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PETITIONS CONCERNING THE CAMEROONS UNDER FRENCH ADMINISTRATION

Observations of the French Government as Administering Authority

Note by the Secretariat: The observations refer to the following petitions:

<u>Section:</u>	<u>Page:</u>
1. Petition from Mr. Zacharie Zenguele (T/PET.5/208)	2
2. Petition from the Secretary-General of the <u>Union des Populations du Cameroun</u> (T/PET.5/211)	3
3. Petition from the Secretary-General of the <u>Union des Populations du Cameroun</u> (T/PET.5/214)	6
4. Petition from the World Federation of Trade Unions (T/PET.5/215)	7

1. Petition from Mr. Zacharie Zenguele (T/PET.5/208)

The petitioner was employed as foreman on a plantation belonging to Mr. BATTALIA when it was sold to Mr. FISTER in January 1952. No complaint was then lodged against the seller by any employee.

FISTER defaulted, and BATTALIA took the plantation back and sold it in October 1952 to the Société des Plantations de Nguebile, of which Mr. CLAUDE is a director.

In June 1952 the workers on the plantation made complaints against FISTER for non-payment of wages. An official report was drawn up by the Inspectorate of Labour and the plaintiffs were advised to submit their claims to the Courts. The matter has in fact been placed before the Court of First Instance of Yaoundé, in whose area the defendant is domiciled, but it has not yet pronounced judgment.

The managing director of the Société des Plantations de Nguebili says that he did dismiss ZENGUELE Zacharie, having found his work as foreman unsatisfactory. He kept on most of the workers employed on the plantation before its sale. Several workers followed ZENGUELE Zacharie, of their own accord, when he left the plantation. They are probably the persons referred to in his petition.

ZENGUELE made no complaint about his dismissal to the Inspectorate of Labour.

2. Petition from the Secretary-General of the Union des Populations du Cameroun (T/PET.5/211)

The Administering Authority does not wish to enter into futile controversies with the petitioner on the importance of the UPC as a political party, but refers to the statements made on that subject in December 1952 in the Fourth Committee of the General Assembly.

The authorization given to UM NYOBE RUBEN to appear before the Fourth Committee certainly provoked violent reactions among the population of the Cameroons. These reactions are due to the fact that the UPC leaders misrepresented the authorization as a special invitation to UM NYOBE to express the aspirations of the entire population.

This tendentious interpretation of the rules concerning the hearing of petitioners by the Fourth Committee led to immediate protests by the traditional chiefs and the various elected and true representatives of the population, who immediately notified the Secretary-General of the United Nations of their disagreement with UM NYOBE, stressing the fact that he did not in fact represent the country as a whole.

As he himself indicates, the Secretary-General of the UPC was extremely active on his return from New York and held a large number of public meetings. In his petition, however, he altered his attendance figures and misrepresented the facts. In no case did his meetings for "reporting on his mission" draw, as he claims, between 4,000 and 20,000 persons. The largest meeting, held at DOUALA, may have assembled about 2,000 people. At the Bafang and Bafoussam meetings, the "crowd" was represented in one case by 50 people, and in the other by 300. It is untrue that UM NYOBE's hecklers were shouted down by the audience at both meetings. On the contrary, it was UM NYOBE who was unable to reply to his hecklers at Bafoussam.

The petition complains about the "militant policy of the French Administration" and, particularly, about his occasionally having been refused permission to hold meetings in the street or in public places.

The militant policy followed by the UPC against the traditional chiefs and elected representatives arouses the indignation and open antagonism of

most Cameroonians. To avoid disturbances, the officials responsible for order and public security have been compelled to forbid certain meetings organized by the UPC in public places. Moreover, it should be noted that all meetings on a public street are prohibited by law.

The only instance of the Administration's intervening in connexion with a meeting held on private premises occurred at Songmbengué, where the Chief Subdivisional Officer intervened on 7 February 1953 at the request of the owner of the land on which the petitioner and the organizers of the meeting had established themselves, despite the owner's objection. Proceedings were instituted against UM NYOBE for refusing to vacate the land and resulted in a fine in settlement of 1,200 francs, proposed by the magistrate with extended powers at Edea and agreed to by UM NYOBE.

The Songmbengué case will have other legal consequences: the Chief Subdivisional Officer has instituted proceedings against three people for having held a public demonstration without due notice, and a fourth for threatening behaviour towards a policeman. On the other hand, on 8 April UM NYOBE instituted an action against "a person or persons unknown" for the acts mentioned in his petition. The case is now being investigated. Most of the petitioner's allegations (shots into the air, destruction of the enclosure) are denied by the Chief Subdivisional Officer. He puts the number of persons assembled at Songmbengué at about 200, whereas the petitioner's estimate is 4,000.

The Foumban incidents, to which the petitioner refers, show the hostility encountered by the Secretary-General of the UPC in many parts of the Cameroons.

On 23 March, UM NYOBE asked for permission to hold a public meeting at Foumban; on 25 March, having learnt that a party of Bamiléké intended to go to Foumban to oppose him, and being aware of the hostility of the people of the Bamoun region towards the local UPC leaders, the Chief Regional Officer informed UM NYOBE that he could not authorize the meeting, for fear of disturbances.

UM NYOBE then decided to hold a private meeting on a private concession, but summoned the inhabitants to the meeting by means of posters displayed in public places. A police report was drawn up recording this offence and UM NYOBE was warned against the probable reactions of the local inhabitants.

A crowd of about 200 attended the meeting. As soon as UM NYOBE began to speak, he was interrupted and a free fight broke out between practically the entire audience and his bodyguard.

The Chief Subdivisional Officer was notified at once and came to the scene accompanied by the police superintendent. As soon as he arrived, the demonstrators fled. He found the meeting place littered with broken furniture and saw UM NYOBE crawl from under a bed where he had sought shelter, with his clothing torn off. Patrols were immediately organized in the town to restore the peace and to protect the members of the UPC against the hostility of the inhabitants.

The Administration of the Territory can but leave the petitioner free to place his own interpretation on the facts described above. It would, however, point out, first that on 25 March, the Chief Regional Officer did in fact accompany to the MBAM Valley a parliamentary mission under Mr. BECHARD, a former Minister which had been sent to see how the plan was progressing in the Region, and secondly that Sultan SEIDOU and Senator Arouna NJOKA had been at Douala since 22 March to welcome General De Gaulle who was visiting the Territory.

The petitioner complains of plots against his person. The Administration of the Territory is not aware of the intentions of Deputy Douala Manga Bell, and still less of those of the European, GATEAU. The latter, who had been invited as early as January to leave the Territory or to produce a regular employment contract, was interrogated by the police superintendent at Douala on 9 March, at the request of the UPC Executive Committee. He said that he had wished to meet UM NYOBE for an exchange of ideas. This European, who has no regular means of support and apparently did not possess a fire-arm, was expelled from the Territory by an order of 16 April 1953.

The petitioner again refers to the dispute between NJIMOFIRA SALIFOU and Sultan SEIDOU and the Bamoun chiefs. This matter has already been dealt with in the petition classified as T/PET.5/210.

3. Petition from the Secretary-General of the Union des Populations du Cameroun (T/PET.5/214)

The Administering Authority notes that the petitioner protests because he was refused customs clearance for a number of pamphlets he wished to bring into the Territory.

The Act of 29 July 1881 stipulates that all publications must bear the printer's name and address. The pamphlets now held by the Customs do not satisfy those requirements.

The importer has been invited to comply with the legislation in force and to supply proof of the origin of the goods.

4. Petition from the World Federation of Trade Unions (T/PET.5/215)

The Administering Authority explains that decision No.2270 of 6 May 1953, attached to the petition, was taken because of the political propaganda far exceeding the limits of trade-union activity, which the World Federation of Trade Unions constantly includes in its publications. Such propaganda is frequently based upon grossly inaccurate interpretations and allegations and is liable to disturb the peace in a country where the bulk of the population has not yet acquired a sufficient sense of judgment and experience of political discussions.

The Administering Authority took the measures it considered necessary to maintain order and public security, in accordance with the rights and obligations conferred on it by article 10 of the Trusteeship Agreement.
