

WORLDVIEW

Kamerun

In the last issue World View looked at the situation in Uganda where if it were not for continued British economic exploitation, the recent freedom struggles would not have occurred and there would not be the continued militarist factions vying for dictatorial control.

Many people in this country do not accept that Europe exploits Africa. They see themselves as kind-hearted with massive aid programmes, "Live Aid" etc, without realising that they are giving with one hand and taking with twenty. Famines are not natural disasters but a consequence of cash-crop exploitation, the lack of a manufacturing economy is a consequence of trading deals with the western multinationals which prohibit industrialisation. If the Third World people were left to manage their own economies and their vast natural resources, without the interference and exploitation of the West, then there would be no Third World! But why do WE then accept this? Or even how many of us actually know to what extent we are involved? The answer is simple. WE can't really know. What we learn about is based on two things – education and the media. And if we don't know the truth it is because these two institutions present us with an invalid world view.

To show in part how this is done we spoke to Ndeh Nhumazah of the UPC of Kamerun. We looked at an encyclopaedia – a book used for reference in education and the media. We are all asked to use encyclopaedias as unbiased source books for essays, projects, etc. but it will become clear that their bland and apparently unbiased statements are clearly written with a pro-colonial bias. What we did was to quote the encyclopaedia and ask him for the true explanation.

BRIEF HISTORY

But to understand his explanations we need a brief look at the history of Kamerun. Their early contacts with Europe was trading with the Portuguese. Then over the centuries they suffered from the same enslavement as did much of the rest of Africa until late in the nineteenth century when they were colonised by the Germans. Then during the first World War Britain and France invaded different parts of Kamerun and so there became the East Kamerun (France) and West Kamerun (British). Soon after the second World War the people of Kamerun began fighting for an independent Kamerun under the banner of the UPC (Union of the Peoples of Cameroons). The UPC still exists today but it has been banned since 1955 – it is the only African independence movement, that developed immediately after the second world war, which does not now have political power. Perhaps that is because they are the only party which insisted on true independence, economic and political, from colonial exploitation. Instead of true independence Kamerun is now a French neo-colony and is maintained by France's puppet dictator, Paul Biya, who has a poor record on Human Rights, as have many of the African puppet dictators.

ENC: A federal republic, with two states, was formed on Oct 1 1961 through the merger of a former French trust territory (now East Cameroon) with the southern part of a former British trust territory (now West Cameroon) . . . As the result of a special referendum on May 20, 1972, the federal structure was abolished and the country became the United Republic of Cameroon.

● This sounds very complicated, and it is meant to be confusing, but behind it is a very devious trick for increasing French profits. It shows quite clearly how much governments, land and peoples, particularly in Africa, are manipulated for the benefit of multinational business interests.

Ndeh: In the British sector when oil was discovered French companies became interested in the oil. The French felt that if the oil is exploited and if West Kamerun (British) has its own independent house of assembly, its own government, because they now had the wealth the chance of that government seceding – becoming independent – was good. France was afraid that another power might come along and support the people of West Kamerun because of the oil, so West Kamerun might want to secede. And if that secession was backed by Nigeria the chances are that West Kamerun would secede.

The dissolution of the federation was because of the oil. The united republic was created by Ahidjo, the first puppet president of Kamerun; it was brought about to strengthen the French position in West Kamerun and to prevent the possibility of secession. Since 1961 the people of West Kamerun have been treated as second-class citizens: subterranean positions are reserved for them. Although the constitution is written in French and English, only the French text is authentic. This means that West Kamerunians cannot understand the constitution and the dominance of French influence is enshrined in it. As a result there are now problems in West Kamerun because they do want secession.

ENC: The executive consists of a president and vice-president and together with the assembly are elected by universal adult suffrage to five year terms. In 1972 Ahmadou Ahidjo was elected president and S.T. Muna, from West Cameroons, as vice-president.

The spelling of Kamerun
In all official literature the French spell Kamerun as Cameroun and the British as Cameroons. Kamerun is the German spelling and the UPC choose to spell Kamerun in that way to signify the last time in which their country was truly united. The YJ has used Kamerun except when it is quoting from official sources.

Ndeh: When the country was first unified the prime minister of West Kamerun was J.M. Foncha. Before 1970 when Ahidjo was preparing the ground for the dissolution of the federation he knew that Foncha would resist unification, he didn't want it. He needed someone pliable, and he knew that someone who was this was S.T. Muna. Muna was a member of Foncha's party and Ahidjo asked him to form another political party against Foncha. When he did Ahidjo made Muna prime minister in place of Foncha. All this was done to prepare the grounds for the dissolution of the federation. And all this was done to protect French interests, to get the oil.

● Was Ahidjo voted in?

Ndeh: In a country like Kamerun he will always be voted in because there is no-one to challenge him. When they talk about elections in a country like Britain you have more than two candidates standing. But in Kamerun no-one has a right to stand against the president. At one time Abel Eyinga, who is now in France, was teaching, lecturing in one of the Algerian universities and the presidential elections came up. He decided to announce that he would contest the elections from Algeria. Simply because he said he was standing for elections he was tried in his absence and convicted. This meant that he could not stand because he must register in Kamerun, go round campaigning and other formalities which he could not do or he would be arrested. So all these elections that are spoken of are sham elections.

● These are some of the political tricks that the French used to maintain control, ultimately to ensure the flow of raw materials and boost their profits. But what economic measures did they use?

ENC: Cameroon belongs to the franc zone and is an associate member of the European Economic Community.

Ndeh: Associated membership means Kamerun's products will be sold to the EEC and it also means it is a guaranteed market. Kamerun exports 63% to the EEC and France takes 43% This means that France is able to control the raw materials from source. It also means that Kamerun is not free to shop around for the best market. In this way former French and British colonies are still sending much of their raw materials to their former rulers. As well as this Kamerun is a captive market because France and the EEC also export their goods to the Kamerun.

● Because of this associate membership France is able to maintain an economic imbalance in trade. Ndeh explains "Kamerun gets 43% of its imports from France but only exports 28%. Therefore Kamerun always has a trade deficit with France and when you are in debt you are tied. So being an associate member of the EEC is not in the interest of the dependent countries."

● So here a simple statement of associate membership of the EEC has vast implications for the continued economic oppression of the Kamerun because France and the EEC continue to control trade with the Kamerun. If the encyclopaedia were there to give a fair representation of the true situation some of this would be explained. Are there other economic strategies used?

ENC: Since then (the forming of the federation in 1961) the government has made efforts to integrate the two economies, eliminate trade barriers between the two areas, and reduce differences in prices and wages which are higher in the East.

Ndeh: That is absolute nonsense. Originally British Kamerun obtained their manufactured goods from Nigeria or Britain. When the federation was formed then they traded through the French Kamerun and became part of the French market. This benefitted France because they could sell wine and other French goods which had not previously been sold there. Also I don't know what they are saying about high prices. British Kamerun farmers who had been selling their coffee to Britain now had to sell to France. Now the French middle men had to buy the coffee at a lower price in order to sell at the usual price at home. So because of the inbuilt layer of middle men the price of the cash crops from West Kamerun decreased.

● This is important because this helps to entrench differences between East and West Kamerun, part of a "Divide and rule" colonial strategy. So what are the effects of these measures on the overall economy?