

FORCE OF ARGUMENT OR ARGUMENT OF FORCE?

I have followed with interest the ‘work’ of the powerful government delegation, led by Philemon Yang, in the Northwest and Southwest provinces, in a concerted campaign against the SCNC. Four things struck me which need remarking.

- (1) The delegation declared that it is not necessary to dialogue with the SCNC! How can this be, when dialogue is the best, if not only, means of settling disagreements and conflicts peacefully? Is the problem with the word ‘dialogue’? Sometimes mere words can cause a lot of problems and have led people and even nations to conflict, violence and war. So, if the problem is with the word ‘dialogue’, why not forget the word and just sit down (or even stand up) and **talk with** (or even to) the SCNC? Talking is very important because sometimes through talking people in disagreement or conflict may realize that they were seeking the same end in different ways without being aware of the fact. The African traditional system is widely recognized for its emphasis on and practice of **consensus** in the management of public affairs. In reaching such consensus, the position and views of dissenting minorities are of the utmost importance. Such consensus, however, does not necessarily imply unanimous agreement or even reconciliation of differences, but rather **recognition** of differences, suspension of disagreement and charting of a way forward, in spite of the differences.
- (2) One of the so-called leaders of the SCNC showed up at one of the conferences of the powerful government delegation and was sent away! If he did not show up there with an army ready to start war, why was he sent away? Did coming there not indicate perhaps that what he was looking for is listening and perhaps also talking? Should the powerful delegation not rather have seized the opportunity to give him the floor to speak so that every one would know whether or not the SCNC is really preparing to take us down the horrendous path of violence and war, as alleged by the government? The slogan of the SCNC, as inherited from AAC1 and AAC2, is “**the force of argument, not the argument of force**”. Anyone who does not subscribe to the view and vision of this maxim, can hardly claim to be acting on behalf of the Anglophone problem. Was the SCNC leader sent away so as not to spoil the harmony of the chorus being sung by the government delegation?
- (3) All the members of the powerful delegation admit that there is an Anglophone problem! The Fons and Chiefs, who have been urging their “subjects” not to follow the SCNC, also admit the existence of an Anglophone problem. But this problem is identified with marginalization in the appointment of ministers, and the need for water, electricity and good roads, (which equally applies to other parts of the country). This is a simplistic trivialization of the Anglophone problem, even though the problem does also manifest itself in a trivial manner in that domain. If a presidential decree were signed today, appointing only Anglophones in the so-called key ministries, that will in no way even start addressing the Anglophone problem. If all the horrible roads in the Northwest and

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Southwest provinces, which make some of us cry when we ride on them, are tarred tomorrow, that will not solve the Anglophone problem.

- (4) Are they harping on the issue of appointments because they know they belong to the club of appoint-ables, from which ministers and other big men and women are appointed, unappointed (during which time they up their demagogic utterances and declarations), reappointed and recycled back into the power system? Empirical evidence shows that ministers and their peers are appointed to help themselves and their immediate and perhaps extended families, friends, acquaintances and flatterers, from the considerable resources at their disposal. In spite of “motions of support” for the appointment of individuals, emanating from whole villages or even divisions, no ordinary person can gain anything from the appointment of anybody as a minister. But we all gain from good policies, from good institutions, from good projects. The Anglophone problem is not about ministerial appointments.

So, what is the Anglophone problem about? Please, read the answer to this question in *The Buea Declaration* of the AAC1, *The Bamenda Proclamation* of the AAC2 and the proposed *Federal Constitution* of the AAC. The problem is basically a constitutional problem that manifests in various domains, with many ramifications, creating strong attitudes and phobias. You are facing the problem directly if you stop to consider the following pertinent questions: Why did it take a bloody demonstration of Anglophone parents in Yaounde before the GCE Board (whose praises both Anglophones and Francophones tend to sing today) was created in 1993? Why, since Reunification in 1961, is it that the English version of the Cameroon National Anthem was sung for the very first time over the National Radio in 2003 in Becky Ndivé's *The Wakeup Show*? Why has it taken over forty years for a director of our National Polytechnic to show enough fair-mindedness to consider the GCE syllabus as an appropriate background for competitive admission into that institution? Why is information about important national competitive examinations, likely to result in lucrative employment, usually available only in French? Why is it more difficult today (2005) to travel from Mutengene via Kumba to Ekok, from Mamfe to Bamenda, from Bamenda via Nkambe to Wum and back to Bamenda, than it was in 1960, forty-five years ago, under colonial rule? How do you expect a D.O. (District Officer), deaf and dumb in English but speaking fluent French, to resolve a serious conflict between Farmers and Cattle Rearers in Wum, who are equally and oppositely deaf and dumb in French?

His Excellency President Paul Biya did not create the Anglophone problem; he inherited it from his illustrious predecessor; he will likely bequeath it to his successor unsolved, but hopefully not worse confounded than he met it. Yesterday we voted for Reunification; today we would probably still vote for Reunification; but yesterday, today, and tomorrow we should say “NO” to assimilation.

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