
ANOTHER CAMEROON IS POSSIBLE !

victor youmbi

The benefits of globalisation are hard to see in Cameroon. The deprivation of the rural majority, says one of its social activists, is reinforced by the venality of the WTO, giant corporations and local politicians. The answer ? Cameroon people must learn from the vibrant protest movements of India and Latin America and imagine themselves in a better country.

Porto Alegre, where more than 100,000 people attended some 1,700 workshops, seeks to challenge the very foundations of this process. There, wherever I went, I kept hearing denunciations of the neoliberal form of globalisation, calls for more sensitivity, for organised resistance and for alternatives to this doctrine.

As I listened, I was tortured by a single thought : it is urgent that Africa's people in general, and Cameroon's in particular, are made aware of how high the stakes of globalisation are. If they are not, we will all disappear like cattle to the abattoir, including those who do not believe today that they and their descendants could ever be in need.

The Bad Sleep Well

Officially, Cameroon has a population of 15 million, of which about 65 per cent live in rural areas, working the land in the way they always have. What are these people going to do when the five giants of biotechnology and transgenic research bring them up against the latest developments in biotechnology and genetically modified organisms ?

Robert Ali Brac and Franck Seuret in their latest book *Suspect Seeds*, say that the five — Syngenta (comprising Novartis and Astra Zeneca), Pharmacia (Monsanto), Aventis (AgroEvo and Rhone Poulenc), DuPont and Dow Agrosiences — control 100 per cent of the market in transgenic seeds and their power is going to concentrate further. Without information or organisation, without any means of organising resistance, what are our peasants going to do in order to earn a decent living from their work ?

How can we free ourselves from the clutches of these multinationals which are out to reduce our peasantry to a state of dependency; to prohibit them contractually from holding part of their grain harvest for seed ? The situation is more worrying

because of the profound ignorance of our civil society, of our political leaders, or those who pass for them. While they wallow in complacent sleep, the rest of the Third World is busy organising its resistance. In the medium term, 65 per cent of Cameroonians who live off the land will have little choice but to make a mass exodus from the countryside. The new rules which the WTO drew up at Doha, flagged this as the next disaster awaiting the poorer countries of the world.

This is a subject which Yondo Black and his well-fed political cronies of the Cameroonian opposition have never even mentioned. They cannot be bothered with sick, dirty peasants. And Jean Jacques Ekindi and Hameni Bieleu are too busy fighting for power to bother with such matters. Meanwhile, Léger Bieleu Bedzigui may write beautifully but he writes nothing but press releases. What about Dakole Daissala and his friends from the north ? Do they know anything about this impending disaster ? I doubt it.

They deplore the injustices to which the 'Great North', *their* great north, is exposed to but not that of the peasants who, even now, are suffering from cyclical famines, thanks to the long drought. Are any of these eminent men going to take the trouble to prepare people for the cataclysm that awaits them ? I despair even of Shanda Tonme, champion of the Bamileke lost cause. Has this great champion of the peasantry ever gone to a village and spoken to people about this threat to their livelihood ? No, he prefers to pursue his struggle in the perfumed salons of Yaounde and Douala.

Protest and Survive

As I sat in Porto Alegre listening to debates about globalisation and neoliberalism, I found myself wondering whether I belonged to the same planet as the other Africans at the Forum, all these professors, officials, politicians and social leaders who were flaunting their university titles so insistently. What were they going to do, I wondered — to inform our compatriots that they were just about to be plunged into new depths of poverty ? Last January, against the background of the drought, AES Sonel, Cameroon's newly privatised, American-owned hydroelectricity corporation, came out with a schedule of power cuts. The admirable Anicet Ekane, Jean-Pierre Mom and Robert Simo did try to launch a campaign of resistance, which was remarkable enough in a country where passivity rules. But electricity is a tough issue to get people excited about, as they quickly found.

They should have just let people know the difference between the price per kilowatt that they were paying for their electricity, as opposed to big companies like Alucam, a re-located French factory which consumes about 48 per cent of Cameroon's electricity supply. In Latin America, it is campaigns like this that get people engaged in the struggle for social justice.

The courage and determination of intellectual, social, political and religious leaders in Latin America has also resulted in their coming up with an alternative socio-economic model of globalisation. Meanwhile, our priests and pastors sing the same old song, so beloved of capitalists everywhere : the reward of earthly sufferings will be eternal joy after death. As for Christ's revolutionary struggle for social justice, well, that they leave in the hands of God.

It is frightening to compare Brazil's socially committed clergy, Catholic and

Protestant, with Cameroon's docile priests. The sinister Françafrique arm of globalisation, which Francois-Xavier Verschave describes in his book, still has a clear road ahead of it. We can only hope that Verschave and the brave organisation Survie do not get discouraged in their long, lonely struggle on our behalf.

Educate, Agitate, Organise — and Dream

It is deplorable that we in Cameroon are playing no part in this struggle. How much we have to learn ! We might start by studying how the Brazilian people are setting about trying to escape from the toils of North American imperialism. We might look to Brazil's new President Lula, who has brought new hope to Latin America.

It is up to us now and it is urgent. We must make the Cameroon people aware of what is happening to them. A simple example must suffice : during the colonial period there may not have been many vehicles on our roads, but at least they were new. Now, forty-three years after independence, most of the traffic consists of vehicles which have been laid off Europe's roads.

Either we remain passive and we disappear, or we get engaged and begin acting in conjunction with Latin America and India. That means also making our people aware of the threat posed to us — and above all to posterity — by the WTO, and by the secret agreements imposed by General de Gaulle and Jacques Foccart on Francophone Africa. To take this path is the only way that we in Cameroon are going to escape the clutches of the multinationals.

I long for a Cameroonian Social Forum because I believe that another Cameroon is indeed possible. Let us join forces in making it happen.

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Translated by Susan Richards from the original in French.

Victor Youmbi works for an NGO in Cameroon — the Programme D'Animation de Quartiers that operates in the shanty towns around Douala, educating the most socially excluded women, children and youth, and locating jobs and credit for them.

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