

# On A Plata of Gold? A Critical Narrative of Nationalism and Independence in French Cameroon 1945-1960

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## Abstract

It is over fifty years since most countries in Africa became independent but the debate about the role of nationalists in the quest for African independence remains controversial. While some opinions hold that independence in Africa was granted (given) to the Africans, others hold the premise that it was fought for by the Africans to the point of achievement. As Cameroon celebrated its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of independence and reunification in 2014 (4 years behind schedule) we thought that as teachers of African history, our contribution to the celebrations was to give a fresh account of the road to independence in French Cameroon with the hope of throwing light to the 'granting-achieving' positions. Our account is mainly established from primary sources (especially newspapers) from the National archives Yaoundé.

## 1. Introduction

These are a series of important events that touch on the political life of our country. They are historic events and their dates will remain, I think, marked in the history of Cameroon, its evolution and political maturity... they are historic because they mark stages and actions of important consideration of very high repute for our country. These events, I must say, will be the preoccupation of historians, political critiques and jurists... Today, a new event is going to be added in the annals of Cameroon history.

*Andre Marie Mbida to ALCAM; Yaoundé May 15 1957*

When Andre-Marie Mbida made this speech in 1957, he fully understood that the actions of political leaders would forever remain the subject of scholarly scrutiny and the preoccupation of historians. He was certain (on the day he made this speech) that a new event would inspire a study of the period of history in which he played a great role as is being done, today fifty-three years later. This chapter discusses the political activities that occurred between 1957 and 1960 and led to the achievement of independence and the creation of the Republic of Cameroon. It is a historical narrative of the initiatives of both Cameroonian and non-Cameroonian actors, including reforms, meetings, legislation and other developments which contributed in one way or another to the attainment of political and economic sovereignty by Cameroon. It begins with a background of events that took place prior to 1957, to enable the reader understand why the year 1957 is strategic in the history of the territory

## 2. Prelude to 1957

The years before the outbreak of the Second World War are a good starting point for a proper understanding of the roots of Cameroon nationalism. These years witnessed the birth of many political formations and events notably; the creation of The *Jeunesse Camerounaise Francaise* (Juecafra) by Paul Soppo Priso in 1938, (and then following) the holding of the Brazzaville conference in 1944, Cameroons participation in the 1946 Constituent Assemblies in Paris, the signing of the Trusteeship agreement in 1946, the formation of the UPC in 1948 and the passing of the Outline laws (*Loi Cadre*) of 1956.

JEUCAFRA was created at a time when anti-French sentiment in Cameroun was very high. In order to restore a good French image, the High Commissioner Richard Brunot, supported Paul Soppo Priso in creating the association. Although it started as a forum for expressing the political, social and economic grievances against the French colonial administration, the French eventually used it as a political nursery for grooming Pro-French nationalists in the territory. The founder made it a strenuous commitment to maintain Cameroon as a colony of France. This brought disagreements within the association which led to its break up after the war.

Towards the end of the Second World War the Brazzaville conference was summoned by General Charles de Gaulle. It met in the Congo from January 31 to February 8, 1944. The conference participants called for the elimination of the *indignat*, *Prestation* and *Capitation*<sup>1</sup>, the institution of administrative decentralization,

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<sup>1</sup> W.G. Moseley, *Taking Sides: Clashing Views on African Issues*, Dubuque: Mc Graw Hill, 2007. p.59. These were repressive laws associated with the French colonial policy of Assimilation. The *Indignat* gave French Colonial Administrators the right to imprison Cameroonians without having tried them in a law court and without having to justify their action. The *Capitation* was a sort of Head tax which was imposed on all men and women and children above twelve years while *Prestation* was a system of forced labour through which all male French Cameroonians worked compulsorily, without pay, for the government

the application of a labour code to cater for the problems of native employees and the right to form trade unions. These deliberations led to several reforms in French colonies. By laws of 22 December, 1944 and 20 February 1945, the *Indigenat* was abolished. On 11 April 1945, *Prestation* was formally abolished and in January 1946 the status of colony was officially ended as colonies became *Territoires d'Outre-Mer* (Over-sea territories) with a right to have a territorial assembly in which issues concerning the territory could be discussed by natives and French settlers. On 7 April 1946, the humiliating status of *sujet* was abolished and all Africans became *citoyens* although not full fledged French Citizens<sup>1</sup>.

Apart from the Brazzaville conference, the creation of the UN and the establishment of the Trusteeship Council had very important consequences for the evolution of Cameroun nationalism. It compelled the French to promote the political, economic, social and educational advancement of the inhabitants of the trust territory of Cameroon. It also required the French to ensure the progressive development of Cameroon towards self-government or independence in a manner appropriate to the particular circumstances of the territory and its people. In view of these dispositions the French government presented to the Trusteeship Committee the Trusteeship Agreement for French Cameroon and Togo on November 5 1946. This was accepted by the UN General Assembly on December 13.

Further developments which encouraged political participation in French Cameroon were the Constituent Assemblies that were called to draft a new constitution for France between 1944 and 1946. Each over-sea territory of West and Equatorial Africa was to be represented in the Constituent Assembly. A decree of October 9, 1945 instituted an *Assemblée Représentative du Cameroun* in Yaoundé (ARCAM). This was a Representative Assembly whose members would in turn elect representatives to the Paris Assembly. Elections into this assembly were on individual basis considering the fact that political parties were not in existence in the territory at the time. With these elections, two sheds of opinion were established amongst the political actors of French Cameroon. These included the *evolutionaries* and the *revolutionaries*.

The evolutionaries, though not entirely satisfied with the Framework for political advancement offered by France were willing to work within it for the time being to claim as much privileges as may have been freely offered by France. This group was led then by Alexander Duala Manga Bell and later Louis Paul Aujoulat, Andre Marie Mbida and Amadou Ahidjo. This was the group which formed the Bloc Democratique Camerounais (BDC) in June 1951<sup>2</sup>. This contradicted sharply with *revolutionary* tendencies which were determined to alter French policy and ensure a rapid evolution towards self-government and independence. Alexander Duala Manga Bell represented Cameroon in the first and second constituent assemblies in France visibly on the evolutionary ticket.

The constitution which was adopted following the discussions of the two constituent assemblies emphasized that all overseas administrations be headed by civil servants of *France d'Outre Mer* rather than Under-Secretaries answerable to the French National Assembly. The significance of these constitutional developments in France for Cameroon was that the French administration, in order to counteract the development and popularity of radical elements and entrench its power on Cameroon, used its control over the chiefs and the agents of local administrations to encourage the growth of pro-colonial administrative tendencies and in many cases ensure their election to the national and territorial assemblies<sup>3</sup>.

Such radical tendencies were already visible in some trade unionists like Reuben Um Nyobe, Ernest Ouandie, Abel Kingue and Dr. Felix Roland Moumie. Using the decree of 7 August 1944 which gave Cameroonians the right to form trade unions, they went further to launch the first indigenous political party in the territory; *L'Union des Populations du Cameroun* (UPC). The UPC platform rested on three pillars: immediate independence, immediate reunification and non-foreign interference in the internal affairs of a unified Cameroon<sup>4</sup>. Such a radical departure from the common line of thinking such as the gradual approach to issues of

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for ten days in every year. It increased the natives' dislike for the French for it was strictly a tax on railway and public works. Such works also often grossly neglected health provisions, nutrition, housing and transport of natives since the service was often of short duration. However, a small number of Frenchified indigenous people were considered évolués and thus accorded citizen status, becoming a local elite attuned to the French presence and subservient to its interests. Such laws as mentioned, did not apply to citizens.

<sup>1</sup> For a detailed analysis of France-West African relations after WWII see J.F. A. Ajayi and M. Crowder (eds.) *History of West Africa*, 1974, p. 622-664.

<sup>2</sup> Louis Paul Aujoulat who founded BDC was a French Algerian who came to Cameroon in 1938 as a physician in the service of the Catholic mission. He had been a member of the *Mouvement Republicain Populaire* (MRP) in France. He broke away from it to form the *Mouvement des Independants d'outre-mer* (MIO) whose local branch in Cameroon he transformed into BDC. He and his followers (Mbida and Ahidjo) favoured continuous ties with France and a gradual approach to issues of autonomy.

<sup>3</sup> Richard Joseph, *Gaullist Africa: Cameroon Under Ahmadou Ahidjo*, Enugu: Fourth Dimension Publishers, 1978. p. 47.55

<sup>4</sup> For a detailed Biography of the founders of the UPC see Eugene Wonyu, *Cameroon de L'UPC a L'UC: temoignage a l'aube de l'indépendance* (1953-1961), 1985. and V.J. Ngoh, *Cameroon 1884-1984 A Hundred Years of History*, 1987.

political reforms as adopted by the evolutionaries was viewed as a challenge to French policies in Cameroon. This was because French interests in Cameroon were decisive in selecting the future leadership of the territory<sup>1</sup> but the UPC did not understand this. They were to test their strengths in the elections of 1951.

In 1951, the *Assemblée Représentative* (ARCAM) was transformed to *Assemblée Territoriale* (ATCAM) with 50 members and limited powers. Elections were organized to select representatives to the French National Assembly in June. In March 1952, another election was organized to elect members into ATCAM. Despite the elections, the French administration was ready to break the back of any political party that it considered hostile to its overall goals of maintaining French tutelage in Cameroon. Not surprisingly, the UPC suffered most from the resulting repression. Despite their tight organization and intensive campaign, they failed in their quest for the two second college seats reserved for African representatives in the legislative elections of June 1951. In March 1952, none of the four UPC candidates contesting for the 24 second-college ATCAM seats in four of the nineteen voting districts succeeded. Even UM Nyobe lost the elections in his native district to a priest of the Roman Catholic Church Joseph-Antoine Melone<sup>2</sup>. The victory of Dr. Louis Paul Aujoulat's *Bloc Démocratique Camerounaise* (BDC) enabled him to become president of the Territorial assembly in Yaoundé while the UPC was left in the *August* rains to recover from the trance of the unbelievable defeats they had suffered in the two elections.

While the BDC settled down to face the affairs of the territory with the minimal powers which the ATCAM possessed, Um Nyobe took the UPC cause to the UN. In the December 1952 and in the subsequent sessions the UPC leader addressed the General Assembly calling for the immediate independence and reunification of Cameroon. This was contradicted by Charles Okalla<sup>3</sup> who was of the view that independence for French Cameroon was "premature". Upon his return to the country, the UPC leadership experienced a smear campaign<sup>4</sup> which culminated in it adopting violent methods and consequent banning in 1955. This was masterminded by Roland Pré who replaced André Soucadaux as High Commissioner in 1954<sup>5</sup>.

The banning of the UPC in July 1955 and complimentary political developments in France proved that the year 1956 would be a year of good tidings for the political progress of the Trust Territory of French Cameroon. In France, the Mendes reforms<sup>6</sup> proposed as early as 1951 saw the light of day after the 1956 elections into the French National Assembly. These elections held on 2 January 1956 permitted one "authentic" Cameroonian nationalist to serve as Cameroon's representative in the French parliament and to contribute to the efforts of that institution. This position was won by Andre Marie Mbida.

In Paris, the replacement of the conservative Francois Mitterrand by forward-looking Gaston Deferre as Minister of *France d'Outre Mer* inspired the adoption of the Mendes Reforms into law No: 56-619 of 23 June 1956. This law was generally referred to as the Outline or Framework laws (*Loi Cadre*). Article 9 of this law stipulated that concerning the government in Cameroon reforms could be carried out by decree.<sup>7</sup> Amongst other things the law provided for a Legislative assembly in Yaoundé with 70 elected deputies from a single college by a direct universal suffrage, a government with ministers headed by a prime minister, a Cameroonian citizenship, a flag, an anthem and a motto.

Despite these initiatives the French kept a firm grip on Cameroon. The French National Assembly retained supreme powers over legislation and its laws continued to take precedence over decisions by the Cameroonian Assembly. The state public services, including the District Officers (D.Os) and traditional Rulers

<sup>1</sup> W.G Moseley, *Taking Sides*, 2007, p.60

<sup>2</sup> In the legislative elections of June 1951, Um Nyobe had 3,081 votes out of total of 280,302 votes cast. In the March 1952 elections for the Territorial Assembly the four UPC candidates had 2,732, 767, 117 and 223 votes each. V.J Ngoh (1988) associates BDC victory to the party's pro-French policy and the fact that it had politicians from both the south like Andre-Marie Mbida and the North like Amadou Ahidjo in the party

<sup>3</sup> Representing the socialists and the political party called Evolution Sociale Camerounaise (ESOCAM) which he had created in 1949

<sup>4</sup> Eugene, Wonyu, 1985 holds that apart from encouraging the formation of anti-UPC parties, the French rigged elections to disfavour the UPC, used their influence at the UN to bloc UPC petitions, appointed hardliners like Roland Pré as High Commissioners, instructed chiefs not to involve people with UPC tendencies to local administrative organs, influenced catholic church authorities to preach against the party as violent, evil and communist, transferred UPC executives to areas where they could not coordinate political activities, and were often the first to break up UPC peaceful meetings and demonstrations.

<sup>5</sup> Unlike Soucadaux, Pré was opposed to all political parties in Cameroun and restricted the powers of the ATCAM. His actions were especially directed to the UPC whose members were accused of spreading false rumours against Europeans. Pré also refused the UPC from using public facilities and transferred any suspected UPC civil servant to distant areas where it became difficult to coordinate party affairs.

<sup>6</sup> Reforms aimed at improving the political development of over-sea French territories named after the French Premier at the time Mendes. These reforms were passed into law as *Loi Cadre* in 1956. The reforms also permitted the Premier to implement institutional reforms by decree instead of passing through the assembly.

<sup>7</sup> Andre Marie Mbida, Investiture Speech May 15, 1957

were placed under the office of the High Commissioner, free from the control of ALCAM and the government. Article 7 of Decree No. 57-495 of April 1957, also gave the French government powers to annul the decisions of ALCAM and even dissolve it if necessary.

However not all shades of opinion agreed that all was well with the territory. The High Commissioner Pierre Messmer who replaced Roland Pre in 1955 had two specific missions in Cameroun. Firstly he was to ensure that the 1957 statute proposed by France was adopted without modification. secondly<sup>1</sup> he was to choose the right pro-French Camerounian political middleman (faithful friends' of France) to lead the government. These new interlocutors were to work for French interest in the same way as the traditional and administrative authorities. They were to assist France to stay in Cameroun for a very long time. These were to be men who were either socialist or disciples of Louis Paul Aujoulat.<sup>2</sup>

Upon arrival, had expressed a desire to relax the repression of the UPC and contemplate a general amnesty. Paul Soppo Priso was secretly negotiating with government to lift the ban on the party to ensure its participation in the December 1956 elections into ALCAM through his newly formed *Movement d'Union National*, (MUN). Most former UPC members had joined this party en masse after the 1955 ban. Despite these efforts, the outlawed wing of the UPC embarked on a great terrorist campaign a few days before the elections. Troops were sent to all regions of unrest and a great massacre ensued with hundreds of people being shot on sight<sup>3</sup>.

Despite the tense atmosphere, elections were held on 23 December 1956. The election results demonstrated French willingness to work with the moderates to ensure a political future for Cameroun within the French Union. The *Union Camerounaise* (UC) of Amadou Ahidjo and Arouna Njoya, with strong support from the northern elites and their Muslim traditional rulers, won 30 seats. The *Democrats Camerounaise* (DC) of Andre Marie Mbida, with support from the Southern forest zone won 20 seats. The *Paysans Independants* (PI) of Mathias Djoumesi from the western grassfields won 9 seats. The *Group d'Action National Camerounaise* (GANC) a 1956 amalgamation of Charles Okala's *Union Sociale Camerounaise* and Soppo Priso's *Movement d'Union National* with Priso's leadership and a strong base in the Maritime zone won 8 seats<sup>4</sup>. While *Independent candidates* won 3 seat. The elections created expectations in the minds of Cameroun politicians. They looked forward to great transformations in government and socio-economic development

### 3. The Era of Andre Marie Mbida

With the passing of the Loi cadre, it was evident that French policy in Africa was gradually changing. These changes were motivated by British policy in Africa, internal pressures exerted by UPC terrorism, the dissatisfaction of the 1955 UN Visiting Mission<sup>5</sup>, the French humiliation in Indo-China, and her granting of independence to Morocco, Tunisia and autonomy to Togo. At this time, France still suffered from its World War II humiliation, and bitter internal divisions. The country was further weakened by chronic instability of the Fourth Republic, with one-third of its electorate aligned with antirigime Stalinist French Communist party and its army locked in unending and unwinnable colonial wars<sup>6</sup>. These developments were enough to whip up the sentiments of French Cameroonians. As the assembly opened in the New Year (1957) with Amadou Ahidjo as President, the major preoccupation was the development of a statute for the territory. On 16 April 1957, Decree No. 57-501 of 16 April 1957 made the Cameroon Statute applicable. It changed the status of the Trust Territory of French Cameroon to an entity known as The State of Cameroon and accorded it sovereignty. It also acknowledged simultaneously Cameroon's rapid progress to political maturity. The ATCAM elected on the 23 December 1956 became ALCAM, voted its first bureau which officially took office on the 10 May 1957. This day became the National day of French Cameroon and this group of people became the members of a first national sovereign legislative assembly in the territory.

<sup>1</sup> P.M. Gaudemet, L'Autonomie Camerounaise, Review Francaise de Science Politique, 8 (1), Mars 1958, p. 62-63

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, p.63

<sup>3</sup> Eugene Wonyu, Cameroun de L'UPC a L'UC: Temoignage a l'aube de l'indépendance (1953-1961) p.45-55

<sup>4</sup> Wonyu, Cameroun de L'UPC a L'UC, pp. 45- 55 holds that the High Commissioner Pierre Messmer inspired defection within the ranks of the Movément d'Union Nationale (MUN) of Paul Soppo Priso and equally instigated opposition from Ahmadou Ahidjo and the northern deputies as well as from André Marie Mbida's BDC. This was intended to weaken the movement, which Defferre considered was an instrument in the hands of UPC since most former UPC militants had become members of the party following the 1955 ban. Consequently, Messmer intervened directly into the politics of French Cameroun to select representatives and to put in place a government with which France would negotiate independence and transfer power to. Messmer made it a duty to avoid the members of MUN who would have been difficult to negotiate with. Therefore, Messmer with assistance from Guy Mollet frustrated the efforts of MUN before and during the elections

<sup>5</sup> V.J. Ngoh, Cameroon 1884-1985, A Hundred Years of History, 1988, p. 147. The UN Visiting Mission arrived in Cameroon in October 1955 to assess the political developments in the territory. The Mission was not happy with what it saw with regards to the demand for either independence or self-government. They concluded that if Cameroonian Unity were not immediately threatened, it was at least jeopardized

<sup>6</sup> J.W. Harbeson and D. Rothchild, Africa in World Politics: Reforming Political Order, Boulder,CO: Westview Press, 2009.

On 16 May Pierre Messmer<sup>1</sup> apparently confident of Mbida's political stance officially appointed him Prime minister by Arête No: 3171 of May 16, 1957. By a separate Arête No. 3207 the High Commissioner named fourteen members of his government.<sup>2</sup> Despite the fact that Mbida did not obtain the highest votes in the elections, he was chosen to form the first government. This could be attributed to the fact that no party had won absolute majority in the December 1956 elections. He was the preferred candidate because of his strong Christian background and his hostility to the UPC which earned him more popularity in metropolitan circles than Ahidjo who was suspected of having Muslim tendencies similar to those which had caused trouble for France in Algeria<sup>3</sup>.

His *Democrat Camerounaise* merely had a below-average performance by winning 20 out of 70 seats coming second after the UC of Ahidjo which won 30. This modest performance notwithstanding, projected the DC as a major party in the south. This in turn facilitated his choice as the PM within ALCAM because his sound education and professional background made him more experienced than his contemporaries like Djoumessi, Ahidjo and Soppo Priso. He had a post-secondary education and obtained a series of diplomas from institutions in France. In terms of professional experience, he had held important posts of responsibility like Councillor in the French Union, as deputy of ARCAM and ATCAM and the French National Assembly<sup>4</sup>. This academic and professional background gave him an edge over his rivals for power.

Unlike Ahidjo's Muslim background which made him suspect to the French, Mbida's Roman Catholic background favored his rise to power. Colonial authorities were confident that he would protect the Catholic faith and their general interest in Cameroon. Mbida had the support of important personalities in France where his first son, Tobi, was born and baptized by a French bishop. The French Minister of Colonies, Louis Jacquinot was his Godfather and this was indicative that he had good connections in France. They threw their weight behind him hoping that he would resolve the UPC problem since he was a politician from the south.

On the contrary, Ahidjo was not accepted as the first PM because they knew he was from the north of Cameroon making it difficult for him to resolve the UPC problem.<sup>5</sup> The failure of the UPC to participate in the 1956 elections also favoured Mbida's rise to power because it made it possible for his party to win almost all the seats in the south of Cameroon including areas that were UPC strongholds. Had the UPC taken part in the election, Mbida's party might not have won up to 20 out of the 70 seats.

From the onset Mbida seemed to be an astute, firm and determined leader; the very type that this new nation needed. However, he quickly began to disappoint the people. During his investiture on May 15 1957, he confessed that his political program would not be phenomenal or meticulous as the rituals and teachings of the Bible or the Koran. He also warned that given the present conjectures and uncertainty within the economic and financial domain it will be imprudent and even dangerous to make a lot of promises<sup>6</sup>.

Politically, Mbida became illusive. He considered the 1957 Statute the first of the stages of preparation for independence but failed to tell the people when the other stages would be achieved. He categorically refused to preoccupy his government with the issue of the French Union<sup>7</sup> and embarrassingly told the people that to conceive ideas of independence at that moment was not only a dangerous demagogy but also an execrable crime. The 1957 Statute, according to him, did not require Cameroon to hurry up to independence but only permitted the people to research and execute henceforth, for themselves, formulas which will help them ameliorate their

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<sup>1</sup> D. Abwa, *Commissaires et Hauts-Commissaires de la France au Cameroun (1916-1960) : Ces hommes qui ont façonné politiquement le Cameroun*, Yaoundé, Presses Universitaires, 1998 , p. 374. Pierre Messmer, born in 1916 and at the time of his appointment he was the Director of Cabinet of Gaston Deffere, Minister of French Overseas (FOM). He was a trained colonial administrator and had the advantage to have evolved in the ranks and files of colonial administration. During the close to two years period he worked in Cameroun, Pierre Messmer was to accomplish three basic political missions, which laid the foundation of the form of independence granted to Cameroun. Firstly, he was to preserve peace and ensure that another embarrassing UPC uprising does not occur after the botches of Roland Pré. Secondly, he was charged with the responsibility of implementing the bicephalous political administrative machinery decided upon in Paris that the French wanted to institute in Cameroun. Lastly, he was expected to choose the major pro-French political interlocutors or middlemen  
<sup>2</sup> Vice PMI/c special affairs: Amadou Ahidjo; Minister of finance: Mathias Djoumessi; Minister of economic affairs: Arouna Njoya; Public works and transport mines: Kotouo Pierre; National education: Ahanda Vincent; Minister of public health: Haman Adama; Agriculture and animal rearing: Mandon Alfred; Minister social and works security: M. Marigoh; Secretary of state/information: Midouh Gaston; Secretary of state public service: Tsallah Germain; Secretary of state /interior: Logmo Antoine; Secretary of state/budget: Biyo Olinga Françoise; Secretary of state /agriculture: Omatte Talba Malla;

<sup>3</sup> J.F. Bayard, *L'Etat du Cameroun*, Paris: Press de la Fondation nationale des Sciences Politiques, 1979. p46

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, p47

<sup>5</sup> Jean-Germain, G. *Cameroon: Politics and Society in Critical Perspective*, New York: University Press of America Inc, 2003. p8

<sup>6</sup> Andre Marie Mbida, Investiture Speech, 15 may, 1957

<sup>7</sup> *La Presse du Cameroun*, 8 Janvier 1958

lives and put value to the country to the benefit of all inhabitants and nothing else<sup>1</sup>.

Mbida's government was not only born in an atmosphere of general instability but was also plagued with the absence of a clear focus. Although he received popular approval in the ALCAM by forming a coalition government with Ahidjo's UC, it was clear that Mbida neither pleased the French nor met the wishes of a great majority of Cameroonians. Consequently, soon after his investiture, evidence of dissatisfaction from the two sides became visible. Despite the fact that he clearly favoured close ties with France Mbida had procrastinated on the issue. He preferred to deal with it in future. The French viewed this as escapist.

Mbida was preoccupied almost from the beginning with the problem of how to handle the UPC-inspired terrorism which necessitated on one hand strong measures to deal with it but on the other finding a peaceful solution. Mbida lacked both the personality and the balanced political judgment to deal with the problem. Three months into office Reuben Um Nyobe stated the terms on which he and his followers would lay down their arms. This included the dissolution of ALCAM and the calling of fresh elections, the granting of amnesty to all political prisoners and suspects and the granting of immediate independence.

In September he reiterated these demands in a letter to the Prime Minister and the High Commissioner<sup>2</sup>, threatening violence if demands were not taken into consideration. Contrary to the wishes of the French and his supporters Mbida flatly rejected the proposals outright. Violence and terrorism erupted in the Sanaga-Maritime region. Mbida visited Boumyebel; Um Nyobe's home town and urged all insurgents to return to normal life<sup>3</sup>. The UPC intensified violence on an unprecedented scale spreading to the Mungo and Bamileke regions. These resulted in the death of a Bamileke member of ALCAM; Samuel Wanko<sup>4</sup> and six others around Bafoussam in December. From then on the UPC Nationalists instituted a state of perpetual guerrilla warfare, attacking government offices and destroying documents, burning church property and murdering missionaries, Europeans, chiefs and supporters of the administration<sup>5</sup>.

To the disappointment of the majority of Cameroonians who preferred a peaceful solution to the UPC problem, Mbida requested and acquired more troops from France and proceeded with a systematic search of forests and villages of troubled areas for bands of the outlawed nationalists. The Prime Minister's opponents made it clear that his measures were too harsh and renewed their call for a national amnesty.

The popular opinion both at home and in the Metropole was that a peaceful solution be sought to the UPC problem. But Mbida considered the UPC an enemy rather than a group with which government could initiate dialogue. This position explains Mbida's very strongly worded speeches and hard-line policies against the movement<sup>6</sup>. Mbida's strong headedness and impatience with democratic procedure and his intransigence eventually antagonized his political supporters to an extent that few regretted his departure when the time came. In addition, Mbida adopted an authoritarian and arbitrary style of running government business and frequently took major decisions without consulting his cabinet. Mbida was very intolerant to criticism as was exemplified in his termination of the scholarship of five Cameroonian students in France for attempting to criticize him. This made him very unpopular because the move was seen as an attempt to frustrate young Cameroonians who ought to become leaders of tomorrow<sup>7</sup>.

By the close of 1957, popular opinion was that Mbida's replacement may bring the much needed peace and progress in the country. Pierre Messmer was replaced by Jean Ramadier with the belief that a new High commissioner would be in the best position to help the government explore the possibility of a peaceful solution to the countries problems<sup>8</sup>. Ramadier also arrived the territory with strict instructions to "ease the replacement of Mbida, if this would lead to positive developments"<sup>9</sup>.

The year 1957 ended with Mbida being unable to fan off the heat from the fire of his miscalculations. Instead he was bracing for the Abong-Mbang DC congress of January 1958 without reviewing his tactics and without being sure that the majority of his cabinet and party accepted his program. In the congress he announced a ten year program which amongst other things rejected the French suggestion that Cameroon should be integrated in the French Union. Instead, he suggested that it should remain a trust territory. This antagonized the French authorities especially at a time when French desire to consolidate the French Union was at its peak. Mbida opted for a Territorial Ministerial Council for French Cameroon which would be allowed to deliberate

<sup>1</sup> Andre Marie Mbida, Investiture Speech, May 15, 1957.

<sup>2</sup> La Presse Camerounaise, September 21, 1957 (NAY)

<sup>3</sup> Andre Marie Mbida, Discours Prononce le 9 Novembre 1957 a Boumyebel. (NAY). Some historians write that Mbida threatened the people by giving them 10 days to leave the forests or face the consequences but this is not visible in the speech he made there on that day.

<sup>4</sup> La Presse Camerounaise, 15 Novembre, 1957.

<sup>5</sup> E. Wonyu, Cameroun de L'UPC a L'UC: temoignage a l'aube de l'indpendence 1953-1961, 1985. p.48-55

<sup>6</sup> Edith Mireille Tegna, Parlementarisme et Pouvoir Parlementaire au Cameroun Entre 1942 et 1972, 2008, p.99

<sup>7</sup> Ibid. p.98

<sup>8</sup> D. Abwa, p. 374. it was noted that Mbida often quarreled with Messmer.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, p. 99.

and legislate on all matters not related to the metropole. He wanted to prevent France from imposing her personnel on French Cameroon. He called for the creation of several regional states and proposed that southern Christian civil servants be transferred to the Muslim North of Cameroon. These were Mbida's finishing strokes. These proposals induced the Muslim ministers in his government to resign thereby precipitating his fall from power<sup>1</sup>.

Generally, northern Muslims tended to identify the southerners with the UPC. Thus they viewed the demand for independence as a danger to the privileges they enjoyed under French colonial rule. Also they feared that Mbida's policy would spread UPC tendencies to the north and break up their traditionalist feudal societies. The lamidos preferred to be annexed to their eastern neighbours (Chad and Ubangi-Shari) so that they would continue under French administration and enjoy its privileges if Mbida had to continue with this policy of transferring southerners to the north<sup>2</sup>. Finally, Mbida embarrassed everybody when he failed to mention his views on Cameroon's independence and claiming that reunification was still far fetched.

In the context of the decolonization in French Africa, Mbida was not the only French African leader who failed to take seriously the issue of independence. Houphouet Boigny, Leopold Sedar Senghor and (later) Amadou Ahidjo in various instances used the following words to indicate their desire to remain under French tutelage

In Africa, when children grow up, they leave their parents' hut and build a hut of their own by its side. We don't want to leave the French compound. We have grown up in it and it is good to be alive in it. We want simply to build our own huts<sup>3</sup>.

In Cameroon a major reason was that France continued to dominate the economic, political and administrative structures of the territory. French public investments in Cameroon were very high and primary exports were supported by subsidies from France. The territory's dependence on France through membership of the Franc zone, bilateral agreements and lack of direct trading partners outside the franc zone made it difficult for the territory to diversify trade for a foreseeable future.

Besides, the French subsidized the administrative budget which consumed up to 60% of the recurrent budget of the territory<sup>4</sup>. The economy was not only dependent on France but it was run by Frenchmen at both managerial and subaltern levels. More than 20% of the top administrators in the territory were French<sup>5</sup>. For instance Decisions No. 188, 184, 183, 187, 198 and 169 of 10 February 1958 installed French senior administrators into the Over-sea service, general administration, military cabinet, justice, financial and health services in Cameroon respectively. As late as January 1959 the French were still transferring and appointing Frenchmen into such services. By Decision No. 55 of 21 January 1959 the high commissioner introduced 105 new French senior executives into the Ahidjo government<sup>6</sup>.

Also there had been no policy to Africanize the civil service as had been introduced in British Cameroons. Therefore any talk of breakaway from France implied a potential dislocation of the services. Furthermore the French authorities were the ones who managed the electoral machinery and any attempt to achieve a breakaway from France using this machine required an organization that could effectively combat the stranglehold of France over it. Um Nyobe experienced this in the 1951 and 1952 elections.

Another reason why most people never talked of outright independence was that apart from the outlawed UPC, the Cameroon political class was itself committed to France. They had been educated at *assimilationist* schools and era, employed by and large in the French administration; they participated in the French National Assembly and were devotee of French culture. This created an emotional bond between them and their French masters. The chiefs were the agents of French administration and could be relied upon to ensure the preservation of French interests. These chiefs and D.Os were under the direct jurisdiction of the High Commissioner<sup>7</sup> and their tributes and allowances were assured so long as they showed consciousness in maintaining the statusquo.

Within such limits, there is no doubt that Andre-Marie Mbida wanted as much autonomy for Cameroon as possible but could not realistically demand independence. From this perspective independence without France's goodwill seemed a remote prospect. Mbida never understood this. Back from Abong-Mbang Mbida came face to face with the effects that his Ten Year Programme for a political future without independence and reunification had brought to his door steps. The UC rejected the program, Ahidjo his closest collaborator and his

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Joseph, 1978, p. 51

<sup>2</sup> Richard Joseph, 1978, p. 51

<sup>3</sup> Quoted in J.F.A Ajayi and Michael Crowder (eds) History of Africa, Vol.2, 1974. p.693. In 1957 Senghor was quoted to have said this in the National Assembly. Ahidjo used it in the celebration of the 1<sup>st</sup> anniversary of the national Day in 1958. this indicated their stance with regards to membership of the French Union.

<sup>4</sup> J.F.A. Ajayi and Micheal Crowder, History of West Africa, Vol.2, 1974, p.693.

<sup>5</sup> Journal official de l'Etat du Cameroon 11, 26 February 1959. p159, p.160.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, p.159-160

<sup>7</sup> J.F.A. Ajayi and Micheal Crowder, History of West Africa, Vol.2, 1974, p.693.

followers in the cabinet deserted him. Mbida replaced them with members of his own DC. But the High Commissioner Jean Ramadier refused to endorse his new government. Mbida quickly petitioned the French authorities and Ramadier was recalled on 18 February (barely 3 weeks of his taking office) and replaced by Xavier Torre<sup>1</sup>.

The coming of Torre to Cameroon was at a time when there were visible changes in French colonial policies which were in Favour of granting independence to the colonies within the French Community. Torre was therefore required to bring Cameroun to independence without loosing the prerogatives of French interest.<sup>2</sup>

In the exercise of this assignment Torre received instructions from the team put in place in France that was made up of the Minister of FOM (Gérard Jacquet) and the permanent representative of France to the UN Trusteeship Council (Kosciusko-Morizet). Kosciusko was to help Torre defend Cameroun position in the UN against all efforts of destabilization by UPC. Ahidjo was part of the team with whom he had to prepare the stage for a negotiated independence for Cameroun.<sup>3</sup> Xavier Torre oriented his actions toward the independence of Cameroun in two directions: internally; the eradication of nationalist resistance to French policies within the territory and externally, the convincing of international opinion that independence of Cameroun was favoured by France.

Despite Ramadier's replacement it was clear that Mbida's government would not have the endorsement of ALCAM considering that he did not have a majority. Besides nobody was happy with the fact that since Mbida became PM, UPC violence had intensified greatly<sup>4</sup>. With all other things weighing on his shoulders Mbida threw in the towel and resigned on 17 February 1958. That same day the amnesty legislation that had been passed by the French Parliament on 7 February was promulgated into law in Cameroon.

#### **4. Amadou Ahidjo: 1958-1960**

The adverse effects of Mbida's policies, the hard-line he adopted towards UPC and the unpopular reform proposals coupled with developments in France; the reactions of other French territories towards French colonial rule and the changes taking place in British colonies convinced the French that they could not cling anymore to the initial dreams of an everlasting French empire. The coming to power of De Gaulle in 1958 and his tour of certain African territories confirmed this fact and made him begin to realize how rapidly the demand for full independence was gaining ground in the influential urban areas of colonial France. In Brazzaville for instance he was confronted by banners demanding immediate independence. These realities convinced De Gaulle that the wind of change was also blowing over French territories.

By Arrete No. 207 of 19 February 1958, Jean Ramadier before leaving Cameroon appointed Amadou Ahidjo Prime Minister and head of Government. This was in the wake of Mbida's letter of resignation No. 733/CAB/PM of 16 February. In a separate Arête No. 208 of 20 February the High Commissioner confirmed the Members of Ahidjo's first government<sup>5</sup>.

Some names from the Mbida administration were still visible in Ahidjo's first government. Arouna Njoya who was Mbida's Minister of Finance became Public Health Minister. Haman Adama Public Health Minister under Mbida became Public Services Minister although he died shortly afterwards. Mandon Alfred and Talba Malla maintained the duties of Minister of Agriculture and Secretary of State respectively although the appellation changed from Agriculture to Production. Michel Njine seemed to have benefited the most, moving from Minister of Public Works to Vice Prime Minister in-charge of National Education.

In his investiture speech, Ahidjo rested his policy on three basic principles: The Cameroon Ideal, Institutional Reforms adapted to the changing times and a government; a team of men capable of initiating and following up a program consistent with the Reforms. Within the Cameroon ideal, he further emphasized unity, nation building and Franco-Cameroon cooperation. As far as Cameroonian Unity was concerned, Ahidjo dreamt of a nation free from tribal and regional loyalties, an effective Cameroonian community in which no one would see himself as pro or anti-government; in which there would be a strong commitment to the national flag and the

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<sup>1</sup> Like his Predecessors Torre was trained in the colonial school but unlike them he had never exercised any function in the colonies. He had been used to executing instructions received from his superior rather than taking initiatives of his own. Thus, he possessed the qualities required by France to resolve the problem in Cameroun that was initiated by Messmer and had taken a decisive turn under Ramadier. The coming of Torre to Cameroon was at a time when there were visible changes in French colonial policies which were in Favour of granting independence to the colonies within the French Community. Torre was therefore required to bring Cameroun to independence without loosing the prerogatives of French interest

<sup>2</sup>Ph. Gaillard, Ahmadou Ahidjo, Patriote et Despote, Ba<sup>^</sup>tisseur de l'Etat Camerounais, Paris, JA Livres, 1994, pp. 35-36; Eyinga, L'UPC Une Revolution, p.96.

<sup>3</sup> Abwa, 1998 p. 409.

<sup>4</sup> Abwa, 1998, p. 403 indicates that the High Commissioner Pierre Messmer had testified this in Paris in November 1957, and that Mbida's haughtiness did not match the coolness with which he would have loved matters like the UPC to be approached. He was therefore opting for his removal.

<sup>5</sup> Journal officiel de l'Etat Sous Tutelle du Cameroun, p.250.



principle of reunification of the two Cameroons. With the Cameroonian Nation he foresaw a greater autonomy by expanding the 1957 statute in order to meet the aspirations of effective independence within a reasonable time frame. Within the domain of Franco-Cameroon cooperation, the PM emphasized that association with France was necessary and even indispensable for Cameroonians<sup>1</sup> since the territory did not yet possess necessary material, financial, structural and man-power requirements the territory would need at the dawn of independence.

He adopted some of these ideas as the official platform of *le Mouvement d'Union Camerounaise* congress in Garoua on 6 January<sup>2</sup>. In his investiture speech Ahidjo told ALCAM that there was need for the body to ask France to expand the 1957 Statute. ALCAM was also expected to ask France to acknowledge the wish for the state of Cameroon to attain independence, transfer to the state of Cameroon all competences relating to internal matters and to continue with the trusteeship until the proclamation of independence.

Hence forth events took a revolutionary turn. On Thursday 12 June Ahidjo put before ALCAM a resolution which among other things would approve the revision and enlargement of the 1957 statute, grant his government authority to enter into negotiations with the French government and request the accession of Cameroon to sovereign statehood within the shortest possible time.

ALCAM met to discuss this project which was in essence a modification of Decree No. 57-501 of 16 April 1957. During the discussions on this resolution deputies of Mbida's *Groupe des Democrate Camerounaise* declared that they would not take part. Their leader Mbida and Akono, Biyo'o, Ahanda, Ngaba, Ndzana, Yakana, Amougou and Djoumesi walked out. Marigoh, Ndobo and Mabaya of the same group remained. After heated debates lasting many hours ALCAM adopted the proposal by 30 votes for, 2 against and 1 abstention. The two 'No' votes were cast by Mabaya and Ndibo deputies from the east and Medou was the abstention. Those who cast the negative votes did so on the grounds that decisions on independence and reunification should have been made in a referendum<sup>3</sup>.

The law was adopted by the Assembly in conformity with article 59 of *Decree No. 57/501* on the Statute of Cameroon and it asked the government of France to modify the statute of Cameroon in a way as to recognize the state of Cameroon and their desire to gain independence at the end of the trusteeship, transfer to the state all the competences relative to the management of internal affairs and maintain the UN Trusteeship.

After the ALCAM revision of the Statute the Prime Minister left Cameroon on 21 June 1958 to begin negotiations with France. The record of these negotiations reflects the program which the outlawed UPC had for Cameroon. The only difference being that Ahidjo and his team had understood that a radical approach to win such concessions would not have achieved positive results considering the fact that President Charles de Gaulle had warned leaders at the time that "France would intervene if it considered its interests at jeopardy<sup>4</sup>." Such interests had been the basis for the selection of future leadership in French territories in Africa. What mattered, therefore, for Ahidjo was a gradual cajoling "stage by stage" approach. While Ahidjo was acknowledging that UPC terrorist activities had considerably subsided, reports of their intensification in the Sanaga-Maritime were reaching him in Paris. This caused him to respond with relative harshness. He instructed that patrol teams be stepped up and curfews be intensified<sup>5</sup>. These measures saw the killing of the UPC founder and leader Reuben Um Nyobe in his native Boumyebel on 13 September 1958.

The death of Um Nyobe dealt a severe blow on the movement. The second in command in this region and Nyobe's secretary Mayi Matip rebels to abandon the *Maquis* and declare their readiness to return to legal opposition. This coincided with the visit of the Prime Minister to the Mbam area. Ahidjo proposed a program for partial amnesty which Matip accepted on 22 September<sup>6</sup>. He urged his fellow rebels to do same. In doing so, Matip and his companions concealed neither their membership of the UPC nor the part they had played in the terrorist campaigns under Um Nyobe. In less than a month more than 3000 UPC guerrillas laid down their arms in the Sanaga-Maritime region<sup>7</sup>, thereby bringing the rebellion in that area to a virtual end. Ahidjo reacted by announcing that government has made available to the people of the Sanaga-maritime the sum of 264 Million francs for infrastructural development; railway, communication and farm to market roads, 74 million francs for agricultural development and 22 million francs for social equipments, schools and hospitals<sup>8</sup>

With the assassination of Um Nyobe and the positive developments evidenced by the disavowal of

<sup>1</sup> For a detailed outline of his plan for Cameroon, see Ahidjo's Discourse d' Investiture a l' ALCAM, 19 February 1958

<sup>2</sup> La Presse Camerounaise of Friday 9 January, 1958.

<sup>3</sup> La Presse Camerounaise, Friday, of 13 June 1958, and of Monday, 16 June 1958.

<sup>4</sup> Moseley, W.G.,2007. p.60.

<sup>5</sup> La Presse du Cameroun of 12, 13 and 14 Juliet 1958

<sup>6</sup> La Presse du Cameroun of Wednesday, 1 October 1958

<sup>7</sup> Dix Ans d'Action Gouvernemental, published on the 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Ahidjo's coming to Power.

<sup>8</sup> These developments and many more promises were made as early as June 26 1958 during a radio address to the nation before he left for France the following day. Details are available in La Presse du Cameroun of Saturday 27 June 1958. La Presse Camerounaise of June 16 even quotes Ahidjo to have promised to receive the UPC with open hands should they decide to abandon terrorism. This indicates the constant threat that the UPC posed to the Ahidjo regime.

terrorism by Matip and his men as well as the return of people to normal life in the Sanaga-Maritime, the committee for Amnesty and National Reconciliation came up with the following recommendations: to abolish the enclosures<sup>1</sup> which the government had created to contain the UPC and ensure the effective return of people to their original villages, to envisage an immediate withdrawal of troops so that peace and stability will return to those villages where they existed and to ensure a vote for a law on complete and unconditional amnesty for all political criminals since May 1955

Contrary to the call by the Committee for Amnesty and National Reconciliation, the surrender of Mayi Matip was vehemently condemned by Felix Roland Moumie, the UPC leader in the Bamileke area, who continued the rebellion in the Bamileke and Mungo regions. In the night of September 28 1958 in the locality of Nantem in the Mungo region the official Cameroon press reported that a gang of about 30 individuals coming from English Cameroons used machets to cause havoc in the Mungo area. Life around the border towns and villages between British and French Cameroons became very insecure and uncertain<sup>2</sup>.

Meanwhile as the month of October rolled on all focus was on Yaoundé as the ALCAM resumed on 18 October 1958 for another important session. The statute for which purpose Ahidjo had spent the later part of the month of June and early July in Paris and for which he had held frank talks with the Overseas Ministry personnel and ending with De Gaulle on the 12 July, had been approved. It envisaged the transfer of the baton of control of all services under the High Commissioner to the Cameroon government as from 1 January 1959. These included the administration and Personnel of The High Commissioner's Delegations of Douala and Garoua, chiefs, administrative heads and their assistants; judicial services, administrative tribunals, public security, the Cameroon Guard, Ports Control, meteorological services, local flights and airports<sup>3</sup>.

This statute was not necessarily achieved by Ahidjo's wit or by French largesse and good will. It was clear to the PM that while he was lobbying, France's acceptance of Cameroon's steady progress towards statehood would not be achieved without strings attached. These strings were the conventions signed between Ahidjo and The French. First, there was a monetary convention which implied that Cameroon would remain in the Franc zone. Second, there was a defence convention which required Cameroon not to establish an army yet and French control of it when created. Third, a convention relating to external trade requiring Cameroon to channel exports to France and to consume French goods, fourth, a convention specifying conditions for the transfer of Judicial Powers and finally, a convention relating to the terms of "cultural exchange" from which the establishment of French Cultural centres took origin<sup>4</sup>.

Ahidjo pointed out that the duration of this statute would not exceed one year. Consequently, Cameroonians could demand independence at the end of that period. It should be emphasized that the steps leading to the adoption of the 1958 statute for the Cameroons under French Trusteeship were consistent with De Gaulle's strategy for Overseas France. This strategy had just then led to the referendum in French colonies, the independence of Guinea of Sekou Toure and the creation of the Republic of Madagascar. It was made clear by Ahidjo that Cameroon would have demanded independence within the framework of the 28 September referendum in French colonies but for its trusteeship status. To this effect the Cameroon government asked the French government to obtain an accord which will permit the territory to petition the UNO on the issue. Positive notes relating to this were indicated in a letter addressed to Ahidjo by the Minister of *France d'Outre Mer*. The minister explained that "France was disposed to immediately request the UN General Assembly the end of the trusteeship if (Cameroon) can write such a request<sup>5</sup>". This of course demonstrated that the end of the trusteeship and independence depended not more on France but on Cameroonians themselves so long as the people knew what they wanted and the procedures to follow.

To follow up the PM's 18 October ALCAM deliberations, the government prepared a draft resolution to ask the UN to end the trusteeship in French Cameroon. Among other things the draft resolution expressed the desire of Cameroon to move towards national independence on January 1 1960 and also affirmed her commitment to the principles of Reunification of the two Cameroons. It also provided that all dispositions and measures be taken for the people concerned to freely decide on the issue before 1 January 1960<sup>6</sup>. It also condemned any effort to delay the accession to total sovereignty of the people of Cameroon and paid homage to France for her efforts in developing and leading Cameroon to this end and for renewing her wish of 12 June

<sup>1</sup> Apart from solving the UPC terrorist activities, the policy of *Regroupement des Villages* was a regular feature of French colonial policy in Africa. It aimed at resettling dispersed and shifting Cameroonian communities into larger permanent villages on main roads. Moseley (2007) holds that one of the main aims of these enclosures and regroupments was to control the local people-to oblige them to render tax and labour and to prevent further rebellions.

<sup>2</sup> La Presse du Cameroun of 1 October, 1958. V.G. Fanso, in *Cameroun History for Schools and Colleges* reports a series of troubles caused in the other UPC strongholds as a result of Matip's denouncement of the terrorist movement.

<sup>3</sup> Amadou Ahidjo, *Communication du Premier Ministre le 18 Octobre 1958 a L'Assemblee legislative du Cameroun*. P.7.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. p.10

<sup>5</sup> La Presse Camerounaise of 20 October 1958

<sup>6</sup> This is the amended version of the text. The initial text submitted to ALCAM didn't read the same.

1958 to see Cameroon independent and sovereign. This text was presented to ALCAM and adopted by 46 votes for and seven against. It should be noted that many of the deputies who did not support the 12 June statute: Mabaya, Ndibo, Medou who abstained, and Soppo Priso who joined DC deputies in their walk out, explained their action by the fact that they felt that such decisions weighing on the overall destiny of the nation would have been made by referendum. But by October their views had considerably changed<sup>1</sup>.

The policy of the Ahidjo regime was for a gradual step by step accession to independence and from all indications this was yielding fruits. But many political initiates kept wondering why the Cameroon government had to wait for another year to achieve it. The present statute was the last stage in this gradual step by step process and required the establishment of a fixed calendar with definite dates to ensure effective preparation. Also the unique international status of Cameroon required that the territory submit a resolution to the UN to let it know their decisions to attain independence. Such decisions could not expect immediate answers and for a people committed to the principles of international body, Cameroon could not declare independence unilaterally. Independence could only be obtained if the UN ended the trusteeship and France as administering authority consented.

However, in order not to waste time, the Prime Minister was empowered to press on France to ensure the passing of the resolution especially as the UN was in session. This would have avoided the Togoland experience in which they spent two years waiting for a resolution to be passed. It was also expected that before the resolution is passed lifting the trusteeship all measures would have been taken at all levels and it was to show such an attachment that ALCAM was taking such a gradual option.

As the year drew to a gradual close, a few other major events are worth mentioning. First the dates of the 4<sup>th</sup> UN Visiting Mission to Cameroon were announced as 14 November to 9 December<sup>2</sup>. The impressions gathered from the nation-wide tour and discussions with the various stakeholders were positive. The mission among other things declared that the desire for the territory to gain independence on 1 January 1960 was in conformity with the wishes of the people. They also indicated that the wishes were justified because of the way ALCAM and government handled government business. Again, they added that the establishment of a constitution should be a purely internal affair, that holding an election before independence was not necessary and that a general amnesty was worthwhile if not imperative. Their positive findings contributed to the favourable response of the UN to the French request for the abrogation of the trusteeship agreement and the setting of the date for Cameroon independence on 1 January 1960. This was done on 28 October 1958 with the assistance of the French Permanent Representative to the Trusteeship Council Mr. Jacques Kosciusko-Morizet<sup>3</sup>.

The new statute came into force on 1 January 1959. Cameroon achieved complete domestic autonomy and its elected authorities took over all powers of legislation, administration and justice. The Cameroon identity was recognized internationally. The year proved to be packed full of activities in preparation for independence. As early as 8 January a conference of regional chiefs opened in Yaoundé on the theme “application of the statute of complete internal autonomy” in which the chiefs were schooled on the development trends and their role in this process. In the same vein at the court of appeal in Yaoundé a ceremony was held on 13 January marking the transfer of judicial powers to the Cameroon government.

Another UN mission to Cameroon was affected by M. D. Protitch, Deputy Secretary on the question of Trusteeship from 22 to 25 January 1959. This was because the Trusteeship council of the UN was to examine the situation in some African countries under trusteeship as from 30 January and the General Assembly was to hold a special session, which was to start on 20 February 1959 on the question of the future of the territories of Cameroon under French and British Trusteeship. He met with Ahidjo on 24 January 1959 at Foumban. In the morning of 25 January, he met with *chef supérieur* Martin Abega Atangana and two other delegations in

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<sup>1</sup> In the October votes Priso declared that he is satisfied with the steps that the government had made so far on the issue. This state of progress makes a referendum irrelevant and uncalled for. This change of view could also have been seen from the fact that ALCAM recognized as the representative of the wishes of the Cameroonians had already clearly expressed their wish to be independent. Secondly the trusteeship agreement had prescribed that the people should be consulted on the choice of government, in order for the UN to be assured that the country does not obtain independence with a political regime contrary to the principles of the UN charter. This had been satisfactorily done in view of the Cameroon constitution. Thirdly other trust territories, it was clear, were moving towards attaining independence without a referendum. Consequently there would be no problem if the present track taken by the government towards independence excludes the holding of a referendum.

<sup>2</sup> La Presse Camerounaise, Saturday 31 January and Sunday 1 February 1959. The mission was composed of Benjamin Geric (USA) was President, George Salomon (Haiti), Rikhi (India) and MG Throp (New Zealand). This mission had as special mandate to examine and determine whether the measures put in place by France conforms to the objectives of the UN Charter as article 76 stipulated. The mission made a nation wide tour, contacted government officials and members of parliament in order to gather information on the state of political, social and economic life of Cameroon.

<sup>3</sup> Daniel Abwa and Abel Eyinga explain that the role of this personality was to ensure that Cameroon obtains independence on French terms and to ensure that no reports get to the UN which will tarnish French image in the organization.

Yaounde<sup>1</sup>. These were the *Union Nationale des Mère Camerounaise* (UNAMEC) and *Bureau Nationale Kamerounais des Peuples Africains* (BNKCPA). He had an intimate launch with them at Ralais Aériens in Yaounde before taking his flight to Douala during which he had the opportunity to discuss with Xavier Torre.

On the 12 and 14 March The Trusteeship Council and the General Assembly of the UN respectively responded positively to the October 1958 request that the French government had placed before them to end the trusteeship in Cameroon by 1 January 1960. By a majority vote of 56 and 23 abstentions they supported Ahidjo's programme and voted to terminate the trusteeship on January 1 1960. This was done without fresh elections as Felix Moumie the exiled UPC leader, had demanded. Although there was no negative vote, success was not achieved without heated debates. Although there was no negative vote, success was not achieved without heated debates. Thirty petitions in all were heard by the Trusteeship Council.<sup>2</sup>

Felix Moumie apart from calling for the dissolution of ALCAM and the holding of new elections also insisted that independence must be granted to both British and French Cameroons at the same time. Jacques Ngom, president of the trade union called *Union Generale des Travailleurs du Cameroun*, shared Moumie's view. Meanwhile, Mayi Matip who represented *des Anciens Detenus Politiques et Refugiés* called for a general amnesty, which would ensure national reconciliation. Another petitioner, Tchoumba argued that independence could not be granted to French Cameroun because the territory was under military occupation. This intervention greatly worried Kosciusko who claimed that the French had less than 200 troops in Cameroun to guard about 600km of national frontier. Henry Cabot Lodge, the USA representatives spoke seriously in support of the Government and the Assembly of Cameroun.

On the 12 April 1959 by-elections took place in the Sanaga-Maritime, Nyong et Kelle. Mayi Matip the UPC leader who had accepted the partial amnesty offered by Ahidjo scored 35.020, Antoine Logmo 6.191, and Prince Alexander Bell 2.901 votes. These elections were held to fill up the empty ALCAM seats left by the assassination of candidates from the area who had won the December 1956 elections. The administration in order to prove that it was fair for UPC terrorists to abandon marquis activities and join active politics made it possible for Mayi Matip and his associated to win the elections. Once in parliament they carried out vociferous opposition both inside ALCAM and out but condemned those of their members who had refused to lay down their arms and accept the government's amnesty.

To consolidate his grip on the territory, Ahidjo acquired special powers from ALCAM which enabled him to impose a curfew, an internal pass system, the censorship of private mails and the arrest of any suspected individual. Although these and other repressive measures were meant to limit UPC activities, they did not deter the terrorists from carrying activities in Douala, Mbalmayo, Mbanga, Yaounde and the Bassa and Bamileke territories in the nights of 27 and 28 June 1959<sup>3</sup>. This out all offensive which the UPC started was motivated by the approaching 1 January 1960 which it viewed would be fatal to its hopes of ever gaining power. With these new threats of the UPC, Ahidjo knew that his position was still fragile but was not ready to let any of such hurdles deter him. To consolidate his position, he decided to bloc the re-election of Daniel Kamejou to the presidency of ALCAM and stripped Michel Njine of the Vice Premiership<sup>4</sup>. These were leaders in the UC from the Bamileke region where UPC terrorist activities had intensified. Ahidjo was gradually developing distrust for the Bamileke partly because of the support that the people in this area gave the nationalists<sup>5</sup>. Ahidjo also opted for an-all-out-attack on all suspected areas and also created self-defence militia units. A series of *state of alerts* which usually lasted for three months and were renewable were passed<sup>6</sup>. Other powers which the PM acquired from the assembly included the *Plein pouvoir* and the *project de loi*. The *plein pouvoir* enabled the government to rule by decree for a maximum period of six months and empower a commission to draft a constitution with the assistance of a consultative committee. The *Project de loi* was to grant full and unconditional amnesty to all people living in the Sanaga Maritime and Nyong et Sanaga regions who had committed political crimes. These bills when presented to the assembly provoked heated debates but were passed by a vote of 50 to 12 with one abstention. However instead of a full amnesty what the political criminals received was a partial amnesty<sup>7</sup>.

On the 30 October ALCAM elected a Consultative Commission to help the government to prepare for independence. On 1 January 1960, the independence of Cameroon was proclaimed by the UN Secretary General

<sup>1</sup> La Presse du Cameroun, Samedi 24 et Dimanche 25 Janvier 1959

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, Samedi 14 et Dimanche 15 ; Mercredi 18 ; Lundi 23 ; Jeudi 26, n° 2652 ; Vendredi 27 n° 2653, Février et Lundi 2 ; Mercredi 4 ; Jeudi 5 ; Vendredi 6 ; Lundi 9 n° 2661 ; Mercredi 11 n° 2663 ; Jeudi 12 n° 2664 ; Vendredi 13 n° 2665 ; Lundi 16 n° 2667 ; Samedi 21 et Dimanche 22 Mars, 1959.

<sup>3</sup> V.J. Ngoh, Cameroon 1884-1985: A Hundred years of History, 1987, p158-159.

<sup>4</sup> Richard Joseph, 1978, p.57

<sup>5</sup> V.J. Ngoh, 1987, p.159

<sup>6</sup> For instance Arrête No. 3270 of 29 September 1959 instituted a state of alert in the Wouri Division and Odormance No. 02 of 12 January 1960 instituted a state of alert in the Wouri, Bamileke, Nyong et Kelle, Ntem, Dja et Lobo, Kribi and Mungo till further notice. Cited in Ngoh 1987, p159.

<sup>7</sup> VJ Ngoh, 1987, p160

Dag Hammarskjold under the name of Republic of Cameroon with a green, red, yellow flag. The outlawed UPC violently clashed with government forces in Yaoundé and Douala. The clashes led left 40 natives and three Europeans dead. They were reacting to the fact that they had been cheated by history. Being the architect of Cameroons independence and reunification against all odds and seeing these dreams realized by those who had struggled to stifle these demands was indeed frustrating. Work on the constitution was finalized and on the 21 February 1960, it was adopted by a referendum whose results Ahidjo still found necessary to manipulate (especially in the north)<sup>1</sup> and was elected President of the Republic on 5 May<sup>2</sup>. From the 15 to 17 July 1960 Ahidjo paid an official visit to British Cameroons in which broad outlines of reunification were discussed.

## 5. Conclusion

The objective of the chapter was to trace the series of events that led to independence. Looking at these milestones, one would readily identify four stakeholders. These are the UN, the French as administering authority, the UPC and the Radical Tendencies and the Moderate (Pro-French) Cameroon Politicians. As to which group credit for the attainment of independence would be ascribed, this remains a matter of personal judgment. Questions as to whether independence was given to Cameroon or taken by Cameroon are subjective and only require a reading of the trends and arriving at independent conclusions.

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Joseph, 1978, p57.

<sup>2</sup> The 1960 constitution required the election of the president by an electoral college of notables based on the model of the 1958 French constitution. However Ahidjo ensured that a clause was inserted which allowed the first president to be elected by the assembly alone. This gave him an easy victory considering the UC majority.