

Review

## The Kamerun society: A missing link in the independence struggle in the British Southern Cameroons, 1956–61

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The history of the liberation struggle in Cameroon is a half written story. Like in the history of Africa, many of the actors in this struggle have been deliberately or inadvertently written off and/or forgotten. This explains why the Kamerun Society (KS) is seldom mentioned in most colonial Cameroon historiography. In passing, some actors in the politics of the period made reference to the KS dismissing it as a group having nothing but mischief to offer. At its best therefore, the KS has received only an ethnic or marginal orientation. This paper attempts a placement of the KS in its proper historical context. It argues that the KS, from its establishment, was a broad-based organ that made positive strides in the liberation struggle in the Southern Cameroons. In colonial Africa, most pressure groups were reservoirs to political parties and the KS was no exception. Its contribution to Southern Cameroons liberation laid in its role as the think tank of the Kamerun National Democratic Party (KNDP) which eventually negotiated the reunification between the British Southern Cameroons and French Cameroon.

**Key words:** Forgotten, people, struggle, independence.

### INTRODUCTION

The German colonial rule in Cameroon lasted from 1884 to 1919. It ended following the defeat of the Germans from Cameroon and their expulsion from Cameroon by the Anglo-French during World War One. The Anglo – French failure to establish a condominium in Cameroon in the course of the war led to the partition of the territory between them in 1916. The French took four fifths of the territory while the remaining one fifth went to the British. For administrative convenience, the British further

partitioned their own portion into two and governed them as integrals parts of Nigeria. As a result, the British Northern Cameroons was attached to the northern provinces of Nigeria while the British Southern Cameroons was administered as an integral part of Southern Nigeria (later the Eastern Region of Nigeria).

Following the terms of the Mandate Agreement of 20 July, 1922, both the French and British Cameroons became mandates of the League of Nations.

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During the Mandate period (1922 – 45) anti-colonial sentiments developed gradually in the British Southern Cameroons and gathered steam during the Trusteeship period (1945 – 61). The anti-colonial sentiments were articulated by a number of internal and external forces which can hardly be overemphasized. Among the internal forces were pressure groups and political parties. Like in many African colonies, the leading nationalists in the Southern Cameroons adopted different political platforms vis-à-vis the political future of the territory. Pressure groups and then political parties were the vectors of transmission of their political ideologies.

In 1939, Mbene of Bonjongo, Victoria (now Limbe) founded the Cameroon Welfare Union. This pressure group condemned the non-representation of the Southern Cameroons in the Legislative Council in Nigeria (Ebune, 1992:121-122). Two years later (1940), Endeley and Kale formed the Cameroon Youth League (CYL) in Lagos, Nigeria. The CYL stood for a separate regional status for the Southern Cameroons. Unfortunately, this group lasted for about eight years and disappeared into oblivion without achieving its objective. This was partly due to the fact that its members were mostly students who were obliged to move from Nigeria at the end of their studies, thereby causing a fluctuation in membership.

In 1949, Endeley founded the Cameroon National Federation (CNF) which called for a separate regional status for the Southern Cameroons and its reunification with French Cameroon. In fact, Endeley was not alone in the call for a separate region from Nigeria. In 1951, Dibongue founded the Kamerun United National Congress (KUNC) which also advocated the reunification between the Southern Cameroons and French Cameroon. In order to be more pragmatic in the process, he suggested that the English Language should be taught in French Cameroon while the French Language was taught in the Southern Cameroons.

Two years after the formation of the KUNC the Eastern Regional Crisis occurred in Nigeria in 1953. This gave Endeley and Dibongue and their supporters the opportunity to condemn association with Nigeria. This led to the merging of the CNF and the KUNC thereby giving birth to the Kamerun National Congress (KNC), the first political party in the Southern Cameroons. It is imperative to be borne in mind that Southern Cameroons politics was bedeviled with the inconsistency of maintaining a single political platform as was the case in many parts of Africa. For example, Mbile who wanted continuous association with Nigeria formed the Kamerun Peoples Party (KPP).

The situation was further complicated when Endeley shifted his political goal post from the demand for a separate region for the Southern Cameroons to association with Nigeria. This was one of the reasons why Foncha and Jua cut off links with the KNC and founded the Kamerun National Democratic Party (KNDP) in 1955 calling for independence and ultimate reunifica-

tion with French Cameroon. In 1956, the KS emerged to act as the think tank to the KNDP and to help in the realization of its main objective, reunification with French Cameroon.

Though much has been written on the role played by pressure groups and political parties in the struggle for independence in the British Southern Cameroons, it is unfortunate that the KS has not been given adequate attention in this direction by authors. The very few writers who cared to mention this group in their works have rather done so in passing or superficially and as such, a complete picture of the contribution of the KS in the independence struggle in the Southern Cameroons has been difficult to come by. Consequently, this has left a huge gap in the history of nationalism in the territory. The essence of this study is to attempt filling this lacuna by bringing out the role of the KS to the limelight with analysis from both primary and secondary sources. It is in line with this argument in mind that some works related to the subject have been reviewed.

Writers like Johnson (1970), Eyongetah and Brain (1974), Ebune (1992) and Ngoh (2001), Fafawora (1990) acknowledge the role of pressure groups and political parties in the independence struggle in the British Southern Cameroons. Johnson (1970) briefly discusses the activities of pressure groups in the Southern Cameroons but says very little in relation to their impact on the political and socio-economic evolution of the territory. He mentions the KS in passing but fails to elaborate on its activities like he does with other pressure groups. Likewise, Eyongetah and Brain (1974) also concentrate on the activities of a number of pressure groups in relation to the political evolution of the Southern Cameroons. Though they mention the KS, they however, limit themselves to its participation in the Mamfe Plebiscite Conference of 1959. Though such a minute detail would be helpful in this study, it is unfortunate that they failed to present an all-inclusive picture of the KS in the independence struggle in the Southern Cameroons.

In addition, Ebune (1992) gives a detail account of the growth of pressure groups and political parties in the Southern Cameroons between 1916 and 1960 and clearly distinguishes their various roles in the quest for independence. Chiabi (1997), on his part, presents a synopsis of the origins and demise of pressure groups such as the CYL and KUNC. Regrettably, none of these authors have mentioned the KS, not even in passing, as far as their works are concerned.

Soh (1999) concentrates on the biography of Foncha and focuses on his role in the political evolution of Southern Cameroons. Though pressure groups are not at the centre of his argument, he discusses Foncha's interactions with some of his close collaborators. Given that some of these men, like Ndumu, Dibue and Ngwa, were members of the KS, his work helped in providing some insights on role of the KS in the independence drive.

Mbile (2000), in his eye-witness account of the politics of the Southern Cameroons, makes allusion to some pressure groups including the KS. He, however, dismisses the KS as a mischievous group, with origins from the grass fields, which had nothing good to offer. This rather marginal picture of the KS was amongst the propellants that influenced us to investigate the activities of the KS in the politics of the Southern Cameroons in order to prove the contrary, thereby placing the KS in its right historical context.

Lastly, Ngoh (2001) examines the role of pressure groups and political parties in relation to the constitutional developments in the Southern Cameroons between 1922 and 1961. He makes reference to the political stance of the KS during the London Conference of 1957 and spotlights the interactions amongst some politicians and member of the KS, as was the case between Muna and Dibue, which had some implications on political developments in the territory. While these were helpful to this study, they were however inadequate in providing a complete picture and comprehensive understanding of the role of the KS in the independence struggle.

### The emergence of the Kamerun Society

During and after the Second World War, a number of political organizations emerged in the Southern Cameroons articulating claims for the re-unification of the two Cameroons. For example, Endeley had succeeded in uniting close to twenty tribal unions under the umbrella of CNF. It was this pressure group that made the first written demand for the re-unification between the British Cameroons and French Cameroon expressing its disappointment that the British Cameroon "has not made the slightest advance from where the Germans left it" (Johnson, 1970:119).

The zeal to break away from Nigeria grew stronger following the Eastern Regional Crisis of 1953. Endeley's CNF and Dibongue's KUNC merged to form the Kamerun National Congress (KNC), the first indigenous party which advocated a separate regional status for the Southern Cameroons from Nigeria. About a year later, Endeley shocked many re-unificationists when he started preaching continuous association with Nigeria. He argued among other things that the acts of violence perpetrated in French Cameroon by the Union des Populations du Cameroun (UPC) would mean insecurity for the Southern Cameroonians (LeVine, 1964).

Endeley's change of position did not augur well for some Southern Cameroons nationalists at the time. This was one of the reasons why Foncha left the KNC and together with Jua, formed the Kamerun National Democratic Party (KNDP) in 1955 (Soh, 1999:14). Things were further made worse following the Bamenda Conference of 1956 where the *Endeleyists* called for continuous association with Nigeria. This was enough to spark off some major political developments because:

... even if only for financial reasons was widely criticized and resulted in the emergence of parties and groups, not necessarily political, which registered their disagreement with the decisions and called more vehemently for re-unification.<sup>1</sup>

One of the groups that emerged from the yoke of this hullabaloo was the KS. This pressure group adopted the German appellation "Kamerun" because it admired the territorial unity that prevailed in Cameroon during the German era. Its paramount objective was to see the British Southern Cameroons re-united with French Cameroon as a single unit. The arbitrary Anglo-French partition of Cameroon in February 1916 was therefore considered anachronistic. This was because there had existed in the past a single "Kamerun Nation."<sup>2</sup>

The KS was to act as the voice of the voiceless and to bring pressure to bear on the administering authorities to improve the lot of the Southern Cameroonians. It wanted the British authorities to find lasting solutions to problems such as high illiteracy through the establishment of more schools, especially post-primary and professional institutions. It was hoped that through these, many Southern Cameroonians would be prepared to take over the administrative machinery completely from foreigners. Consequently, it was to play an advisory role to the KNDP leadership which shared its objectives. It was perhaps for this reason that the KS was branded the "think tank" or "brain trust" of the KNDP.

The KNDP which was led by J.N. Foncha was considered to be a grass field party by its opponents because its leaders came from the grassfield with a large following. It was probably due to the customary, tribal or regional sentiments that characterized African politics during the struggle for independence that Mbile who came from the coastal region developed apathy for the KNDP and its supporters. It should be reiterated that the KS just like the KNDP membership was not limited to the grassfield region of Cameroon.

The KS comprised a number of educated persons, some of whom were civil servants in Southern Cameroons. Membership was opened to anyone interested, irrespective of his or her region of origin or ethnic group who supported the objectives of the group. Proof of this could be seen in the fact that S.J. Epale, Thomas Abanda and Dr. G. Dibue who were members of the Society were French Cameroonians. Others such as E.T Egbe, R.E.G. Burnley, E.D. Quan, J.B. Etame, O. Ebanja, S. Lyonga and JomeaPefok came from the coastal part of Southern Cameroons. Those who came from the grassfield included Nicholas Ade Ngwa, Dr. Alexander B. Gwan-Nulla, S.C. Tamajong, Vincent

<sup>1</sup> National Archives Buea (henceforth cited as NAB), 310/S.4/vb/b, 1957/2, The Kamerun Society, The Kamerun Society and the Nigerian Constitutional Conference and the Unification Question, 1957, p.1.

<sup>2</sup> Interview with Alexander Baba Gwan-Nulla, 82 years, member of the Kamerun Society, Sokolo Old Road, Limbe, 22 September 2001.

Nchami, TamajongNdumu, Jack A. Kisob, A.D. Mengot, Dr. Victor AnomahNgu and F.N. Ndang.<sup>3</sup>

From the aforementioned names, it is evident that Mbile (2000) was biased when he concluded that the Kamerun Society was an association of *graffi* students studying abroad who were working for their own selfish interests. The cynicism of the Mbile school can be dismissed as a historical fallacy. This argument could be sustained further by pointing out that E.T. Egbe, who led the group as General Secretary, came from Mamfe in the coastal (forest) region of the Southern Cameroons. It was from its seat in Victoria (now Limbe) that Egbe operated the administrative machinery of this pressure group.<sup>4</sup> Egbe's leadership would not have been a historical accident as he was glued to the reunification idea. In a speech at the funeral of S.T. Muna in 2002, which was one of his last public appearances, Egbe told the world that if the plebiscite was to be organized one thousand times he would vote for reunification one thousand times.

### Political activities

By the mid 1950s, the leading Southern Cameroons politicians adopted different political platforms *vis-à-vis* the future of the territory. There were three dominant platforms. There were those who wanted integration with Nigeria, led by E.M.L. Endeley and N.N. Mbile. There were also those who wanted secession as a separate entity such as P.M. Kale. The third group led by Foncha with the support of NdeNtumazah of the OK and the KS wanted independence and ultimate re-unification with French Cameroon. These provoked a cluster of debates on the political future of the Southern Cameroons. It was against this backdrop that the KS actively participated in some conferences meant to find the way forward for the Southern Cameroons.

### The London Constitutional Conference, 23-26 June 1957

In 1957, the London Conference met with Alan Lennox – Boyd, British Secretary of State for Colonies as chair. The aim was to review the Nigerian constitution and to discuss the political future of the Southern Cameroons. Before this conference, some ground work had been done by the KS besides other groups.

Before 1956, the call for re-unification was considered some-what vague because no formula had been worked out to show how this idea could move from a mere slogan to political reality. Such a formula only “saw the light of day” when Samuel Adeoye George with the help of some members of the KS such as Simon Joseph Epale, formulated a seven point advance towards unification (Ngoh, 2001:95).

The first point in the document requested that the UN should review the two separate Trusteeship Agreements and provide a joint Anglo-French administration for Cameroon. To further facilitate the re-unification process, three or four government units should be created in each zone with executive and legislative functions. S.J. Epale made the position of the KS in this matter clear when he remarked to S.A. George that “I agree with you in toto on point one which provides for modification of the Trusteeship Agreement with the view of bringing the whole Kamerun under a unified administration” (George, 1956:12).

Before this document, the call for reunification seemed to have been at the romantic, theoretical and conceptual levels. It was like a symbol which represented a fundamental shift from a theoretical discussion of reunification to a concrete and practical desire to create a permanent structure in that direction, so to speak. The document was among the first blueprints for the reunification aspirants. It was timely in that it was published at the time of the Bamenda Conference of 28 May to 1<sup>st</sup> June 1956, which met to prepare for the London Conference of 1957.

Though the first point contained in the document was never given a second thought to by the UN, the KS made an impressive contribution on what it thought the political destiny of the Southern Cameroons should be. Before the Southern Cameroons delegation left for the London Conference, the KS handed to them a memorandum containing its stance on the political future of the Southern Cameroons. The document titled “The Kamerun Society and the Nigeria Constitutional Conference, and the Unification Question,” contained four options available to the Southern Cameroons.

It rejected the first option which called for integration with Nigeria. The second which advocated a regional status for Southern Cameroons within the Nigerian Federation was also rejected. The first two were rejected on grounds that no real contact had existed between the people of both territories. The third option which was separation without unification was rejected for financial reasons. The Society expressed reservations, arguing that where finance “will come is at the moment hard to see.” After its careful examination of the pros and cons of the matter, the Society settled for re-unification which was the fourth option. This was made clear when it stated that “we shall reiterate in concluding the point made in our preamble that the solution of the problem of the Cameroons lies in re-unification.”<sup>5</sup>

The KS further attempted to justify its position by arguing that the relative decline of the KNC and the increased popularity of the KNDP were due to the fact that while the former stood for integration with Nigeria, the latter stood for re-unification in one form or the other after 1955 (Ngoh, 2001:101-102). It affirmed its strong support for the KNDP because it wanted to use its

<sup>3</sup> Interview with Gwan-Nulla.

<sup>4</sup> Interview with Gwan-Nulla.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

position to attain re-unification between the Southern Cameroons and French Cameroon. Both were certainly birds of a feather. This was the position of the Kamerun Society before the London Conference of 1957.

At the London Conference, Dr. E.M.L. Endeley who led the KNC delegation was shocked when Fon V.S. Galega II of Bali, a member of his delegation took an independent stance when he called for secession from Nigeria and the independence of Southern Cameroons in its own right. Even though the KNC leadership accused the KNDP for influencing Galega's position, others however laid the blame at the doorsteps of the KS. Mbile (2000) accused the *graffi* or "Bamenda"<sup>6</sup> students [in London] who called themselves the "Cameroon Society" for fabricating derogatory stories such as the one that Endeley had treated FonGalega II "like a house boy." That this was done in order to discredit the KNC thereby causing many Bali to stampeded into KNDP. This issue will be analyzed later in this paper.

A number of defections from the KNC followed which weakened the ranks and files of the party. For example, in September 1957 S.T. Muna, an influential member of the KNC defected the KNDP because Endeley had abandoned re-unification with French Cameroon for integration with Nigeria. Muna was encouraged to leave the KNC by Dr. Dibue, with whom he had discussed his imminent crossing of the carpet. It was alleged that Muna and Dibue<sup>7</sup> concluded a deal between them in which the former got some material and financial compensation (Ngoh, 2001:105). It is however, not clear how much was involved in the process.

Other members of the Kamerun Society who were said to work closely to discredit Endeley and to puncture his popularity were Tamanjong Ndumu and Jack A. Kisob. They worked closely with Paul SoppoPriso, a French Cameroon politician, who supported re-unification. They made use of a printing press which Priso placed in their disposal to print propaganda material which the KNDP used to tarnish the image of Dr. Endeley and the KNC (Ibid., 105-106). At this juncture, there is no gainsaying that the political gymnastics of the KS precipitated the downfall of the KNC government in the 1959 elections which catapulted the KNDP to the top, giving it the golden opportunity to lead the negotiations for re-unification.

### **The Kamerun Society and the elections of 24 January, 1959**

In January 1959, elections were held into the Southern

<sup>6</sup>Mbile uses the terms *graffi* and "Bamenda" interchangeably. Literary, both mean people from the grassfield of Cameroon where Bamenda is one of the chief towns. These terms are however, often given a pejorative outlook whenever used in this manner.

<sup>7</sup> Dr. Dibue was from the Duala ethnic group but spent much of his life in the Southern Cameroons. He was a founding member of the CYL in 1940 and his conviction in a reunified Cameroon also led him into becoming a founding member of the KS in 1956. He was an accomplished medical doctor.

Cameroons House of Assembly. The KNC and the KPP formed an alliance to oppose the KNDP. The KS played a decisive role in the success of the KNDP. For instance, in the last week of the campaigns, Foncha had a car accident in Widikum while returning from campaign in Mamfe. His collar bone was fractured and the pains dampened the spirit and enthusiasm with which he started the campaign. His inability to move to Buea to record his campaign speech on the Nigerian Broadcasting Corporation (NBC) was a cause of jubilation by his political rivals who publicly called on the masses not to vote for a man who was in his dying bed (Soh, 1999:57).

It was Michael Fontem, Foncha's close associate and Dr. Dibue after consulting some members of the KS, who advised him to scribble something and send to Buea. It was thanks to them that Foncha dictated his campaign speech to his wife Anna. Based on their advice, the speech was sealed in an envelope and secretly sent to Nicholas Ade Ngwa, another member of the KS working in Buea as Education Officer. He quickly moved over to NBC radio network where Thomas Abanda, a journalist had it recorded. Though it was Ngwa's voice that went on air, many believed it was that of Foncha himself. Bejeng (1999) summarizes the impact of the speech in the following words:

It was a beautiful speech that outclassed the other campaign speeches. The KNC people felt bad. They thought it was all over for Foncha. How come that he was able to make his campaign speech? Even Dr. Endeley himself felt bad and even lived to poke fun at Mr. Ade Ngwa for what he did (Ibid., 58).

Dr. E.M.L Endeley who was Prime Minister of the Southern Cameroons on the eve of the elections was confident that the absence of the campaign speech of his main political rival would give him an upper hand in the elections. Needless to emphasize why Ngwa received a bollocking from Endeley for the speech galvanized many people into voting for the KNDP. This led to its victory obtaining 14 out of the 26 seats in the Southern Cameroons House of Assembly. Foncha replaced Endeley as Prime Minister and here began the practical steps towards the latter's political demise.

### **The Kamerun Society and the Mamfe Plebiscite Conference of 10 to 11 August 1959**

In August 1959, Sir Sydney Phillipson, the Acting Commissioner of the Southern Cameroons chaired the Mamfe Conference which met to determine the plebiscite questions and the qualification of voters. Among the political parties that were represented include the KNDP, the KNC-KPP, the OK, the KUP and the CCC. Prominent among the pressure groups that attended was the KS represented by N.A. Ngwa.

There was controversy over the plebiscite question. NdeNtumazah of the OK party wanted the question to be

“Do you want to re-unify with an independent French Cameroon?” P.M. kale who led the Kamerun United Party (KUP) was of the opinion that the Southern Cameroons should have independence “without ties of apron strings either way.” This view was supported by Chief Nyenti who led the CCC. The KNC-KPP alliance wanted the question to be “Do you want to continue association with Nigeria?” or “Do you want to unify with an independent Cameroon?” The KS delegation at the conference argued that re-unification was not necessarily the alternative. It realized that many wanted secession from Nigeria and were consequently not prepared for immediate re-unification since the terms had not been worked out. As a result, the KS concluded that the question should be “Do you want to remain with Nigeria?” (Eyongetah and Brain, 1974:154).

A curious reader may want to know why the sudden adjustment of the political stance of the KS which was normally that of reunification. It can be argued that the modification of the Society's stance was a pre-emptive measure to avoid the wrath of some influential traditional rulers who still showed reservation as far as re-unification was concerned. The position of the fons was re-echoed at the conference when FonAchiribi II of Bafut reminded the audience that they had abandoned Endeley because he attempted taking the Southern Cameroonians to Nigeria. He went on to warn in unequivocal terms that the traditional rulers would also abandon Foncha if he “tries to take [them] to French Cameroon.” The KS did not want its dream of re-unification punctured and consequently, failure to modify its position for the time being would have been costly for both the KNDP and KS. This was because whether covertly or overtly, some of those who paraded the corridors of the KNDP and KS knew that among the three options of integration, reunification and secession, the last was the most popular option.

Given the situation, Foncha had to play his cards well. He was tactful in the memorandum he presented to the delegates at the conference when he argued that “re-unification can only be achieved by common agreement among the sectors of Kamerun ... It should not be one of the alternatives to be put at the plebiscite” (Soh, 1999:85). His political opponents however could not be convinced out of their belief that Foncha tenaciously and secretly stood for an unconditional re-unification with French Cameroon. For example, F.N. AjebeSone of the KNC argued that the KNDP and its supporters were trying to conceal the issue of re-unification from the electorate. To him, should the KNDP drop the phrase “ultimate re-unification” from its political program, the KNC-KPP alliance would gladly settle for “secession” alone (Ngoh, 2001:128). Unfortunately, this was not heeded to and the conference ended up in a fiasco.

The UN was left with no option than to impose the two plebiscite questions on the Southern Cameroonians. These were “Do you wish to achieve independence by joining the independent Republic of Cameroon?” or “Do you wish to achieve independence by joining the inde-

pendent Federation of Nigeria?” The date was fixed for the 11<sup>th</sup> February 1961. The Kamerun Society supported the KNDP which campaigned vigorously for re-unification as opposed to the Cameroon Peoples National Congress (CPNC), a merger of the KNC-KPP in 1960, which stood for integration with Nigeria. The KNDP option won and consequently, Foncha championed the negotiations for re-unification with the Republic of Cameroon which saw the light of day on 1<sup>st</sup> October, 1961 with the birth of the Federal Republic of Cameroon.

### **The Kamerun Society and the Cameroonisation Policy**

By 1957 the British authorities had embarked on the ‘Cameroonisation Policy’ which was meant at integrating Southern Cameroonians into the public service. The KS saw this as an opportunity through which the people would take over the administrative machinery of their own affairs and consequently become masters of their own destiny. The KS was however, embittered by the slow pace of its implementation. On 4 March, 1957 the Honourable Secretary of the KS, E.T. Egbe, wrote to the Commissioner of the Cameroons, Southern Cameroons to this effect. He sent copies of the letter to the Leader of Government Business of the Southern Cameroons, the Civil Service Commission Lagos and the Chief Secretary to the Federation of Nigeria, Lagos. In this letter the KS argued that though the number of trained Cameroonians was comparatively small those who presented themselves for employment had to become “marathon waiters” for long.<sup>8</sup>

Still in the letter, the KS complained that some of the very few who successfully got employment suffered from underemployment. As a result, a number of them had to seek employment elsewhere. To justify this argument, the KS sorted out the case of one Mr. Ndang who returned with a diploma in Public Administration from Exeter University in the United Kingdom. Ndang was considered fit for employment only as a third class clerk in the Southern Cameroons. The KS pointed out that “the same gentleman was appointed Administrative Assistant elsewhere [in Nigeria].” The letter ended with the recommendation that the 1957 London Conference should consider ways and means to vest in a separate “Cameroons Authority” the full powers over appointment and general disposition of the civil service machinery.<sup>9</sup>

In reaction to the aforementioned letter, the Commissioner of the Cameroons, Southern Cameroons granted audience to a delegation of the KS on 26 July 1957 where the worries raised by the KS were discussed. The British authorities promised to look into some of the problems and to take a step forward in the Cameroonisation Process. The implementation of this

<sup>8</sup>NAB, 310/S.4/vb/b, 1957/2, The Kamerun Society, Letter to the Commissioner of the Cameroons, Southern Cameroons, 4<sup>th</sup> March 1957.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid.

policy could be seen as a necessity as it opened numerous positions for Cameroonians and allowed for their rapid advancement in the bureaucracy (DeLancey, 1989:61). In September 1959 the KS issued a paper titled "Statement of Policy for the Cameroonisation of the Public Service of Southern Cameroons." In this paper, the KS made it clear that it was going to continue to press hard among other things that qualified Cameroonians should fill all sensitive positions in the public service. The KS did not however lose sight of the fact that a sound education was the bedrock for such an achievement.

### **The Kamerun Society and the advancement in education**

The KS asserted that a sound education of the people was an important instrument in the independence drive. It advocated planned education and training so as to provide "a sprinkling of Cameroonians in higher positions within a reasonable time." As a result, the KS pressed for scholarships to be awarded to deserving Cameroonians to further their studies. P. M. Efange remarked that "The Kamerun Society did play a great part in influencing government to grant many scholarships to accelerate the Cameroonisation Policy."<sup>10</sup> The type of scholarship awarded included coverage of tuition fees and allowances both at home and abroad. It was thanks to the KS that some of those who benefited came to hold high offices before and after independence. Some of those who benefited from such scholarships were C. S. Bongwa and Otto Monono.<sup>11</sup>

### **The Kamerun Society and Economic Progress**

The KS was of the view that economic stability was also a necessary tool for the independence struggle. It was against this background that the KS prepared a pamphlet titled "Economic and Financial Problems of the Cameroons" which contained its views on how to push the economy of the territory forward. On 27 July 1957, a copy of this document was forwarded to the office of the Commissioner of the Cameroons, Southern Cameroons for consideration. In this paper, the KS identified some of the economic problems of the territory and suggested what the authorities could do to salvage the situation. For example, the KS decried the slow pace at economic development and called for educational reforms that would be directed toward the training of people who would efficiently man all development projects and supply the technical managerial know-how.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>10</sup>Interview with P.M. Efange, 72 years, retired Senior Administrative Officer of the Southern Cameroons civil service and presently traditional ruler of Longstreet Small Soppo, Buea, 27<sup>th</sup> September 2001.

<sup>11</sup>Ibidem.

<sup>12</sup> NAB, 310/S.4/vb/b, 1957/2, The Kamerun Society, "Economic and Financial Problems of the Cameroons," Mimeo., 1957, p. 3.

In addition, the economic pamphlet argued that it was unfair for the Southern Cameroons to seek a solution to its economic problems in integration with Nigeria. This was because "Nigeria needs an improvement as the Cameroons and to deprive her of the little capital now at her disposal is most unjustifiable."<sup>13</sup> Among the issues which raised controversy in the paper were the sources of revenue that were open to the Southern Cameroons. For instance, the KS proposed that the territory could secure a block grant of about £20 million from the UN and in getting the UN to guarantee the Territory a loan of about the same amount from the World Bank.<sup>14</sup> This was seen as a farfetched dream by the British authorities.

On 29 September 1957, J. Murray, the Financial and Development Secretary of the Southern Cameroons, remarked that "The paper is an interesting and often lively survey of Cameroons economic and financial problems ... [but] many of these suggestions are already government policy." He however, felt disappointed that such a well-informed paper should propagate the idea that the UN would assist the Cameroons with such a fabulous amount by way of block grant or loan.

### **Debunking Some False Impressions about the Kamerun Society**

As earlier mentioned in this study, some of the opponents of the KS failed to see anything good in this group. They dismissed it as a mischievous organ and gave the "dog" a bad name because they wanted to hang it. Some of the issues concerned require a careful analysis at this point in time.

### **The Endeley – Galega Story**

During the period of the struggle for independence, there was the spread of a story that Endeley had treated FonGalega II of Bali "like a houseboy" during the London Conference of 1957. Mbile (2000) and Amazee (2004) have successfully argued that this could not have happened. It can be said that it was a mere fabrication. Mbile however, provokes a new debate in the discussion when he places the said concoction at the door steps of the KS.

Mbile (2000) argues that the KS concocted the 'Endeley-Galega' story at a crucial moment when it needed a desperate story to cajole the people of Bali to leave the Endeley camp (KNC) and stampede into the Foncha camp (KNDP). Implicated in this matter was FonGalega II whom he accused of holding secret meetings in his apartment, while in London, with the KNDP in an attempt to assist the "tricksters."

Dr. A.B. Gwa-Nulla agreed with Mbile that the story

<sup>13</sup>Ibid.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 11.

was false, but rejected the argument that it was the fabrication of the KS. As a pioneer member of this group and a man from the palace of Bali, he would not have accepted such a coinage as a weapon against the KNC. To him, "it was too expensive a joke to use the name of a Fon who was like a deity to his people to ride in the name of dirty politics," and concluded that the Society was never involved in that "nonsense." According to him, the issue was never discussed within the rank and file of the Society. Consequently, the fabricators, whether members of the Society or not acted out of their own accord.<sup>15</sup>

In relation to this, the Fon of Bali, Ganyonga III wrote to Mbile on 29 January, 2001 criticizing the way he handled the issue in his book. Though he appreciated the fact that the 'Endeley-Galega' Story "has been well defended in his book, *Cameroon Political Story*. Although it is merely based in hypothetical evidence." He went on to say that Mbile's book "does not portray exactly what happened in London."<sup>16</sup>

From the discussion so far, two conclusions could be drawn. First, whether based on 'hypothetical evidence' or not, it is certain that such a story was spread in the Southern Cameroons in the 1950s that damaged the image of the KNC, though it was a mere fiction. Second, it is not clear whether the Fon of Bali took part in secret meetings with "tricksters" in London, whose mission was to discredit Endeley. Quoting Titanji and others in *An Introduction to the Study of Bali Nyonga*, Ngoh states that Galega's independent stance on secession at the London Conference of 1957 was in conformity with his understanding with other natural rulers before leaving for London (Ngoh, 2001:105). Consequently, if the alleged meetings were to cause Galega and his subjects to stampede into the KNDP, then it was not necessary given that the line was already drawn before the London Conference.

### Were the Activities of the Kamerun Society Secret?

Critics of the KS such as Mbile (2000:176), Lainjo and Endeley argue that because of its pre-meditated mischief, the Society was guilty of functioning in the 'dark.' They claimed not to have recalled when this group at any given time held a public debate on the political issues of the day. This was however, a rash conclusion. In this study, we have seen instances where the KS engaged the British authorities in an outright and lawful manner in the independence and reunification struggle. The letters and petitions the KS sent to the British authorities such as that of 4 March 1957 and the audience granted them as that of 26 July 1957 go a long way to justify this argument.

<sup>15</sup>Interview with Gwan-Nulla.

<sup>16</sup>Letter from His Majesty Dr. Gayonga III, Fon of Bali Nyonga, to N.N. Mbile, 29 January 2001.

### Was the Kamerun Society guilty of the ethnicity syndrome?

The contention that the KS owed its entire existence to tribal sentiments has opened yet another avenue for debate. The Mbile School argued that "Bamenda" students came together as the "Cameroon Society" in an effort to strengthen their empire following the birth of the KNDP. The Society was said to have been motivated by tribal sentiments and personal interests in a "KNDP empire" than in the general interest of Southern Cameroons (Mbile, 2000:109, 176). For example, it was accused of masterminding the massive dismissal of some top Bakweri civil servants between 1959 and 1961 such as P.M. Efange, P.E.N. Malafa and Eric Quan.<sup>17</sup>

Earlier in this paper, it was revealed that membership into the Society was not based on ethnic consideration. Another sensitive issue that needs to be examined at this point is the accusation levied against the KS for the dismissal of some civil servants of Bakweri origin from the KNDP administration on the grounds that they came from the "coast" and secretly gave their support to the CPNC against the KNDP.

It should be reiterated that Malafa and Quan were members of the KS. The question therefore is did the two of them participate in the forum of an association to which they belonged to decide on their own dismissal? We can hardly lose sight of the fact that the human nature is complex and that the phenomenon of *les ennemis dans la maison* is not new in Cameroon politics. If Malafa and Quan were suspected to be 'black legs,' the Society would have probably dismissed them from its ranks before influencing their dismissal from the public service. That notwithstanding, P.M. Efange who was not a member of the Society argued that his eviction from the Public service was Foncha's and by extension a KNDP decision.<sup>18</sup>

The critics of the KS ought to take note of the decisions of the KNDP government that were taken independently of the KS. For example, though TamanjongNdumu objected to the dismissal of Efange and Quan, Foncha went ahead to evict them from the public service. This was just one of the numerous examples to show that all was not bread and butter in the KS-KNDP relations. It was from this vantage point that it could be argued that some of the blames of the KNDP were unjustifiably laid at the backyard of the KS. Being the think tank of the KNDP

<sup>17</sup>Interview with S.M.L. Endeley, 82 years, retired Chief Justice of the Republic of Cameroon and presently paramount chief of the Bakweri. He was a keen observer of the activities of the KS. Mokonda Quarter, Buea, 16<sup>th</sup> October 2001; Interview with V.T. Lainjo, about 80 years. He was among the first thirteen elected representatives from the Southern Cameroons to the Eastern Regional House of Assembly in Nigeria in 1951. He was one of the main critics of the Kamerun Society. Buea Town, 9 October 2001.

<sup>18</sup>Interview with Efange. In the course of my discussion with Efange, he pointed out that it was Foncha's personal decision to dismiss him from the public service. He argued that at certain moments Foncha was so tight to his convictions that even his personal advisers had difficulties in making him see a good reason in some of their ideas.



did not mean that the Society was the KNDP itself or neither could it bring the KNDP under its wings and caprices if Foncha was not moved by some of its convictions.

## Conclusion

Among the fundamental issues that guided this study was the desire to examine the role of the KS in the independence struggle of the British Southern Cameroons. The aim was to show that pressure groups were indispensable in the independence struggle in Cameroon. It has been proven that the detractors of the KS exaggerated when they argued that the group had nothing but mischief to offer and that it operated on purely regional sentiments.

In a bid to achieve re-unification, it had to rally behind the KNDP leadership. Even though the Society might have registered its own flaws, there is no gainsaying that it stood tall as a liberation force among other pressure groups. It needs no protocol to say that the KS left behind footprints in the liberation struggle in the Southern Cameroons which can hardly be erased from the sands of time.

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