



The Anglophone Side of the Anglophone Problem and Crisis in Cameroon

Kijem Joseph Yuh (PhD)

ARTICLE INFO

Article No.: 012521013

Type: Short comm.

Accepted: 25/01/2021

Published: 27/01/2021

*Corresponding Author

Kijem Joseph

E-mail: yuh750@gmail.com

Keywords: Anglophones Francophones Problem; Public Service; Armed Forces; Trade Unions; Bilingualism; Week Crisis

ABSTRACT

This work is an attempt to show that, paradoxically, Anglophones in Cameroon constitute part of their own problem. In this country, Francophones and Anglophones have not concretely succeeded, so far, to overcome their common major problems (constitutional, institutional, social, cultural, linguistic, etc.) inherited from the union between the two parts of Cameroon (former Southern Cameroons and former East Cameroon). A very insidious dimension of these problems is what I refer to as the Anglophone side of the Anglophone Problem, a problem which has unfortunately developed into bloodshed. The said side comprises issues relating to the Public Service, life within the armed forces, politics, life in trade unions and other associations and institutions, the Bilingualism Week and the current Anglophone Crisis which is rocking Cameroon. There is urgent need for Cameroonian Anglophones to come together and handle the said problem and crisis judiciously, else it shall soon be too late.

After the Foumban Conference – which was a milestone in the reunification process in Cameroon – there was great need to consolidate the said process through very positive and concrete actions from both former Southern Cameroons and former *La République du Cameroun*.¹ No sooner had the conference taken place than cracks started appearing on the walls of the reunification house, thereby questioning the foundation of the entire reunification deal. One of these cracks was depicted by Bernard Fonlon in a secret memo to President Ahidjo concerning the malaise in the federation. He wrote:

In order to close with proposals practical and precise, I will spell out clearly the claims of the KNDP. We demand:

- 1) That discussion, negotiation and agreement should become the rule in this coalition as from this day, in order to ensure for the KNDP a dignified participation in this Government and an effective contribution in the..., the elaboration and implementation of all Government policies;
- 2) That a general framework and particular applications of it in the diverse fields should be defined and adopted jointly by the two parties to give coherence and direction to all Government action; and that concrete programmes should be drawn up to embody these policies;
- 3) That a machinery should be set up at party and Government levels for the efficient and effective carrying out of the above proposals; at the party level, a permanent committee

¹ This conference took place from 17 – 21 July 1961

should be set up where representatives from both sides shall meet regularly to draw up Government policy;

- 4) That the constitution should be revised to provide, *inter alia*, for a Council of Ministers in which Government projects from all ministries shall be fully, freely and frankly debated before they are submitted to the Head of State.....that all Government decisions should be taken in council;
- 5) That an ad hoc committee should be set up right away to work out the details of these suggestions;
- 6) That these proposals should be studied, worked out and put into effect before the final dose of the transitional period, that is, before the forthcoming presidential elections.²

Such then are the proposals of the KNDP; we hope they are clear and precise.³

These proposals and many other events signalled the beginning of what is known today as the Anglophone Problem, a problem which has developed into a multi-faceted gruelling and gruesome conflict pitting Anglophones against Francophones in Cameroon, as well as Anglophones against Anglophones in the said country, a problem which has developed into a violent and bloody crisis between the Cameroonian Government and some Anglophone separatist groups.⁴ One of the facets of this problem is the lack of solidarity or unity among Anglophones in some very sensitive issues or areas concerning their existence and survival as well as the consolidation of their union with their Francophone brothers and sisters. Some of these issues or areas concern the Public Service matters, life within the armed forces, politics, life in trade unions and other associations and institutions, the Bilingualism Week and the current Anglophone Crisis which is rocking Cameroon.⁵

² A Secret Memo Written by Bernard Fonlon (Chief Scribe of KNDP (the then ruling party in former Southern Cameroons) to President Ahmadou Ahidjo (the then former President of the former Republic of Cameroon) on the Malaise in the Cameroon Federation.

³ Ibid

⁴ It should be noted that in Cameroon, the terms "Anglophone" and "Francophone" have a geographical dimension in their definition. In other words, Anglophones are Cameroonians who hail from Former Southern Cameroons while Francophones are Cameroonians who hail from former "La République du Cameroun".

In this work, the aforementioned geographical dimension as well as social, cultural and linguistic aspects shall be the components used in defining the term "Anglophone"

⁵ It should be noted that the term "armed forces" in this article has a broader meaning. In other words, it does not

In **Cameroon's Public Service**, some Anglophones shabbily treat their Anglophone brothers and sisters. A good number of them prefer to associate more with Francophones so as to obtain as many privileges as possible since Francophone civil servants in Cameroon's Public Service are in the majority. Other Anglophone civil servants even go as far as tarnishing the image of their Anglophone peers or discrediting them in so many domains for the sake of self-aggrandizement, while another group of Anglophone civil servants openly or hiddenly work against the interests of Anglophone communities so as to protect their interests. In a nutshell, a good number of Anglophone civil servants are ready or willing to sacrifice their Anglophone geographical, linguistic, social and cultural background for the sake of acquiring a better or more lucrative professional status or profile.

It is in this light they go as far as writing administrative or official notes, letters, applications, reports, speeches, etc in French instead of English. Their zeal to write in French is very inordinate, up to the extent that they do not care whether their excessive use of the French Language negatively affects their level of spoken and written English. Similarly, this situation also obtains when they speak during meetings, seminars, conferences, workshops, etc. They are always eager to speak mostly in French, even if the level of the French they speak leaves much to be desired. They speak to their Francophone colleagues mostly or always in French. What a pity!

This unfortunate situation is exacerbated by some aspects of the *modus operandi* of **the armed forces**. To be more precise, some Anglophones who are part of the police force, the army and the gendarmerie feel that, in order to be very comfortable in the said forces, you must use the French Language even when it is not necessary. A good number of Anglophones in these forces have almost adopted the French Language as their official language. Some of them take this blunder too far by even speaking to their Anglophone brothers and sisters in French!

Another pathetic dimension of the Anglophone side of the Anglophone Problem is observed during **the Bilingualism Week** in Cameroon. This is a week which can enable the Anglophones to showcase the importance of their belonging to, or presence in, the Cameroonian Union (union with their Francophone brothers and sisters) by ensuring that there is an urgent need to guarantee and perpetuate the constitutional equality of English and French.⁶

refer only to the military forces (army, airforce and navy), but also to the police force and the gendarmerie.

⁶ Article 3 of the 1996 Cameroon Constitution states as follows:

This could be done by Anglophones through several means or mechanisms, for example, by ensuring that Anglophones speak mostly in English during the said week, by calling the attention of the powers that be to the need to uphold the said constitutional equality, by organizing fora, conferences, etc which promote the cultural, social and linguistic status of Anglophones, etc. Unfortunately, this proposal is far from being considered by Cameroonian Anglophones.

One of the ignoble Anglophone ramifications of the Anglophone Problem hinges on **the North-West /South-West Divide**.⁷ Logically, it is expected that Cameroonians who hail from the North-West and South-West Regions of Cameroon should cooperate in all aspects of public life pertaining to their welfare since they constitute the linguistic minority of Cameroon. Conversely, a good number of these Cameroonians, especially members of the elite, go against this logical expectation. It is in this light that they fuel all sorts of antagonism, tension and hatred aimed at dividing the North-West and South –West Regions, thereby undermining Anglophone’s fruitful attempts to present a solid front in their struggle to stay afloat in their union with Francophones.

The attitude of Anglophones in trade unions and other associations and institutions aggravates the Anglophone Problem. In Cameroon, Anglophones have produced cracks on their solidarity wall when it comes to unity in action so as to obtain desired results. This deplorable situation has been noticed within professional groups or institutions such as the Bar Council, the teachers’ trade unions, etc.⁸ In these groups

The Official languages of the Republic of Cameroon shall be English and French, both languages having the same status.

This article clearly spells out the equality of French and English in Cameroon.

⁷ The North- and South – West Regions are the Anglophone Regions of Cameroon.

⁸ Mokum Njouny Nelson, “We (Anglophones) May Have Been Betrayed!”, *The Guardian Post*, Yaounde, 17 March 2019, p.8 In this article, Mokum Njouny Nelson points out the divisive attitude of Cameroon Anglophones in some professional groups or institutions. He decries the fact that Anglophone lawyers were unable to present a common front during the recently organized Bar Council elections in Douala. He goes ahead to deplore the existence of a series or multitude of Anglophone teachers’ trade unions, a situation which hampers Anglophone teachers’ endeavours to present a

or institutions, Anglophones have conspicuously exhibited selfishness and tactlessness, thereby reducing their chances to better organize themselves so as to present a common front with more coherent, convincing or cogent arguments for their welfare.⁹

The current or ongoing harrowing Anglophone Crisis has gone a long way to show that some Anglophones are the enemies of Anglophones. A good number of Anglophones and violence-inclined groups controlled by Anglophones are wreaking havoc or destruction in the North-West and South-West Regions.¹⁰ They are freely involved in horrifying cases of kidnapping, murder, ransom demands, maiming, looting, arson, etc.¹¹ Indeed, some Anglophones are seen terrorizing other Anglophones! The despicable acts of terror go a long way to erode the ability of Cameroonian Anglophones to present a unified or solid front in their struggle for self-determination. They instead antagonize as well as plunge into chaos or distress a good number of Anglophones, Anglophone families, groups and communities.

In a nutshell, it could be inferred that paradoxically, Anglophone Cameroonians are consciously and unconsciously compounding the

common front in their struggle for the betterment of their status.

⁹ Just the fact that a group of persons with common interests are united militates for of them

¹⁰ These Anglophones and groups are referred to as Amba Boys and Amba Groups. “Amba” is the short form for “Ambazonian”

¹¹ Singfred Sinior, “Anglophone Crisis: Tears and Tongues of Victims”, *Cameroon Panorama*, Buea, Buea Catholic Printing Press, June 2018, p.4

Singfred Sinior provides a quotation culled from the Bamenda Provincial Episcopal Conference’s Declaration following the massive demonstration and curfew imposed on the North-West and South-West Regions of Cameroon in September 2017. This quotation, though being general or not specifically referring to Anglophone-Anglophone acts of human rights violation, however, depicts a partial picture of the nature and consequences of these acts. It is as follows:

..., the sighs of those who have lost property through looting or arson, the pain of anxiety inflicted on families and friends of those abducted or missing, the trauma caused on the young and the old by fright from the warlike atmosphere...have left another heap of painful memories in our minds and hearts.”

Anglophone Problem and Crisis in one way or the other. In order to reverse this pathetic situation, there is need for enlightened Anglophones in Cameroon to sensitize their fellow brothers and sisters to the need for a collective and sustained fight (a fight involving all Anglophones) against all the aforementioned ills or vices.¹² Such sensitization may produce what Jean-Marie Denquin calls “significant or considerable progress”, significant or considerable progress in the resolution of the Anglophone Problem and Crisis.¹³

BIBLIOGRAPHY

A) Books

1) Jean-Marie Denquin, *Vocabulaire Politique (Que Sais-Je ?)*, Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 1997

B) Articles

2) Mokum, N., “We (Anglophones) May Have Been Betrayed!”, *The Guardian Post*, Yaounde, 17 March 2019

Sinior, S., “Anglophone Crisis: Tears and Tongues of Victims”, *Cameroon Panorama*, Buea, Buea Catholic Printing Press, June 2018

C) Legal Instruments

3) 1996 Cameroon Constitution

D) Other Instruments

4) A Secret Memo Written by Bernard Fonlon on the Malaise in the Cameroon Federation.

Cite this Article: Kijem JY (2021). The Anglophone Side of the Anglophone Problem and Crisis in Cameroon. *Greener Journal of Social Sciences*, 11(1): 1-4.

¹² It should be noted that whenever there is any reference to the term “Anglophone” in this work, it is limited to only Cameroonian Anglophones.

¹³ Jean-Marie Denquin, *Vocabulaire Politique (Que Sais-Je ?)*, Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 1997, p.37
Jean-Marie Denquin states that “considerable or significant progress” in the resolution of a conflict or crisis simply means that those involved in the said conflict or crisis are on the right track.