

Statement on the Anglophone Teachers' Strike and the Anglophone crisis in Cameroon: November – December 2016

Within the present state of strike action by Anglophone Teachers in Cameroon, I find it necessary to make a statement about it, so that my cooperating partners and friends who are out of Cameroon can be in the picture of the crisis. This write-up can also be used to balance excesses from rumors and from the social media. I have tried to structure the document under the following sub-headings: background, teachers' strike overview, evidence of Anglophone marginalization remarks and observations. I have equally attached some useful documents as backups. I have not put any definite conclusion because the strike is still ongoing.

Historical background

After the First World War, German Cameroon was partitioned between Britain and France in 1919 with the two partitions known respectively as Anglophone and Francophone parts of Cameroon. The educational system in Cameroon after independence and re-unification in 1961 till date continued to reflect this bicultural pattern though with persistent attempts of assimilation by the Francophone sub-system (Konings & Nyamnjoh, 2003).

The Francophone part of Cameroon whose former colony is France gained independence in 1960 and is comprised of 8 regions out of the ten for the whole country while the Anglophone part had Great Britain as former colony and gained independence in 1961 and is made up of 2 regions, namely the North West and South West Regions. The Anglophone part is geographically and numerically in the minority.

The bi-cultural differentiation of education in Cameroon is not only the question of language but more importantly a heritage of cultural and ethical values. The Anglophone framework of education in Cameroon, promotes and develops, decentralization, collaboration, participation, liberation, mass education with financial support to private and confessional initiatives, use of mother tongue etc (Su, 2001). On the other hand, the Francophone practice is based on the French colonial system of education, characterized by centralization, under government control and hierarchical. It mainly promotes white-collar jobs, makes French the overall language of instruction and discriminates against religious and private schools (Ngoh, 2004 & Su, 2001).

From the historical background, the Anglophones and Francophones in Cameroon have developed differently with two different educational systems (Frederick, 2015). In practice, the bicultural status of the education system in Cameroon is only a window dressing as it is not fully respected; rather, the assimilation policy by the francophone majority is being forced onto Anglophones (Konings & Nyamnjoh, 2003).

Anglophone Teachers' Strike: genesis, manifestations and reactions

The Anglophone teachers put up a sit down strike captioned, "All Anglophone Teachers' Strike" that commenced on 21st November 2016. It was organized by all legalized trade unions of Aglophone teachers (seven of them) to protest against all

the injustices that have been meted on the Anglophone sub-system of education in the last three decades with the argument that all attempts, appeals and requests to the Government to resolve the issues have met with failure (Doc. 1). These teachers' unions comprise of

- Cameroon Association of Teachers' Trade Union (CATTU)
- Teachers' Association of Cameroon (TAC)
- Presbyterian Education Authority Teachers' Trade Union (PEATTU)
- Baptist Teachers' Trade Union of Cameroon (BATTUC)
- Catholic Education Workers Trade Union of Cameroon (CEWOTU)
- National Union of Teachers of Higher Education, University of Buea Chapter
- National Union of Teachers of Higher Education, University of Bamenda Chapter

This strike action highlighted the following grievances, eleven in number (Doc. 1)

1. Our children who pass the General Certificate of Education (GCE) with quality grades cannot enter professional schools of their choice, while those who perform poorly fill all the spaces.
2. Francophones outnumber Anglophones in the professional schools in Anglophone Universities of Buea and Bamenda by a ratio of up to 90:10% in Higher Teachers Training College (HTTTC) (Kumba, 90:10% in Medical School in Buea, 80:20% in HTTTC Bamenda whereas there are no Anglophones in these schools in Francophone Universities.
3. Anglophones who apply to read medicine are usually sent to Francophone universities, where operating becomes a serious challenge, and since they cannot cope, they give up.
4. As a result of this policy of discrimination and marginalization, government does not train Anglophone technical teachers, and even the few Anglophones who are trained are sent to work in Francophone areas.
5. Government continues to send Francophones who do not master English to teach in Anglophone schools. The teachers teach in broken English, thereby confusing the students. As a result, many students do not perform well in their final examinations.
6. The Universities of Buea and Bamenda have been francophonized and admissions into key faculties have been taken to Yaounde so that admission lists can be doctored.
7. Our children are compelled to write CAP, Probatoire and Baccalaureate in technical schools, with a tradition of poorly translated questions and massive failures on their part. Qualifications into professional schools and the universities, what a mockery to our certificates!
8. Our children who graduate from the university cannot get jobs; they have become bike riders and call-box operators and sim card vendors.
9. Lay private and confessionnal schools are doing so much to educative our children, but receive little or no subvention from Government. Even Religious Studies is mocked as a requirement for admission.

10. That the election and appointment of authorities of the Anglo-Saxon Universities of Bamenda and Buea should be in strict compliance of Anglo-Saxon norms.
11. The 1998 Law on the Orientation of education in Cameroon provides for the creation of an Education Board, but we are asking for separate boards which can address the needs of each subsystem.

On this day 21-11-2016 of the teachers sit in indefinite strike, a local Journalist and activist popularly known as “Mancho Bibixy” took on the streets of Bamenda with a coffin he bought that he was ready to be killed by security forces (Picture 4). He protested, making analysis of the poor road networks in Bamenda and the works of a Chinese company that was digging trenches for pipe borne water, destroying both the existing pipes and roads without maintenance. He cried out that no city council official especially the Government Delegate to the Bamenda City Council appointed by the Head of state was making any statement to this destruction. This pulled the crowds who were observed to affirm the declarations by “Mancho Bibixy”.

The incidence was received with violence from the security forces tear gassing, the streets and detaining some protesters. The violent action of the soldiers provoked a strike march by the population in the streets of Bamenda whose confrontation led to the molestation and shooting of some armless citizens, one of whom died.

A follow-up strike was mounted by the students of the University of Buea highlighting several grievances. The students from the University of Buea have been tortured, violated and some raped by security officers. Hundreds of them taken to police jails (Picture1, 2, and 3).

There has been some dialogue by the Prime Minister (who is Anglophone) and the trade Union leaders all of which have not yet yielded any meaningful way forward (Doc.2, Doc. 3 and Doc. 4). The Head of state promised the recruitment of bilingual science and technical teachers and a 2 Billion Francs CFA to be given to lay private and confessional. This was viewed by teachers and trade union leaders as an insult because there are no trained bilingual teachers of science and technical subjects and that the grant of two million declared does not carry any time specifications (doc. 4).

The strike action continuous with and additional request to probe into the act of violation on the students of Buea University, calling for their total release, medical care and security.

Anglophone marginalization

There is massive protest around major cities in the Anglophone part of the country opting for a Federal Government and subsequent political talks. Prior to the teachers' strike, the lawyers of the Anglophone Cameroon who have since been opting for Common law contrary to Civil Law imposed in the Anglophone sub-system, went on a peaceful demonstration in Bamenda (Capital of the North West Region) and Buea (capital of the South West Region). In Buea the peaceful march by lawyers met with violence on the side of the 'security' forces of the state who had the lawyers beaten

up. The Parliamentarians and Senators of the Social Democratic Front (SDF), a frontline opposition party staged a march in Bamenda and Buea in solidarity with the strike of lawyers and teachers, calling on the Government to give room for dialogue.

The circumstances from the strike of the lawyers, the teachers and university students have pushed the Anglophone community to go on a general sit down strike as declared by other Anglophone workers' syndicates highlighting evidence of gross Anglophone marginalization (Doc. 5). There has been self-declared ghost town in Anglophone regions characterized by limited movement of taxes and bikes, shut down of markets and shops (since Monday, 5th December 2015).

Hope the government gives a listening ear and guarantees the restoration of peace, justice and activities.

Remarks and observations

All other services in the Anglophone section are functioning except for schools and the judiciary.

From my observations, Anglophone Cameroonians do not hate Francophones but are rather disgruntled with their being marginalized by government. Even in the present situation, Anglophones and Francophones maintain their usual warm relationships in the Anglophone towns.

I feel very hurt and touched right into my heart and marrow, when state police and soldiers openly oppress, molest and even open arms on unarmed citizens; rape students and loot their property while the government watches and makes no single statement about such barbaric acts. I think military harassment needs to cease in order to give room for meaningful and peaceful negotiations.

I believe in respect for human dignity, peace and social justice. I also think that frank and open dialogue that is participatory, backed by empathy, non-violent communication, constructive feedback and an enabling trustworthy environment can contribute to solve the Anglophone problem.

Besides the episodes of issues mentioned above, there are no fears of insecurity. Let us remain strong in hope.

Njobati Frederick Frederick

Appendix

Doc 1: Flyer, Anglophone teachers' strike

Doc. 2: Creation of adhoc committee by Prime Minister

Doc. 3: Government communiqué: money donation and recruitment of bilingual teachers

Doc. 4: Response by Trade Union leaders to Prime Minister's efforts

Doc. 5: Newspaper analysis of Anglophone marginalization

Picture 1, 2 & 3: Molested students of the University of Buea in military trucks

Picture 4: "Mancho Bibixy", Journalist and activist

References

Konings, P., & Nyamjoh, F. B. (2003). *Negotiating an Anglophone identity: A study of the politics of recognition and representation in Cameroon*. Boston: Brill Leiden.

Su, A. (2001). *Searching for national education policies for sub-Saharan Africa: the Cameroon experience*. Bamenda: Neba Publishers.

Frederick, N. F. (2015). Impact of the leadership styles of principals on school quality: the case of lay private secondary schools in the North West Anglophone Region of Cameroon (Master Thesis under publication process)