



Mr. Verkijika G. FANSO

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BLACK AFRICA

By Verkijika G. FANSO.
Verkijika G. FANSO (B. Ed. (Brit. Col.), M.A. (Birmingham)
Lecturer, Department of History
University of Yaounde.

TRENDS IN PARTY POLITICS IN POST-INDEPENDENCE BLACK AFRICA

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Following the introduction of PARTY POLITICS in Black Africa after the Second World War, many parties were formed, many crumbled or melted into DOMINANT PARTIES before independence was achieved, while a few survived and prospered. Of the few that survived and were active in various states at the time of independence, some have been banned, others outlawed or suspended, and ONE-PARTY or military governments established in their places. Both MULTIPARTY and one-party governments have been overthrown in several African states, and politicians dismissed from office with ignominy. Several military governments have suffered the same fate. No other institution in post-independence Black Africa has undergone as many changes, experienced as many crises, or been so discredited as political parties. Yet African leaders and their followers have continued to regard parties as the only "democratic" way to canvas public support and gain control of government.

This article attempts a critical examination of trends in party politics in Tropical Africa since independence, particularly the trend towards ONE-PARTY GOVERNMENTS, the NEW THEORIES that are being adopted in order to legitimize and sustain the system, and the possibility of NO-PARTY GOVERNMENTS in the future.

We may well begin with a DEFINITION OF A POLITICAL PARTY. In the African context this paper will accept as a political party ANY ORGANIZATION OF PEOPLE WITHIN A TRIBE OR ACROSS TRIBES BY THE JOINT EFFORT OF A GROUP OF PEOPLE UNDER A LEADER OR LEADERS WHO AGREE ON COMMON INTEREST, CLAIM TO SPEAK FOR THEIR SUPPORTERS, AND DESIRE TO GAIN AND MAINTAIN CONTROL OF GOVERNMENTAL POWER, OR INFLUENCE GOVERNMENT POLICY; such an organization may or may not be operating legally, but, before being outlawed or suspended, must have once organized before going 'underground'. Thus, A DESIRE by a group TO FORM A PARTY in a state which does not tolerate opposition parties DOES NOT CONSTITUTE A PARTY. This definition includes OUTLAWED PARTIES, and eliminates traditional tribal groups or organizations and all 'one man shows' that petered out in the face of general elections.

AFRICAN NATIONALISM, the springboard of political parties, originated at the turn of the century, came of age during the second world war, and bore its first 'fruit' of parties between the 1940s and the 1950s. The aims of the first political parties were to develop and quicken the growth of NATIONALIST SENTIMENTS in the masses, unite the people of the tribal groups, gain control of governmental power, and achieve SELF-GOVERNMENT AND INDEPENDENCE. One would expect from this that in their struggle against a common enemy African nationalist leaders would rally behind a single political leadership and work in unison, in the interest of

national unity. This did not happen. As soon as the first party was formed in each country the desire to form new parties spread like a contagious disease, so that within a few years several organizations reorganized, took on party names and registered as new political parties. By the end of 1956, on the eve of Ghana's independence, at which time numerous parties had formed and "re-organized, split, merged, died, or . . . undergo[ed] changes which resulted in reducing their numbers and extending the scale of territorial frontiers," there were at least four major political parties in UGANDA, KENYA, GHANA, and CAMEROON; at least three major parties in CONGO BRAZAVILLE and GAMBIA, and at least six in NIGERIA. Only one state, IVORY COAST, had maintained a one party government from the 1940s until independence, but even there, only after minor rival organizations had been eliminated at the polls.

The reasons for multi-parties in colonial Africa and even in the post-independence years were many and varied. Africa's first POLITICAL LEADERS, nationalist as they were, were TRIBESMEN by virtue of the primarily tribal basis of their political solidarities, and were either identified with their tribes to some extent or their tribes with them. Thus the tribals in Basil Davidson's regret for Nigeria that even with such a pioneering nationalist leader as NNAMDI AZIKIWE that "contained several peoples whose right to consider themselves as nations, . . . was obvious to anyone who had thought about the matter." There the NCNC, the oldest and most 'nationalist' of Nigeria's political parties, had become basically an Ibo party long before independence, and the AG and the NPC had established as Yoruba and Hausa/Fulani parties respectively. It must therefore remain true that the TRIBAL NATURE OF THE NEW NATIONS OF Africa coupled, in British colonies, with the British policy of decentralized administration could not separate the first parties from ethnic and tribal particularisms, with the result that dominant nationalist parties grew by "successfully incorporating a variety of ethnic and other groups."²

Besides tribal tendencies the new African parties were also divided on issues and priorities. Nationalism meant different things to different leaders: It included social regeneration, political power, economic control, and independence. Coleman and Rosberg sum up these various issues in their general observation of African political parties: They see them as

"... the organizational end product of the massive social and economic changes of the colonial era, including, in particular, the appearance of new assertive social groups and claimant elite; the provocations, frustrations, and challenges of alien rule; and the formation of a variety of interest associations, protest groups, and nationalist movements directed first towards the amelioration of specific grievances and later towards the displacement of colonial power by independent African governments."³

By the time independence was achieved another dividing factor had been established between political parties, namely, antagonism, not just between mass and patron classes⁴, not only between dominant and minor parties, but most important between the ruling and the rival parties; between leaders of different parties and their supporters.

With the coming of independence, the African ruling parties began attempts to ABSORB, SUPPRESS OR ELIMINATE opposition parties, and those governments which tried succeeded. Absorption was possible through deals and compromises between the ruling and the opposition parties, and could be determined by the "degree of popular consent, the degree to which party leaders held reform in the direction of social equality to be important; and the degree of opportunity to express dissenting views inside or outside the . . . party."⁴ It was not uncommon to find the same government suppressing some parties on the one hand and absorbing some on the other. Party elimination by absorption were successfully accomplished in Keita's Mali, Touré's Guinea, Nyerere's Tanganyika, and a few other countries in the early 1960s. "There was more generally a growing realization that support for the opposition would never bring any benefits or redress. It was only the winning party which could do so. This was characteristic of African politics at

1 R.S. Morgenthau, Political Parties in French-Speaking West Africa. (Oxford, 1964), p. 350.

2 A.R. Zolberg, Creating Political Order (Chicago, 1966), p. 35.

3 J.S. Coleman and C.G. Rosberg Jr (eds) Political Parties and National Integration in Tropical Africa. (Los Angeles, 1966), p. 3.

* A mass party seeks directly (through public rallies and local branches) the adherence of every single individual; a patron party seeks the adherence of chiefs and other notables believing that chiefs will instruct their subjects to vote for the party.

4 R.S. Morenthus, op. cit., p. 351

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this stage, suggesting that the winner is there to stay, like a chief who has won a succession war. Disgruntled groups struggling for ethnic identity and hoping to be included in government parties began to change allegiance in favour of the ruling party. Frequently, candidates for elections were advised by their ethnic groups to contest as independents and so join the winners party after elections.

If attempts to eliminate opposition parties by absorption failed, steps were immediately taken to BAN or OUTLAW them. First the government would accuse such opposition parties of subversion, and then their leaders of treason. Opposition leaders would then be arrested and locked up or placed under house arrest and detention and their parties banned. This happened in Ghana and most francophone West African states. Rather than merge with the ruling party in Ghana, their leaders were JAILED or EXILED. These were the steps taken to establish one-party government in the early Sixties. But, why the one-party; what was wrong with the "government and opposition system"?⁸

It may be conjectured that a genuine African leader when questioned, would have argued, "but although there was not too much to gain in the one-party government, there was everything to lose in an independent multi-party African state; it was necessary to end multi-parties before they were strong enough to destroy the state. Too much politics, it must be stated, was the curse of newly independent Black African states.

But one of the MAJOR PROBLEMS that new African leaders had to face on gaining independence was HOW TO ENSURE A GENUINELY NATIONAL AND POLITICALLY INTEGRATED STATE. It was understood that every African state, no matter its size, had its own SECESSIONIST ELEMENTS, and their origins were in tribal or regional support and loyalty to one leader and one party against another. In Nigeria, for example, each of the three major regions of the first Republic had at one time or the other threatened to break away from the Federation. The Ashantis and the Ewe of Ghana, the Buganda province of Uganda, the peoples of Southern Sudan, and the Senus of Ivory Coast are well known secessionist groups in the 1960s. Consequently regional parties became suspect in new African states.

Besides their secessionist tendencies it was argued against multi-parties that they were INCOMPETENT AS OPPOSITION and lacked nationalist programmes, and that it would be a national tragedy to give them a chance to govern. Most African oppositions, it was said, TENDED TO DEFAEME rather THAN OPPOSE⁹ the ruling party. "It was not that they tended to be destructive of the government in power; this is the purpose of an opposition. It was that they tended to destroy the state in the process of trying to depose the acting government."⁷ It was also frequently argued by African leaders that ONE-PARTY SYSTEMS APPROXIMATE TRADITIONAL and social AFRICAN SYSTEMS—as if the same was not true even for Europe before party governments were developed).

But, did the first post-independence one-party African governments fare better than the multi-party systems? For the majority of early one-party states before 1965, the answer is definitely "no." What happened was that "The leader of the party became head of state. The committee of the party became the cabinet. Local party leaders were given key posts in local administration. . . . Because political party and government . . . were almost indistinguishable, a blow

5 Aiden Southall, "General Amin and the Coup" in the *Journal of Modern African Studies*, Vol. 13, No. 1, March 1975, p.

⁶ "That is, a leader whose number one priority is the unity, territorial integrity and development of all parts and sections of the country.

6 W.A. Lewis, *Politics in West Africa* (London, 1965), p. 78

⁷ "Colonial administrations did not operate on the basis of government and opposition. Consequently, the first African politicians most of whom had never been to London or Paris, never really knew the work of an opposition party.

Immanuel Wallerstein, *Africa, The Politics of Independence* (New York, 1961), p. 88

against the one was liable to bring down both."⁸ In a political system where the formal opposition is absent because it has been suppressed or outlawed, and where the major governmental decisions are made by the ruling party raised to or above the level of the state. POWER SHARING is ineffective and the single party raised to or above the level of the state. AMBITIOUS LEADERS, even within the party, are accused or DISMISSED from the government, and detained or exiled. "The list of number two men who were eliminated from power in African states,"⁹ in the Sixties is very long indeed: Aka Banda in Malawi, Kapwepwe in Zambia, Mamudu Dia in Senegal, and Kamabona in Tanzania, are well known examples.

Having tasted power, African leaders in one-party governments became more and more desperate. They were declared PARTY LEADERS FOR LIFE, and his name sung in praises, as if power hungry. The party leader became all-powerful and his name sung in praises, as if power hungry. The party leader would be imprinted on all state symbols—in short happened to Nkrumah in Ghana. His portrait was the number one priority because the official leader of the party was defiled. The single party as the number one priority because the official doctrine of the opening of the party's branch conference surpassed the pomp of the opening of Parliament, and NATIONAL LEGISLATURES were turned into MERE GATHERINGS OF MINOR PARTY OFFICERS and local notables whose only duty was to confirm party programmes. In some states—in Ghana for example—the party hymn became the national anthem and the party flag the national flag.

The sole party acting without an OPPOSITION WATCH-DOG over government powers, spending, and control of national resources went straight into NATIONAL BANKRUPTCY due to "vast and profligate squandering of their scarce revenue and even scarce foreign aid on . . . cost-ly and economic show-piece";¹¹ people scrambled to become politicians not because they hoped to contribute to good government, but because they hoped to gain a chance into immense wealth. "Successful politicians received . . . salaries two to four times as high as they previously earned,"¹² and, compared with their peasant compatriots, they earned in six months "a sum which it takes a peasant thirty-six years' continuous toil to earn."¹³ The single party in the Sixties became a champagne party where education, employment, wealth, and children whose parents did not register and native but to register and obtain a party card which would get them through police checks, and gain scholarships and jobs for their sons and daughters. The masses were alienated from GOVERNMENT POLICIES; and public opinion was completely suppressed. But the tension remained within the peoples and grew with every government act of oppression.

What happened next? The army generals, captains, majors and lieutenants came, many one-party governments vanished overnight, the masses took to the streets in jubilation singing praises to the revolutionary heroes, and military rule was established. The military regimes wasted no time, in setting up various COMMISSIONS OF ENQUIRY to probe political leaders of office. The revelations of these commissions confirmed rather than exonerated political leaders of office. The deposed governments and parties were discredited and political activities banned. The disclosure of extensive corruption, misappropriation of state funds, the enormous wealth of office politicians without indication of their sources, the transformation of the party into a cult and the leader into a Redeemer, and the inability of the masses to participate in or influence the government, showed the extent to which political leaders of the first one-party republics had failed politics and government by their failure to summon the courage to be honest.

8 Ruth First, *The Barrel of the Gun* (London, 1971), p. 120

9 Immanuel Wallerstein, "The Decline of the Party in Single-Party African States" in *La Palombare and Weiner* (eds), *Political Parties and Political Development* (Princeton, 1967), p. 205

10 *Ibid.*, p. 206

11 S.E. Finer, *The One-Party Regimes in Africa: Reconsideration* in *Government and Opposition*, July 1967, p. 493

12 W.A. Lewis, *op. cit.*, p. 31

13 S.E. Finer, *op. cit.*, p. 494

The first one-party governments of Africa (including the Regional governments of the Federation of Nigeria) conducted very poor ELECTIONS into the legislative assemblies; elections were openly RIGGED or candidates forcefully declared returned unopposed. In French-speaking Africa the LIST SYSTEM of elections was introduced and candidates on the list were chosen by the leader in consultation with the party executive. In French-speaking legislative assemblies were indefinitely delayed. In Ghana Nkrumah's CPP which "never managed to win more than 60 per cent of the votes in general elections"¹⁴ nominated its candidates into Parliament in 1965 without elections. But military coups or threats of coups, and other discontent in the early and mid-sixties more than any other factor set African one-party leaders thinking hard and reformulating their one-party theories. In this direction Tanzania leads the

PRESIDENT NYERERE of Tanzania became the first African head of state to realize that the existence of differences among politicians did not necessarily mean the desire to form new parties. He expressed his conviction that DIFFERENT POLITICAL BELIEFS COULD EXIST TOGETHER. He MAINTAINED IN A ONE-PARTY GOVERNMENT. Nyerere dismissed the multi-party system as foreign luxuries which in Africa were working to the detriment of the state. He began to demonstrate convincingly that both diversity and dissent could serve to improve the multi-party system. The mandate given to the 1964 Commission to improve the constitution included the instruction to inquire the effectiveness of the one-party government. The instruction to the Commission on one-party state in Tanzania demonstrates this better. The Commission was instructed to determine how the RULE OF LAW and the INDEPENDENCE OF THE JUDICIARY could best be preserved, how the EQUALITY OF EVERY CITIZEN would be safeguarded, and to make sure there would be "complete freedom for the people to choose their own representatives" in Parliament.¹⁵ One of the reasons for the failure of the first one-party governments "to can states in the early Sixties is that the Party had almost been everything including the judiciary, the executive, the legislature, and even the state. The Tanzanian commission was to ensure the independence of these institutions from the Party.

Reforms have been made in other directions in other African one-party governments. In CAMEROON where (unlike Tanzania and other one-party countries) the state has NOT become by law a ONE-PARTY STATE, the single party was formed in 1966 as a result of the agreement reached between PRESIDENT AHIDJO and various political leaders, backed by their supporters, to work together instead of against one another for the good of the country. Opposition leaders, including those detained in 1962 and whose parties were also suspended, were invited to consult with their supporters and join the fold. It was agreed that the NEW PARTY to be formed would be A MASS PARTY with CELLS in every village, BRANCHES in every town, SUBSECTIONS in every district, and SECTIONS in every division or province; candidates wishing to contest Parliamentary elections would channel their application for consideration through the branch, the sub-section, and the section to the NATIONAL COMMITTEE of the party where a final List would then be called upon to confirm the list in a general election. This system, like the Tanzanian system in which the party would have at least two candidates for elections in each constituency, ensured that the masses would continue to exercise their right to vote and not be disenfranchised as was beginning to happen in Nkrumah's Ghana.

In UGANDA, in 1970, MILTON OBOTE'S government ADOPTED PROPOSALS making his party, the Uganda Peoples Congress, the sole party and the state a ONE-PARTY STATE. According to the proposals for the election of peoples' representatives to parliament, membership would not be determined solely by particularistic local or tribal issues and attitudes. "Under the proposals a candidate would stand not only in a constituency of his choice, his Basic Constituency, but also in three other National Constituencies, one in each of the three remaining regions of the country, to be determined in a random drawing."¹⁶ No candidate would stand unopposed. To win, a candidate would have to poll more electoral votes than his opponents. Electoral votes

would be computed as the sum of the percentage of a candidate's votes in the total vote cast in each of the four constituencies. For the post of president (head of state), any candidate receiving the support of at least one-third of the Parliamentary Constituency Conferences would become an official nominee of the party. For President of the Republic. The UGANDAN SYSTEM, labelled 1 + 3 (i.e. 1 BASIC CONSTITUENCY PLUS 3 NATIONAL CONSTITUENCIES), aimed at DECREASING TRIBALISM, promoting a sense of NATIONAL UNITY, accommodating all shades of opinion within the party, and ensuring that the right of the people to choose their own representatives would be protected. The system was to be applied in the general election of April 1971, but for Idi Amin's coup.

Today, more than ever, African one-party states are endeavouring to bring the government closer to the masses, and politicians and civil servants have become very conscious of accusations of corruption and fraudulent use of state resources. Efforts are made to minimize all forms of fraud, and those caught defrauding the government and the party "to turn themselves into a new economic class"¹⁷ are brought to justice and asked to pay far more than they misappropriated.

One-party governments are also striving, like Tanzania, to bring all shades of opinion into the government, Zambia being the latest example. In the Ivory Coast the policy has been not to eliminate but to AMALGAMATE the OPPOSITION. Houphouët-Boigny rejected the idea of a "unitary party" and went for a "unified party."¹⁸ One-party leaders in the late 1960s were beginning to avoid accumulating too much power, and to refrain from appearing like monarchs or dictators.

The final question here is: have all these new theories and reforms solved the problems of one-party governments, or of party politics in Black Africa? Have they satisfied the masses? It is the contention of this paper that, to an extent, they have not. In most one-party states not only political differences, but also political hatred and enmity even between rivals for party leadership still exists outside the party and there are constant accusations of plots against the government. Even in Tanzania—the most credible and credible of all African one-party states—political opponents were still being detained and implemented the recommendations of the Commission after the government had accepted and implemented the recommendations of the Commission on one-party state. Even today some Tanzanian politicians are still living in exile. Despite the claims of the leaders of one-party governments, the existence of POLITICAL DETENTION ACTS in those countries is proof enough that OPPOSITION has NOT YET been successfully REHABILITATED WITHIN THE ONE-PARTY SYSTEM.

However, to question or to criticize the reformed one-party governments in Africa is not to deny that they have succeeded greatly where the multi-party and initial one-party governments immediately after independence failed. If the one-party government is to maintain its success it should learn to rotate the leadership position among competent party militants. Today, the reformed one-party state stands as little chance as the earlier one-party states of ever having a leadership change in the government in the life time of the leader of the one-party.

In retrospect, it would be suggested that a successful one-party state, like Cameroon or Tanzania, should not regard the one-party as an end, but should use its success as a means to establish a SYSTEM that would be UNIQUE in the AFRICAN CONTEXT: a system that would be traditional, democratic, social, and "all-inbrancing" — in short, a NO-PARTY SYSTEM. If the Tanzanian government were to ban the present TANU party leaving intact that party's structure as a base for political seminars, the situation would be a basis of the no-party government that is being suggested here. The government would continue as if it were still a one-party government, but a party without a name—an 'UJAMAA' NOT A TANU GOVERNMENT.

It stands to reason, then, that the ONE-PARTY system SHOULD serve as a SUBSTRATE for the organization of a NO-PARTY state. In other words, a NO-PARTY state can (or might) only emerge from a successful one-party system. A one-party government or state whose

14 Basil Davidson, *Which Way Africa* (London, 1969), p. 171

15 H. Bienen, "The Party and the No Party State: Tungavika and the Soviet Union" in *Transition*, March 1964, p. 29

16 D.L. Cohen and J. Puroon, "The Uganda Peoples Congress Branch and Constituency Elections of 1970" in *Journal of Commonwealth Political Studies*, Vol. XI, No. 1, March 1973, p. 49

17 Ruth First, op. cit., p. 119

18 A.R. Zolberg, *One-Party Government in the Ivory Coast* (Princeton, 1964), p. 326

19 S.E. Finer, op. cit., p. 496

The advantages of a no-party system for Black African countries are numerous. In such a system contrary opinion to that held by the leader(s) of the system would be freely expressed for the good of the system or state without the fear of being branded a subversive element. The question of joining the party because others were doing so, because it was the sole or ruling party, because it was tribally obligatory, or for the purpose of avoiding public harassment at black points would not exist. A no-party state would utilize political conferences and seminars for the discussion of the affairs of the state, and not those of the party. The no-party system would be an authentic African political system and Black Africa's contribution to political civilization—multi-parties for capitalist West, one-party systems for communist East, and no-party states for Black Africa.

In conclusion, the argument has been that although the one-party system is good enough for Black Africa at this stage, such a system should be regarded not as an end but as a base for the organisation of a no-party state. It is the contention of this paper that the no-party, not the one-party, system represents the traditional African political society.

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