

Nkrumah on Neo-Colonialism

1 What is neo-colonialism?

“The essence of neo-colonialism is that the State which is subject to it is, in theory, independent and has all the outward trappings of international sovereignty. In reality its economic system and thus its political policy is directed from the outside” (NC, ix).

“Neo-colonialism is also the worst form of imperialism. For those who practise it, it means power without responsibility and for those who suffer from it, it means exploitation without redress. In the days of old-fashioned colonialism, the imperial power had at least to explain and justify at home the actions it was taking abroad. In the colony those who served the ruling imperial power could at least look to its protection against any violent move by their opponents. With neo-colonialism neither is the case” (NC, xi).

“The change in the economic relationship between the new sovereign states and the erstwhile masters is only one of form. Colonialism has achieved a new guise. It has become neo-colonialism, the last stage of imperialism” (NC, 31).

Questions: What relations characterise neo-colonialism? Is it accurate to describe aid packages as a form of neo-colonialism? What is the relationship between neo-colonialism and imperialism?

2 Neo-colonialism and Marxism

“But the internal contradictions and conflicts of neo-colonialism make it certain that it cannot endure as a permanent world policy” (NC, xii).

“Marx predicted that the growing gap between the wealth of the possessing classes and the workers it employs would ultimately produce a conflict fatal to capitalism in each individual capitalist State. This conflict between the rich and poor has now been transferred on to the international scene [...]” (NC, xvii).

“The tribute drawn off by way of colonial and semi-colonial exploitation enabled the capitalist classes of the metropolitan countries to pass some of the crumbs to their working classes and thereby buy them off [...] when the class conflicts in their societies got critical” (NC, 39).

Questions: How is neo-colonialism meant to fit into the Marxist view of historical progress? Can Nkrumah account for the seemingly political (rather than economic) aspects of neo-colonialism? Is this way of approaching neo-colonialism productive for or detrimental to our thinking about it?

3 The end of neo-colonialism

“Unless small states combine they must be compelled to sell their primary products at prices dictated by the developed nations and buy their manufactured goods at the prices fixed by them” (NC, xiv).

“Military aid in fact marks the last stage of neo-colonialism and its effect is self-destructive. Sooner or later the weapons supplied pass into the hands of the opponents of the neo-colonialist regime [...]” (NC, xvi).

“A continent like Africa, however much it increases its agricultural output, will not benefit unless it is sufficiently politically and economically united to force the developed world to pay it a fair price for its cash crops” (NC, 9).

“[...] *unity* is the first requisite for destroying neo-colonialism. Primary and basic is the need for an all-union government on the much divided continent of Africa” (NC, 253).

“Our liberation is meaningless unless it is linked up with the total liberation of the African continent!” (Speech given on the day of Ghanaian independence)

Questions: Why is African unity essential to the end of neo-colonialism on Nkrumah’s view? Are there other ways of bringing about the end of neo-colonialism?

4 Further questions

What is the wrong of colonialism?

LOCKE: Nothing, just so long as the people of the colonised country haven’t got property rights in the land (i.e., they haven’t mixed their labour with the land).

MILL: Nothing, just in case the colonial power is helping to develop the capacities of those they have colonised.

KANT: Colonialism is inconsistent with cosmopolitan right, and cosmopolitan right is necessary for a condition of peace.

FANON: Colonialism is a kind of total domination. It involves both physical and psychological control over the colonised subjects.

INTERNATIONAL MARXISM: Colonialism is a form of capitalist exploitation and a way of postponing the revolution. The exploitation of workers in colonised countries allows for institution of the welfare state by the coloniser.

NATIONALIST: Cultural groups have a prima facie right to self-determination and colonialism is a violation of this right.