

GENERAL ASSEMBLY

TWELFTH SESSION

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Chairman: Mr. Thanat KHOMAN (Thailand).

AGENDA ITEM 13

Report of the Trusteeship Council (A/3595 and Corr.1, A/3718, A/C.4/372) (continued)

GENERAL DEBATE

At the invitation of the Chairman, Mr. Charles Assalé, Mr. Paul Soppo Priso and Mr. Jean Ekwabi, representatives of the Groupe d'action national du Cameroun, Mr. Ndeh Ntumazah, representative of One Kamerun, Mr. Félix Roland Moumié, representative of the Union des populations du Cameroun, Mr. Dika Akwa, representative of the Confédération des syndicats indépendants du Cameroun, and Mr. Jacques Ngom, representative of the Confédération générale kamerunaise du travail, took places at the Committee table.

1. Sir Andrew COHEN (United Kingdom) said that, since the general debate on the report of the Trusteeship Council (A/3595 and Corr.1) might deal with a number of Territories, he reserved the right to speak again if necessary.

2. A great deal had been said on the subject of the Cameroons by the petitioners, but he doubted whether an uninstructed listener would have gained either a very clear or a very accurate picture of the situation in the Cameroons under British administration from the flood of oratory.

3. The affairs of the Cameroons under British administration had been discussed at length in the Trusteeship Council, where a special representative for the Territory had been present to give detailed information. The Cameroons under British administration and the Cameroons under French administration would again be discussed at the next session of the Trusteeship Council and a visiting mission would go to the two Territories in 1958, in accordance with the Council's normal programme. Nevertheless he felt that as a courtesy to the members of the Fourth Committee he should say something about the political position and the future of the Cameroons under British administration.

4. One of the petitioners came from the Cameroons under British administration and in his statement (715th meeting) and his replies to questions had expressed the views of one political party in that territory. At the previous session of the General Assembly Mr. Ntumazah had appeared as the representative of

the Union des populations du Cameroun (UPC); at the present session he was representing a party which had a different name but which according to the available information, drew its support from broadly the same source. In the general election held in the Southern Cameroons early in the year, out of a total vote of just under 80,000 the UPC had obtained less than 2,000 votes. Clearly, therefore, the party represented only a very small section of opinion in the Southern Cameroons under British administration. It had never been seriously suggested that there had been any irregularity in the conduct of the election: it had taken place in an orderly manner and everywhere polling had been a smooth and efficient operation, in which the people had demonstrated that they were well able to benefit by the democratic method of selecting their representatives in the House of Assembly.

5. His reason for drawing attention to the extremely unrepresentative character of the UPC was not that the United Kingdom delegation was seeking to present some different view about the future of the Cameroons: when the time came it would be for the people of the Cameroons to express their own opinion about their future. He did, however, wish to emphasize that the petitioner from the Cameroons under British administration represented only a very small fraction of public opinion; naturally he was entitled to express the view of that fraction but no one should suppose that that view was widely held.

6. The petitioners' statements might have given the impression that the people of the Cameroons under British administration were being forced against their will, in the narrow and private interests of the United Kingdom, into union with the British dependent territory of Nigeria. Those who knew the facts would know that that was the exact opposite of the truth. It had recently been made absolutely clear to the leaders of the Cameroons under British administration that there could be no question of the Territory being forced against its will into permanent union with Nigeria. There was no special or particular British interest in the question, except one thing: the interests of the people of the Cameroons. There was no question of any connexion or lack of connexion in the future between the Cameroons under British administration and a dependent Nigeria: the question was what, if any, the relationship should be between the Cameroons and an independent Nigeria. The semantics of so-called colonialism were entirely inapplicable to the present case.

7. The Northern Cameroons was administered as part of the Northern Region of Nigeria and had full democratic representation and part in the Northern Region Government. That arrangement was certainly in accordance with the wishes of the people of that part of the Territory. The Southern Cameroons had its own Government, in which the elected representatives of the people played a large part.

8. As the members of the Committee were aware, Nigeria already had a large degree of internal self-government. The Eastern and the Western Regions were already internally self-governing and the Northern Region would obtain internal self-government in 1959. Nigeria was moving towards independence and earlier in the year a conference had been held in London, presided over by the Secretary of State for the Colonies, which had been attended by all political leaders from the different parts of Nigeria and from the Cameroons. The Southern Cameroons had sent representatives of all three parties with seats in the House of Assembly and the Northern Cameroons had also been represented. The Secretary of State for the Colonies had held separate detailed discussions with the representatives of the Southern Cameroons and the conclusions reached, which had subsequently been endorsed by the Constitutional Conference as a whole, related to the constitutional arrangements to be made in the immediate future for the Southern Cameroons. Those arrangements provided for a greatly increased elected element in the legislature to be elected by universal franchise and for a Cameroonian majority in the Executive Council, which would become the principal instrument of policy in the Southern Cameroons. Those arrangements were expected to come into force early in 1958, after which there would probably be a further general election under universal franchise.

9. He went on to refer to a statement made at the Conference by the Secretary of State for the Colonies, in the course of which he had said that the United Kingdom Government fully recognized its obligations to the Cameroons under the Trusteeship Agreement, one of which was to administer the Territory as an integral part of Nigeria. He had added that when Nigeria became an independent country that arrangement would no longer be possible and that the Trusteeship Agreement would have to be reviewed at that stage. The Secretary of State had further said that one possibility would be for the Cameroons to remain part of Nigeria, which would involve the termination of the Trusteeship Agreement and would require consultation with the United Nations, but that there could be no question of obliging the Cameroonians to remain part of an independent Nigeria contrary to their own wishes. Before Nigeria became independent, the people of the Cameroons under British Administration would have to say freely what their wishes were as to their own future; among the options open to them would be to continue under the trust administration of the United Kingdom. The Secretary of State had warned the Cameroons that it would not thereby be given the golden key of the Bank of England; but many of the best friends of the Cameroons did not foresee a destiny more likely to promote its happiness and prosperity than continued association with Nigeria.

10. It was clear from the facts he had cited that the Cameroons would not be forced into continued association with Nigeria against the will of the people. Secondly, it was clear that the Southern Cameroons already had a democratically elected Government while the Northern Cameroons took part in the democratic institutions of Northern Nigeria. Thirdly, the people of the Southern Cameroons and the people of the Northern Cameroons would in due course have the opportunity freely to express their views on their future. When the appropriate time came the United Kingdom delegation would make proposals to the United Nations regarding

such consultation. In particular, the people of the Cameroons would have to consider whether they wished to be associated or not with an independent Nigeria. It was obvious that no question of "colonialism" or anything like it arose in the present case.

11. With reference to the action taken by the Governments of Nigeria and the Southern Cameroons in relation to certain members of the UPC who had come from the Cameroons under French administration, he said that it had been necessary to deport thirteen persons from the Southern Cameroons. It was one of the duties of an Administering Authority under the Trusteeship Agreement to ensure the maintenance of law and order in the Territory and among the people. Criticism was often expressed in the Fourth Committee of Administering Authorities which felt obliged to perform that duty, but in his opinion such criticism would be far more justified if they neglected to do so. It was often extremely difficult to decide whether and when to take action to ensure that there should be no breach of the peace; indeed, it was an agonizing decision for a liberal administrator to take. None the less, it was far better to take action in time than to fail to do so and to be faced with actual bloodshed. In the case in point the Government of the Southern Cameroons and the Government of Nigeria had believed that the members of the UPC might resort to violence in an endeavour to achieve their political objectives, as they had already done in the Cameroons under French administration. The very limited action had been taken with the full approval of the elected Southern Cameroonian Ministers and elected Nigerian Ministers in the Nigerian Council of Ministers and had been welcomed by the people of the Territory, to whom the aims and methods of the UPC were utterly alien. Indeed, the results of the March election had shown that the UPC had only a handful of supporters. The UPC members in question had been allowed to choose the country to which they would be deported.

12. Mr. Ntumazah had suggested, in reply to a question, that some restrictions might have been placed on the One Kamerun party. As matters stood at present, however, the One Kamerun party was free to exercise its functions in the same way as any other political party in the Southern Cameroons. No legal impediment had been placed upon the party, other than the observance of existing legislation affecting public order and security, which applied to all political parties without discrimination.

13. Anyone who was unacquainted with the situation might have gained the impression from Mr. Ntumazah's speech that the Cameroons under British administration was riven by all sorts of violence. That was entirely untrue and there was no justification for any such suggestion. As far as he knew only two complaints had been received even from the persons whom Mr. Ntumazah represented. One of them concerned the destruction by fire of a house at Santa. In fact investigations by the authorities had shown that a house occupied by some French Cameroonians resident at Santa, in the Cameroons under British administration, had been damaged by fire: the grass roof and some papers had been destroyed. The house had subsequently been repaired in a short time with a zinc roof. It was absurd that such an incident (not uncommon in certain parts of Africa) should give rise to the kind of allegations that had been made.

14. The other case was more serious, since it con-

cerned the murder of two people. It was quite untrue that there had been no proper investigation, as alleged by Mr. Ntumazah. There had been a full police investigation of the case. Such an occurrence was naturally regrettable but to use two limited and individual cases to build up a great picture of violence throughout the Territory was absurd. The Cameroons under British administration was a peaceful country where conditions were normal and there was no justification for suggesting the contrary. He felt sure that the members of the Fourth Committee would realize the political motives underlying such wild and sweeping generalizations.

15. Mr. KOSCZIUSKO-MORIZET (France) said that while he felt that some clarifications from his delegation might be useful for the Committee's consideration of the question of the Cameroons under French administration, he did not propose to comment at length on the allegations made by the petitioners, since they had already been adequately dealt with by the Trusteeship Council. He did feel, however, that the position of the petitioners should be made clear.

16. With regard to Mr. Dika Akwa's "delegation", he would point out that the Confédération des syndicats indépendants du Cameroun, whose following had been negligible, had broken up more than a year earlier. Mr. Ngom, whose party was a member of the World Federation of Trade Unions and thus had strong Communist affiliations, hoped by adopting an extremist policy to regain the popularity he was losing, since he had obtained only 7,000 votes out of the 200,000 cast at the 1956 elections. With regard to the representatives of the illegal opposition, the terrorist policy of the UPC had been amply illustrated in Mr. Moumié's statements. That party had been largely responsible for the bloodshed in the Territory, including the brutal assassination of two election candidates in the Sanaga-Maritime, who happened to be political opponents of the UPC. Although the Groupe d'action nationale du Cameroun, representing the legal opposition, had asserted through its spokesmen that it had no wish to obstruct the new democratic institutions which it had voluntarily accepted from the outset, he felt that its members would have been of more assistance to the Legislative Assembly if they had voiced their suggestions in that body.

17. A Cameroonian Government had come into being and was at present defending its budget before the Legislative Assembly; both the Administering Authority and the Fourth Committee should have faith in that Government inasmuch as it had been elected on the basis of universal suffrage. Neither the Administering Authority nor the Committee could take sides in internal political controversies: having so strongly urged the development of democratic organs, they should now respect the integrity of the Cameroonian Government. It was not the function of the United Nations to help an opposition, legal or illegal, which was using the Organization for propaganda purposes, to take revenge on the lawful majority Government of its country.

18. Turning to the report of the Trusteeship Council (A/3595 and Corr.1), he said that the conclusions it stated concerning the Cameroons under French administration, which had obviously been arrived at after an exhaustive examination of the situation arising out of the application of the Statute, amply disposed of the

criticisms levelled at the new institutions established in the Cameroons, which had been recognized even by some of the petitioners as constituting an important advance towards emancipation. He then read out several passages from the report congratulating the Administering Authority on the adoption of the Statute and the establishment of a Legislative Assembly and a responsible Government, on its action in consulting the Assembly of the Cameroons concerning the Statute and on the introduction of universal suffrage. He recalled that the Council had sent a congratulatory cable to the young State and had expressed appreciation of the progress achieved in the economic, social and educational fields. Those conclusions considerably weakened the arguments of those who disputed the worth and validity of the new Statute.

19. Much had been said about an opinion of the Conseil d'Etat reputedly prohibiting the consideration of any statute other than that proposed by the French Government. The fact was that the loi-cadre of 23 June 1956 had provided that the Territorial Assembly of the Cameroons should give its opinion on the draft decree embodying the Statute and it was therefore that draft and no other that had had to be submitted to the Assembly for discussion. There had been nothing however, to prevent the Territorial Assembly making extensive amendments to the original draft. After rejecting the draft submitted by the Groupe d'action nationale, it had in fact made liberal use of that right of amendment and more than half the articles had been either drafted by the Assembly itself or radically revised by it.

20. The Assembly had been elected by universal suffrage and nobody could in conscience dispute the propriety of the elections of 23 December 1956 or the representative character of the elected members. That consultation of the people had been fully in accordance with the objective of the Trusteeship System to promote the evolution of the Territories towards nationhood by progressive and peaceful means. As for those who had sought to discredit the elections, Mr. Moumié had himself admitted that he considered the Trusteeship System illegal. Moreover, as one of the petitioners had rightly pointed out, the fact that an election had been boycotted by a particular party did not imply that the results were unreliable. Since the elections had made it possible for a legal Government to be established it was the duty of the Administering Authority to respect and assist that Government.

21. Some of the petitioners, particularly the representative of the UPC, had given an exaggerated account of the situation in the Territory—in which, incidentally, they were no longer residing. It was true that violent disturbances had taken place in May 1955 and December 1956, but it should be remembered that those incidents had been confined to a single area. The Administering Authority was the first to deplore those incidents, for which it was in no way responsible; it could not but feel indignant at the charges of "colonialist repression" that were preferred against it by the very instigators of the disturbances. Nor could it pass over in silence the allegation that the Administering Authority had been powerless to ensure law and order. The United Nations Visiting Mission to the Trust Territories of the Cameroons under British Administration and the Cameroons under

French Administration, 1955, had vigorously denounced the methods used and the crimes committed by the rioters, while the Trusteeship Council, noting with regret the disturbances in the Sanaga-Maritime region, had called upon all sections of public opinion in the Territory to observe normal democratic practices (A/3595 and Corr.1, p. 123).

22. The representative of the Groupe d'action nationale had asserted that it was the duty of the Administering Authority to restore calm. The latter had done everything possible to that end; it had offered the Cameroonians an opportunity of availing themselves of the democratic right of election and of constituting a responsible cabinet.

23. The petitioners had also asked for an amnesty, but the scope and substance of that amnesty had not been made clear. It would be remembered that the French Government had introduced an amnesty bill in August 1956, which had been adopted by the National Assembly the following December. The disturbances that had broken out again in December 1956, however, combined with the fact that under the new Statute certain powers had already been transferred to the Cameroonian Government, had made it necessary to review the bill. Indeed, the French Government could no longer promote such a bill without consulting the Cameroonian Government, which had by then become largely responsible for the management of the country's internal affairs. It was also necessary to ensure that those who were to benefit by the amnesty would undertake to respect the law on resuming public life.

24. Unfortunately the statements of some of the petitioners were a poor response to the Administering Authority's efforts at pacification. Bearing in mind the Trusteeship Council recommendations, those who claimed to represent the Cameroonian people would do well to show their authority by encouraging respect for democratic practices instead of inciting insurrection against the legal Government of their country. On the other hand, it had been gratifying to hear some of the petitioners—unfortunately not all of them—announce their resolve to promote their political programmes in a law-abiding manner. In the meantime he could only state that the amnesty bill, as amended, was again before Parliament for discussion and there was reason to hope that, unless fresh acts of terrorism prevented it, the desired measures could be put into effect in the near future.

25. While all the petitioners were agreed in asking for independence, the representatives of the Groupe d'action nationale, a moderate group, wished their country's desire for independence to be formally recognized, but at the same time admitted the need for interdependence within a larger unit. The question of fixing dates should therefore be approached

with circumspection. Although the new institutions in the Cameroons had been approved by the Trusteeship Council, they were of very recent date and the Council had yet to observe them in action. The new Government—the result of the elections on the basis of universal suffrage—while as anxious as any petitioner for the attainment of the objectives of the Trusteeship System, had asked to be allowed to proceed to that end by stages. Since the realization of those objectives were guaranteed by the United Nations Charter, the Trusteeship Agreement and the Statute of the Trust State, there seemed no reason to deny the Government its wish. Article 2 of the Statute, which he read out, and the statements made by the French representatives in the United Nations entirely belied the charges made by the petitioners that the French Government was attempting the forcible integration of the Cameroons within the French Union. He would merely repeat once again that it would be for the people of the Cameroons themselves to decide their own future freely.

26. The petitioners had raised the artificial problem of unification of the Cameroons. To make unification a prior condition would only place further difficulties in the way of the attainment of the objectives of the Trusteeship System. Moreover, the 1955 Visiting Mission had pointed out that it had received few requests for unification and that the champions of that idea had not seemed to have any definite programme. It would rest with the regular visiting mission which was to go to the Cameroons in 1958 to comment on the question. The proposal that the General Assembly should send a special commission of inquiry was out of the question, since both the Charter and the Trusteeship Agreement provided that visits to the Territory should be arranged in agreement with the Administering Authority.

27. Since the Cameroonian people were well on the way to attaining the objectives laid down in the Charter, it was surely in their best interests to accomplish that democratic evolution in a peaceful manner, by supporting the new institutions which, however imperfect, guaranteed a steady progress in that direction. While some complained that progress was too slow, others insisted on the need for building solid foundations. In both cases the ultimate objectives were the same. Conscious of its duty, France was providing the new Government all possible assistance—technical, economic, cultural and social—while at the same time refraining from interfering in the country's internal and political affairs. His Governments' policy was not to divide and rule but to unite in order to build. In its view the only way of promoting progress was to seek to consolidate the emerging institutions and to encourage their democratic evolution.

The meeting rose at 11.50 a.m.