NEW DEBATE ON SCIENTIFIC SOCIALISM IN ZAMBIA

The plans of the Zambian government to introduce 'Scientific Socialism' as subject in schools, are a matter of increasing concern for the Zambian churches. In 1979, when the first signs of a possible shift of Zambian Humanism in Marxist direction became apparent, the Zambian church leaders reacted strongly with a 22 page letter entitled Marxism, Humanism and Christianity, signed by the nine Catholic bishops, and by the secretaries of the Christian Council of Zambia and the Evangelical Fellowship of Zambia. (For the full text of the letter and my comments, see Exchange, nc. 24, 1979, pp. 56-71)

The matter remained quiet for some time. In 1982 the discussion flared up again. On March 18-19, 1982, the government invited all the religious leaders of the country to a seminar in Lusaka's Mulungushi Hall. Here President Kaunda addressed the church leaders to explain the government's position. Kaunda dwelled at length on the questions raised by the church leaders in their 1979 letter. In his view, the Party's call for a 'Social Reconstruction' is compatible with Christianity. Scientific Socialism is to be taught at all schools as part of political education. This will not replace religious education. The churches may continue their activities as before because freedom of religion is guaranteed in the Constitution. The Party (UNIP - United National Independence Party) considers the religious organisations and their leaders as important instruments on the way to the ideal of a humanist society.

The explanation of the President has not satisfied the churches. With force and sharpness they endorsed their stand of 1979 during the Mulungushi Seminar: 'Scientific (atheist) Socialism cannot be taught side by side with religion, since they are contradictory'. Scientific Socialism may be taught at University level, but not in other schools such as Teacher Training Colleges and Primary Schools.

The answer of the church leaders to the President has been written down in a new letter, dated 11 May 1982. Signed by the Chairman of the Evangelical Fellowship, the Christian Council and the (Catholic) Episcopal Conference, the document was distributed to all churches with the intention to stimulate
the discussion on the local level between church and party leaders. The full text of this letter appears below.

This time the discussion had a far broader platform than was the case in 1979. Archbishop Milingo - prior to his sudden call to Rome - focused his Easter message on the issue. The Synod of the United Church of Zambia discussed it in its April meeting, and endorsed the stand of all Christian churches expressed in the pamphlet Marxism, Humanism and Christianity of 1979. A paper, which had circulated at the Synod, was revised for printing 'to inform our Church's members about Scientific Socialism'. In some congregations and parishes 'a day of fast and prayer' was organised in June. Yet a consultation planned for July at Mindolo was cancelled because several church leaders did not want to continue discussions before the President had officially reacted to their statement of May 1982.

One may put some questions relating to this lively discussion between church and state in Zambia: because the unspecified use of a term like 'Scientific Socialism'; because the improper use of stories on Poland and Russia which have been distributed in some church circles. A statement noted in a discussion 'Why did our churches never join forces in other matters, and spoke out against the dangers of staunch capitalist Christian countries?' was a lonely voice.

Nonetheless it is remarkable that in a country like Zambia the churches have opened such a frank discussion with their political leaders. In spite of all their criticisms of the plans of the government, the Zambian church leaders have great confidence in President Kaunda. As long as he is leading the country, their concern for the new direction of Zambian Humanism seems to be less serious. 'He is a Christian, a real spiritual man, he looks for guidance of God in all his acts', a Zambian minister spontaneously stated. At any rate, information shared both by the Party and the Churches need to be amplified and studied at greater depth.