

Speaker Bedie Addresses National Assembly

AB2804152190 Abidjan FRATERNITE MATIN

in French 26 Apr 90 pp 7-9

[Speech by Speaker Henri Konan Bedie at the first regular session of the National Assembly; in Abidjan on 25 April]

[Text] Mr. Minister of State representing the president of the Republic: On this solemn resumption of parliamentary activities, I am happy to convey to you on behalf of my fellow parliamentarians the sincere greetings of the National Assembly, and to tell you how comforting your presence is.

Mr. Chairman of the Social and Economic Council; Mr. Grand Chancellor of the National Order; Mr. Vice President of the Supreme Court: you are welcome to the National Assembly Palace. Your presence alongside Mr. Minister of State Kei Boguinard, the personal representative of the president of the Republic, constitutes obvious evidence of the strength and the complementarity of the institutions of the republic.

Ladies and gentlemen, distinguished guests: I sincerely thank you for being present here. All the parliamentarians are grateful of your support.

My dear colleagues:

The Ivory Coast is experiencing a critical situation. Certainly, you remember the analyses that we made at this very venue at the beginning of our annual session and that enabled us to assess the state of the nation, whose representatives we are. Such a move, which has become traditional for our legislative assembly, produced by free and fair elections, must indeed be considered obligatory in these hours.

Since the sixth legislature, we have sought and proposed solutions to the problems confronting our society, namely, the rural emigration, rapid town planning, emigration of Sahelian populations toward coastal countries, and our poorly adapted educational system. Others are the increasing number of unemployed people in our cities and the rise in banditry and crime. All these evils have clearly appeared here, and our general debate was devoted to examining them.

But we know that it is not enough to understand, analyze, diagnose, and make proposals, for what is important for the political official is to act. But acting implies having the necessary financial resources, resources that the present financial crisis confronting the state has made insufficient or unavailable.

Nevertheless, we hoped that our ability to adapt, and the materialization of our solidarity would help us hold on and resist the blows dealt by a bad fate. We hoped that the crisis would never change into a crisis of confidence among Ivorians, that the necessary material sacrifices would not cause a breakdown in the national consensus.

Indisputable Gains

We have regularly supported the successive adjustments, and backed the budgetary policy of rigor and austerity. Many people have admitted that "Ivorians must be responsible for themselves," as we ourselves have admitted. That is the responsible attitude of politicians, graduates, intellectuals, in general, the attitude of people in public and private circles.

How then can we account for the mounting social tension that we have witnessed since the announcement of the first austerity measures of the structural adjustment package affecting wage earners—those who receive an income at the end of the month?

The history of the Ivorian economy is barely 30 years old. A look at this period shows a 20-year-long period of steady growth: 1960-80. Then follows a period of recession corresponding to the world crisis which hit all the developing countries more seriously. The consequences of this crisis are: the fall in the prices of raw materials, increased debt burdens, and the worsening imbalance of the terms of trade in these countries. All of these are

unfavorable developments which have made inevitable a recourse to economic policies of rigor and austerity.

During these 30 years, our country, the Ivory Coast, made considerable progress—by far more impressive than was made during the 70 years of colonial rule.

It would be superfluous to recount the tremendous progress in all sectors—political, economic, and social—because you have been the actors, or at least the witnesses.

These are indisputable and precious achievements which should guide all social behavior in this difficult crisis situation.

Here we are, however, with other issues erupting at this very moment that reduce the usual brightness of the social atmosphere.

First, we have to consider the impact such a long period of expansion and rapid growth has produced in people's mentality. This is essential to understanding the events.

Sociologists and political scientists like De Tocqueville, Davies, and other thinkers who have studied this phenomenon, teach us that serious tensions are produced when a prolonged period of economic development is interrupted by a sharp reversal.

The most significant impact of prosperity on people's thinking is that it produces speculation and "expectations," in other words, the hope of being able to always meet constantly mounting needs. In a crisis, people's minds are subject to anxiety, frustration, torture, and even to the tendency to challenge what previously appeared to be firmly established.

Thus, social unrest mounts when reality differs from people's mental picture of the future. It is not the withdrawal of amenities that pushes people to revolt, but rather unfulfilled expectations and dashed hopes.

Many Ivorians these days may have fallen victim to their own visions of the future and speculations thereof, formulated in the light of growth and prosperity.

They reacted to the austerity measures like people who had never experienced hard times. The present dissatisfaction was more noticeable among the people in whom this vision of the future was more pronounced because of the importance of their projections or of their social ambitions—among people who, despite increasing salaries, still demand more, people who demand more from the State and from society.

There are no sociological laws with mechanical effects. But if we understand these factors, we can easily understand the social conditions and we can stay clear of the "heroes of the day" and "providential men," activists and opportunists who are agitating the social scene and "whose virtues are easily confused with their personal interests like rivers flowing into the sea."

Youngsters have always wanted to be free, even though they may not always know what course of conduct to take! Adults know that what they want is freedom in an atmosphere of order.

All youths want more justice, and this ideal, which is motivated by impatience and ardor, very often leads them into intolerance. The adults know that intolerance is the cause of acts of violence and crime. The youths want changes to give themselves a personality and an identity which must conform with the fashions of their time. The adults remember that disorderly and uncontrolled changes lead to fruitless upheavals and unexpected drawbacks.

A Common Desire

Referring to the chain of generations, we have noticed that school-age Ivorian youths have consecutively contested:

- the systematic advance toward independence advocated by President Felix Houphouet-Boigny;
- the government's liberal political and economic policy;
- several other choices and policies, whereas history has proved their point of view wrong compared to that of the head of state. An example of this is dialogue with South Africa.

Today, some youths, influenced by the winds from the East, are expecting changes, changes that will break with the past, and they contest the one-party system. But how do these youths go about it? By threatening with knives, by throwing stones, by setting fires, and by destroying everything in their way? One cannot believe this, much less accept it. Ivorians instead prefer order in democracy, coming together in diversity; in short, freedom in discipline, order, and peace.

Whether the question concerns multiparty democracy or any legitimate aspirations, to achieve those objectives, we must go about it with persevering and serious work because human nature cannot be transformed like a material, with repeated and violent blows. As far as society is concerned, everything can change, on condition that a common desire exists.

Our constitution, the living expression of our common desires, contains all the promises for the future. All those expecting major changes in the Ivorian political order should meditate on these words from President Felix Houphouet-Boigny:

"Everything can change in the Ivory Coast on condition that it is done with order and peace." We believe that such a broad perspective on our political life calls for strengthened unity among Ivorians, for a patriotic rally for national construction with the effective participation of all citizens from all political leanings.

In finding solutions to the social tensions that have arisen, we must first of all remember our foundation—the law, the institutions, and the values of society and democracy. There is no societal program that can be achieved in disorder and disrespect for the security and peace aspirations for the people.

Under our present economic and social situation, we must make a distinction, on the one hand between what was at the beginning only a protest so easy to understand—because the more people earn, the more they will want—and on the other hand demands of a political nature formulated in a diffuse manner, and taken in a curious manner and dramatized by the foreign press.

The writings of the foreign press in recent months demonstrate a desire to counter the economic and financial recovery efforts of the country. Does the foreign press want to embark upon a process of destabilization of the state and society? Is that its desire? But already, people are becoming tired and furious at seeing so many stones thrown into our gardens, against the nation and against us.

Restoring Peace

All the same, if some people want to send messages to the authorities, if some people make it a point to demonstrate a feeling or an opinion on the Ivorian administration; they can now be persuaded that all the signs have been perceived and that it is time to go back to peace, social peace, peace in the spirit; conditions without which nothing can be achieved, even the most legitimate aspirations.

Concerning some of our brothers from the university and teaching sectors—those of our generation and of the younger ones—who expect reforms in our political order; if they had done useful work through elaborate research, authoritative publications, and relevant proposals, they would have thus contributed to the positive changes necessary for smooth social development. Unfortunately, we are forced to note that instead of being a university at the service of the community, some people have preferred to use it as a place of defiance, lampoons, pamphlets, "autopsies," or superficial analyses. All this literature, like papers that need correcting, only adds to the true crisis confronting our economic and social development!

It is true that if someone wanted to destroy the relations of trust between the university and society, they would not go about it in any other manner. This is unfortunate because it is true that all Ivorians must, in brotherly cooperation, patiently seek new developments that will improve the political well-being of all our countrymen.

Ivory Coast has had its sovereignty for only 30 years, 30 years, which puts the country at the beginning of the 21st century. The challenges that we all must surmount are many; but before anything else, through our common will, we must know which social organization will be the

most efficient for Ivory Coast in the year 2000 and what kind of society we want for a successful start of the third millennium

The importance and usefulness of these tasks are such that the national university, which is expected to contribute to their success, should not shun its task by allowing a minority to cause disturbances and disorder, at the risk of paralyzing the institution and mistaking its status (for instance, a trade union that changes itself into a political party). This would discredit it before international university academies and communities.

My dear colleagues, when one hears and reads all that people are saying and have profusely written, one's reason and common sense can only be profoundly shocked by many exaggerations. To remind you of some current rumors: it is not fair for Ivorians to have a poor opinion of themselves to the extent of thinking that all their leaders act without ethics. If such is the case, how can all those who intend to rule the Ivory Coast, including even the so-called revolutionaries, be taken seriously? They are Ivorians, they are alike. We are all aware of the fact that happiness is appreciated only after it disappears.

Reason and Common Sense

It is not a noble task that the foreign press has been undertaking by amalgamating and appropriating for itself trumped-up stories and false rumors. But it seems that selling sensational news, nowadays, demands a compromise with the noble mission of informing and with one's ethics. Scoops and exaggerated articles in the media are devoid of truth and reality, unfortunately!

A certain culture, which is justly called a "culture of poverty," can never hold water. It estimates everything in billions. That is its unit of account, but it is most often penniless. Let us try, through development, to escape the culture of poverty.

Once the illusion created in people's minds by the list of billionaires is dissipated, the disappointment of a large number of people will be even greater. This is quite another prospective crisis. Let us stop joking with billions in a country hit by crisis.

Has anyone ever been seen boastfully claiming responsibility for a tract? Then what is the meaning of this interest attached to tracts? "Answer, if you are a man."

Reason and common sense demand that we reject the fact that a man who has led his country to independence and remarkably leads its march toward progress and modernization should reject his people's progress toward total democracy. The conditions and ethics of this progress must imperatively be defined to protect it against violence, demagoguery, disorder, and all kinds of abuses.

Reason and common sense demand that we not admit that a statesman of Houphouët-Boigny's stature and wisdom should be unaware of the need to ensure a happy

continuation of his great work, he who has succeeded in harmoniously integrating into his policies of peace and progress Ivory Coast's natural principle of a pluralistic society based on ethics and tribes. Again, the common will or the people's will must be respected.

Multiparty System

If for certain people, multiparty system did not mean the ideal opportunity to create "political sects,"

And if the multiparty system were viewed as a political order which fosters the well-being of all—and not as the servile imitation of trends of thoughts coming in from elsewhere—then it would be possible to work patiently and intelligently to fit it into Ivory Coast's political scene. This should be done democratically and on the basis of the promises enshrined in our Constitution and the By-laws of the National Assembly. This can be achieved in a serene and peaceful climate.

No one can claim to be a democrat without having been elected by the people.

The National Assembly safeguards democratic legality and legitimacy, without which there is no true leadership. It disapproves of all intrigues designed to place above democratic institutions makeshift coalitions which plan to reform the society and the state. Conventional minds should take notice!

Under the present critical circumstances which our country (and many other countries all over the world) is going through, it is our duty to desist from adding fuel to the fire. It is our patriotic duty to defend our achievements and to work hard to realize the promises that lie ahead.

The important thing about our future is that it is promising. By recognizing this we show that we are different from those who prophesize Ivory Coast's collapse. Those who have lost faith in our future despair of the success of our economic and financial adjustment, a measure which cannot be avoided in our drive to restore growth and prosperity.

The fields of agriculture, animal husbandry, fishing, building, industries, handicrafts, trade, services, and technology all hold promising prospects for our youth and future generations.

These analyses reveal the threat of divisions in the current Ivorian society. These divisions are reflected in the behavior of the unstable masses, and in the behavior of the new generations and of those who champion the immediate establishment of a pluralistic democratic system.

For all these people, we want to clear the horizon. May this speech, our proposals, and our repeated appeals to reason, compromise, and reconciliation contribute to closing the gap that separates social groups, and to redirecting these social groups to a common vision of the future and national destiny.

Addressing all those problems, streamlining the growing aspirations, defining stages, opening new horizons for our march toward genuine progress, and reviving the faith in our common destiny will no doubt be the imperious mission of the upcoming Congress of the Party of National Independence and the democratic rally of all Ivorians, the Democratic Party of Ivory Coast—African Rally (PDCI-RDA), our party, your party!

In the prospect of that major gathering for a political dialogue, to which all current and prospective nation builders are invited, I would like to urge PDCI-RDA members of Parliament to arm themselves with more determination, militancy, and cohesion in order to maintain the equilibrium of the nation between history and peace.

Land promised to humanity, land similar to no other, Ivory Coast is Ivory Coast!

I thank you for your kind attention.