

GRAPHIC ONLINE

GRAPHIC ONLINE



An Interview with Professor Francis Nkrumah

Nkrumaist Review / Features / Jul - 20 - 2024 , 17:51



Professor Francis Kwesi Nkrumah, then as a consultant paediatrician, was in 2016 rewarded for his efforts towards polio eradication in Ghana and Africa

Professor Francis Nkrumah (PFN), the first-born child of Osagyefo Dr Kwame Nkrumah, until his death on Sunday, 30 June 2024, was Professor Emeritus at the University of Ghana Medical School, located in Accra, Ghana.

Advertisement

Professor Nkrumah undertook his medical training in Berlin where he qualified in 1961. His post-graduate training in Paediatrics and Public Health was undertaken at the Children's Hospital and at Harvard School of Public Health, both in Boston, Massachusetts.

After his post-graduate training he returned to Ghana and worked as a Paediatrician and lecturer in Paediatrics at the University of Ghana Medical School. In 1983 he moved to the University of Harare, in Zimbabwe, where he served as Professor of Paediatrics for seven years.

In 1990 Professor Nkrumah returned to Ghana to begin serving as the Director of the Noguchi Memorial Institute for Medical Research, located at the University of Ghana in Legon.

It is well known that he led the Institute with distinction until his retirement in 2001, at which time the University of Ghana appointed him Professor Emeritus.

Professor Nkrumah has undertaken research on many of the major infectious diseases that face children in developing countries, including malaria and measles.

Moreover, he has always been a strong supporter of vaccination and has played a major role in the formation of a number of important committees established by major international organisations – such as the World Health Organisation and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation – directed at improving the use of established vaccines.

These efforts have contributed immensely to the research and treatment of measles, polio, malaria and meningococcal disease.

The Editor of the Nkrumaist Review (ENR) posed the following questions to Professor Francis Nkrumah in 2009, including the ideals of his father Dr Kwame Nkrumah, the first President of Ghana, which we reproduce:

NR: How would you assess the progress we have made in Africa, if any, towards your father's vision of one united, socialist Africa?

PFN: In order to put it into perspective and assess the progress or lack of progress we have made in Africa in realising my father's vision of one united, socialist Africa, one has to revisit the main tenets of that vision and its political origins and underpinnings.

The balkanisation of Africa, its colonisation and exploitation by European powers over a period of 200 years, left Africa, at the threshold of national independence in the 50s and 60s, weak, vulnerable, politically divided and susceptible to continued exploitation.

Nkrumah was forthright in realising that imperialism, during the post-independence period, would continue to assume new forms and subtler disguises to create client states, and fan fires of sectional interests in order to keep their stranglehold on Africa's resources.

He was convinced that Africa's hard-won freedom stood open to danger so long as individual independent states of Africa remained economically apart and without a common defence policy.

This danger could only be overcome by presenting a united front and maintaining a continental purpose. He was resolute that the forces that clamoured for unity far outweighed those that divided us.

In my father's view, the liberation of Africa encompassed a lot more than just political freedom from the yoke of colonialism. Africa had to liberate itself from poverty, hunger, disease, ignorance, internal conflicts and exploitation.

A united socialist Africa would assure the public ownership of the means of production, the resources and their use in fulfilment of the needs of the people.

The object of socialism, my father believed, was to effect social justice and human development for all, with the state making sure that all its citizenry has equal access to development and advancement.

It was only within such a context that true democracy could evolve and be expressed.

Nkrumah advocated a "Union of African States," a Community of African States, with members of the Community maintaining their own national identities and constitutional structures – a union without insistence on abrogation of sovereignty of individual states but with defined and reserved areas for common action e.g., a united, joint defence policy and strategy; common economic planning and integrated policy; and a common foreign policy agenda, pursued solely in the interest of Africa.

Advertisement

Unfortunately, there was a deliberate attempt both outside and within Africa (including among some of his contemporary fellow Heads of State) to misrepresent or misinterpret the zeal, crusading passion, and burning urgency with which my father articulated his vision of African unity as signs of personal ambition for continental leadership.

I wonder if we have missed the boat. We certainly have not made much tangible progress so far in moving African unity forward as conceptualised by Nkrumah.

ENR: What do you consider to be the remaining obstacles or challenges that we, as Africans, face

in the struggle to liberate Africa along lines outlined by Osagyefo, Dr Kwame Nkrumah?

PFN: Colonial rule for most African states ended in the late 1950s and 1960s, yet we as a people are still struggling to liberate ourselves from poverty, disease, ignorance, conflict, economic exploitation, etc., and Africa continues to remain at the periphery of global affairs.

Advertisement

The African at the beginning of the 21st century is still not master of himself! We have not been able to accept or actualise many of the ideas and principles Nkrumah tried to get across nor heed the warnings he somehow managed to foresee.

Many obstacles have stood and still stand in the way of translating many of the fundamental political and economic ideas and convictions of my father into action and realisation, e.g., African unity, Pan-Africanism, and socialist economic transformation.

The transition from pre-independence nationalism to post-independence socialist transformation of society as envisaged by Nkrumah still eludes us. These obstacles were and sadly are still being driven by both internal as well as external forces.

Most of the internal factors are self-inflicted. Foremost among them is simply a failure of political leadership in Africa – the inability or unwillingness of its leaders to rise to the responsibility of true and caring leadership.

Advertisement

This includes usurpation of people's will and power by tyrants of all shades; grand corruption; lack of adequate and functioning institutions of State to guarantee rights of citizenry; ethnic conflicts fanned by both internal and external vested interests; and a mentality of maintaining the 'sanctity' of colonial borders at all costs.

Of course, the greatest external challenge we face today is the continuing and persistent neo-colonialist economic exploitation of Africa's resources, nowadays under the guise of so-called globalisation.

Our greatest challenge, however, is to convince current and emerging African leaders that the future security and welfare of our people lie in our own hands and that the will and interests of the people are always paramount.

Influence

ENR: Your father was influenced by many people and by a variety of ideas during his lifetime, especially during his formative years in the United States and in Great Britain.

Which persons and which ideas do you believe had their greatest impact on the ideological development of Kwame Nkrumah?

PFN: As you are aware, my father spent 10 years in the USA as a student (from 1935 to 1945), initially at Lincoln University, a predominantly “black’ university then, where he studied sociology and theology as an undergraduate and then at the University of Philadelphia as a graduate student in education and political philosophy.

It is not easy to specifically pinpoint the ideas and influence that motivated and inspired him in these formative years as a student to embark on the political path he chose subsequently.

There must have been a progressive build-up of intellectual interest and commitment on issues relating to Africa’s liberation and the abolition of the colonial system, especially in the later stages of his graduate studies as exemplified in some of his student academic essays.

His exposure to black nationalist literature and associations, especially in Harlem, where he spent his summers, and the writings of Marcus Garvey and DuBois, would have influenced and inspired his already aroused interest in Pan-African and liberation ideologies.

DuBois, in particular, had contributed so much in documenting the work of black intellectuals and scholars on the history of Africans in the Diaspora; and Marcus Garvey had passionately articulated his doctrines of “Africa for Africans” and ‘Back to Africa’ in writings which were readily available to Nkrumah.

But one person who had a long-lasting political and close personal relationship with my father was George Padmore.

Padmore exerted, I think, considerable intellectual, political and ideological influence on Nkrumah, especially during his two years stay in the U.K., from 1945 to 1947. Both of them had been joint Secretaries to the Organising Committee which planned the 1945 Fifth Pan-African Congress in Manchester.

Padmore was an intellectual-political guru, well versed in the international politics of the left and very active in the Pan-African movements in the UK; he was also an important link figure between Diasporan Africans and colonial Africans.

He and Nkrumah shared a common political and ideological platform that was anti-colonial, anti-imperialist, Pan-Africanist and socialist.

Padmore, I think, provided that intellectual and political companionship that my father needed in the early years of his political life, in the UK and subsequently when he became advisor to my father on African Affairs in Ghana. On a personal note, I always viewed Uncle George as a second father. He and Dorothy, the wife, were always very kind to me.

His premature death must have been a great loss to my father.

ENR: No one talks about the 'African Personality' anymore. During your father's adult lifetime, however, he talked about it constantly. What, in your opinion, did he mean by the 'African Personality' and do you still find it relevant today, especially within the context of the ongoing debate around 'globalisation'?

PFN: Yes, my father in many of his speeches and writings used the term 'African Personality' to express and promote a common social and cultural consciousness that makes us uniquely African.

This inherent 'Africanness' had been badly brutalised, firstly through the traumatic and inhuman historical experiences of the slave trade and subsequently by the subjugation and exploitation of the African people through colonial rule.

Africa, especially in the post-independence era, needed to rediscover and re-identify itself in order to regain its self-esteem, pride and self-confidence. It needed to search and rediscover its true soul and create that African awareness that transverses religious beliefs, ethnicity and social class.

I think Nkrumah wanted to rekindle that inherent spirit in us by referring to its totality as the "African Personality".

Does the projection of this identity have relevance today in the context of a globalising world? Absolutely! Identity and culture should be the common thread that weaves society together to facilitate and create the platform for development.

Europe, Japan, China, and India have not subsumed their identities under a so-called globalised world; rather these identities are being enhanced.

The globalisation playing field is still uneven and we as Africans should take advantage of what globalisation offers without globalisation taking advantage of us.

As the world increasingly becomes interdependent, the 'African Personality' and what it embodies should be allowed to contribute to that totality of human progress.

In that context, the African personality/identity should not be viewed as static but continuously dynamic in keeping with a changing world, requiring reassessment, reevaluation and reaffirmation.

ENR: Your father's contribution to the development of post-colonial Ghana was astonishing, and in practically every field of human endeavour. As a Professor of Medicine, can you tell us some of the specific contributions he made to the critical field of health in Ghana?

PFN: At independence, Ghana inherited a colonial health system characterised by poor

distribution and location of healthcare facilities. These were mostly in a few urban centres and catered mainly to administrative officials, their dependents and the civil service.

A handful of mission hospitals provided mainly curative health services to a few rural communities. During the Post-independence period, the CPP government undertook a massive expansion of health delivery infrastructure and manpower training across the country.

New hospitals (in Tamale, Effia-Nkwanta and Ho), clinics, and nurse training centres were built or expanded and a network of health centres provided for the rural areas.

There was also a change in orientation from a predominantly curative service to increasing incorporation of public and preventive health, e.g., the establishment of the Ghana Field Services Unit.

One of the most notable contributions in the health sector that Nkrumah single-handedly made was the establishment of the Ghana Medical School at the Korle Bu Hospital in 1963. The rapidly expanding health services required that Ghana train its own national doctors in country.

Initially, the USA government through USAID was to provide financing for the whole of the Medical School Complex project and provide American academic staff for the school.

At some point in the negotiations, Nkrumah felt that the terms were not in the national interest of Ghana and abrogated the agreement.

He wanted the Medical School to be established and run by Ghanaians. Dr Easmon (who was appointed professor and first Dean of the Medical School) and other senior doctors at Korle Bu were then directed to establish the school with my father apparently telling them, "you can do it!"

They took up the challenge and today the Ghana Medical School (incorporated into the University of Ghana in 1969) is one of the most accomplished medical training institutions in Africa.

Next >



What Others Are Reading

Advertisement

Ghana Trending stories



Nigeria probes fuel imports amidst Dangote refinery dispute



Ghanaian banks warned of cybercrime risk resulting from fake CrowdStrike update



Mid-year Budget Review: Gov't pledges no new taxes; experts push for...



I couldn't have made it without you- Chiwetel Agu hails wife



Creating TGMA 'Female Artiste of the Year' category will give us a boost – Eno...



Ethiopia landslides kill 146



Kwaku Afriyie: MP disputes apology issued on his behalf following Parliamentary...



Kamala Harris wins enough support to clinch Democratic nomination



Beach Soccer AFCON Qualifiers: Ghana's Black Sharks secure 5-3 victory over...





Asiedu Nketia's defamation case: I don't have documentary evidence but living...



Radio presenter's defilement narration: court grants accused person bail



Taxman hunts for evaders - Ministry, GRA in massive taxpayer data clean-up



Dr. Helena Asamoah-Hassan inaugurated District Governor of District 418 - ...



Celebrating BOST's shining story



Atomic flyover expansion joints exposed



Your Ghana, My Ghana: 'Truth over Speed' in a digital age



Govt strengthens regulation, banks supervision - Dep. Finance Minister



I won't disrespect Yagbonwura my overlord - Samuel Jinapor



Prioritise social welfare in petroleum revenue use - Groups tell govt



BOST posts GH¢710m profit in 3 years



Rwanda's game plan: Lessons for Ghana on leveraging sports for economic growth



2 Bodies school businesses on insurance policies



VIDEO: Noble Nketsiah details how industry colleagues poisoned him



I'm still paying debts from Kaakie's music projects – JMJ



I'll divorce my wife if Kamala Harris doesn't win US Election– Charly Boy



I don't know him – KK Fosu on why he did not attend John Claude's funeral



Voting on Saturday not aligned with our religious beliefs - SDA Church



From milking cows to Man City – the story of Savinho



Al Nassr make €1m per-month offer for Mohammed Kudus



Personal interest, politics bane of amateur boxing – GBA Capo



2024 Paris Olympics: Lutterodt appeals for Gadayi's inclusion in relay team



'Marshal take him out of the House, I'll not entertain such disrespect' -...



Fake Paralympic team: Two fingered in scandal

Banks strive to enhance deposit base – Five banks top chart



NDC targeting 32 percent votes in Ashanti Region - Muntaka



Kade: Fire engine involved in accident, seven crew members injured

ABOUT GCGL

About GCGL

Terms Of Use

Privacy Policy

Contact Us

Sitemap

Daily Graphic Newspaper

NEWS CONTENT

Ghana Politics

News in Ghana

Entertainment News

Business News

Sports News

World News

Editorials

News Videos