Chapter 6

The Socialist-Populist Ideology II

From Kwame Nkrumah to Julius Nyerere

The basis of colonial territorial dependence is economic, but the basis of the solution of the problem is political. Hence political independence is an indispensable step towards securing economic emancipation.

— Kwame Nkrumah, Towards Colonial Freedom, xv

Introduction

This chapter continues the survey—started in Chapter 5—of the political, economic, social, and cultural dimensions of the socialist-populist ideology from a distinctly socialist perspective. It shall focus on the statesmen (and regimes) who, in spite of their socialist rhetoric, have used the socialist-populist ideology as an instrument of control and coercion and sometimes—as in the case of Guinea’s Sékou Touré—even as an instrument of terror. These political systems are characterized by relatively authoritarian (sometimes totalitarian) regimes, a top-down system of administration, as well as state control over the economy. Gamal Abdel Nasser (Egypt), Kwame Nkrumah (Ghana), Ahmed Sékou Touré (Guinea), Modibo Kéïta (Mali), and Julius Nyerere (Tanzania) all fall in this category. It is important to note in this regard that there is a significant difference of degree between these leaders in terms of the authoritarian vs. democratic nature of their regimes. Thus the most autocratic and authoritarian (even totalitarian) tendencies were exhibited by Sékou Touré and Kwame Nkrumah (more pronounced in the former than in the latter), while Modibo Kéïta and Julius K. Nyerere were somewhat more liberal, open, and democratic in their exercise of power (Nyerere more so than Kéïta).

G. Martin, African Political Thought

© Guy Martin 2012
As we have noted in the previous chapter, in the socialist-populist ideology the emphasis is on socialist, while in the populist-socialist ideology (which will be the subject of Chapter 7) the emphasis is on populist. Furthermore, in all these instances, the focus of our study is on the political ideas and the common themes that bind them rather than the individual leaders themselves. This chapter begins with a study of the “Father of African Nationalism,” Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana, whose influential political ideas are encapsulated in the concept of the “African Personality.” The chapter then surveys the political ideas and policies of two key proponents of “African Socialism” in Francophone Africa: Ahmed Sékou Touré of Guinea and Modibo Kéita of Mali. The chapter concludes with a survey of the political ideology and policies of another prominent advocate of “African Socialism,” Mwalimu Julius K. Nyerere of Tanzania.

Problems of ideology and political organization were foremost in the minds of most African leaders in the immediate pre- and postindependence period. These leaders were of the opinion that such problems should be tackled before any attempt to solve economic problems could be envisaged. Nkrumah makes the point succinctly: “The basis of colonial territorial dependence is economic, but the basis of the solution of the problem is political. Hence political independence is an indispensable step towards securing economic emancipation.” Such is also the meaning of Kwame Nkrumah’s famous motto: “Seek ye first the political kingdom, and everything shall be added unto it.” For these leaders, the economic policy should result from a consistent political ideology, and not the reverse. The two most prominent proponents of this view in West Africa were Ghana’s Kwame Nkrumah and Guinea’s Ahmed Sékou Touré.

**Kwame Nkrumah**

**A Biographical Note**

Francis Nwia Kofi Kwame Nkrumah—Pan-Africanist, one of the founders of the Organization of African Unity, and the first leader of independent Ghana—was born in September 1909 (day unknown) in Nkroful, Nzima region, in southwestern Gold Coast. He was educated first at local missionary schools, then at Achimota College, graduating as a teacher in 1930. In 1935, Nkrumah travelled to the United States to study at Lincoln University. He then pursued graduate studies at the University of Pennsylvania. From 1943 to 1945, he taught at Lincoln and served as president of the African Students Association of the United States and Canada. During his ten-year stay in the United States, Nkrumah became familiar with the writings of such African American scholar-activists as W. E. B. Du Bois and Marcus Garvey, who inspired his ideas about Pan-Africanism; he also socialized with (and learned political organization from) prominent Caribbean activists such as C. L. R. James and George Padmore. In 1945, Nkrumah went to London, presumably to study at the London School of Economics and Political