

A Silenced Voice Still Heard: Thomas Sankara's Speeches

Thomas E. O'Toole

THOMAS SANKARA SPEAKS: The Burkina Faso Revolution, 1983-87, Translated from the French by Samantha Anderson (Pathfinder Press, New York, 1988), 272 pages plus 32 pages of photos, \$9.95.

A whole new generation of young blacks and progressive whites are gradually becoming aware that the mainstream presses in the United States, Great Britain, Australia, and Canada do not always present a well rounded view of Africa. For many of these same young people the works of progressive academics and innovative Africa thinkers are often not accessible.

This book is a small but valuable attempt to overcome these barriers. It is a collection of speeches, press interviews, and news conferences by Thomas Sankara, who headed the democratic and popular revolution in the West African country of Burkina Faso (formerly Upper Volta) from 1983 until 1987. The book is a surprisingly well printed and presented volume. Made available to an English speaking audience for the first time by Pathfinder Press, a small progressive press in New York City, this collection is well bound and set in clear typeface on good quality paper. Introduced with a sound preface by Doug Cooper it is furnished with a quite complete chronology of Sankara's life. A more than adequate index and glossary completes this genuine contribution to African studies.

Thomas Sankara, President of Burkina Faso from August 4, 1983 to his assassination on October 15, 1987, represents a new generation (born December 21, 1949) of African leaders who have come of age since independence. Like many of these new leaders Sankara did not fit into the nice, neat categories created by essentially conservative political scientists from Europe and the United States. He was at once a nationalist and an ardent Pan-Africanist. Proudly African yet well aware of the shortcomings of *Negritude* and African Personality rhetoric, Sankara sought a broader dialogue with non-aligned, anti-imperialist and progressive peoples throughout the world.

Neither the African establishment nor those whose academic, political, or commercial lives depend on this tiny neo-colonial class will see much use in this book. After all Sankara, like Biko, Lumumba, Mondlane, Machel, and Mboya before him, is dead. Yet, with the help of this collection, Thomas Sankara's thoughts, aspirations, and ideals remain alive, continuing to inspire and challenge young Africans and others with original and insightful critiques of colonialism and apartheid and all of their "neo" manifestations.

I would enthusiastically recommend **Thomas Sankara Speaks** to all students of African politics, whatever their particular specialty. It is very readable and an excellent primary source. What the works of Nyerere and Nkrumah were for an earlier generation this work will be for the generation which is assuming the mantle of leadership on the African continent.

Thomas E. O'Toole is Director of the Social Science/Social Studies Program at St. Cloud State University in St. Cloud, MN 56301.