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STANDING COMMITTEE ON PETITIONS

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE THREE HUNDRED AND ELEVENTH MEETING

Held at Headquarters, New York,
on Thursday, 26 January 1956, at 2.45 p.m.

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Cameroons under French Administration (T/C.2/L.197) (continued)

PRESENT:

Chairman:

Mr. JAIPAL

India

Members:

Mr. HAMILTON

Australia

Mr. MASSONET

Belgium

Mr. de CAMARET

France

Mr. SERAPHIN

Haiti

Mr. BENDRYSHEV

Union of Soviet Socialist
Republics

Also present:

Mr. LEFEVRE

Special Representative of
the Administering
Authority for the Trust
Territory of the Cameroons
under French
Administration

Secretariat:

Mr. BERENDSEN

Secretary of the Committee

EXAMINATION OF PETITIONS CONCERNING THE TRUST TERRITORY OF THE CAMEROONS UNDER
FRENCH ADMINISTRATION (T/C.2/L.197) (continued)

VII. Incidents in May in the Bamiléké area and at M'Balmayo

In reply to questions from the CHAIRMAN and Mr. SERAPHIN (Haiti) on the subject of petitions T/PET.5/634 and T/PET.5/646/Add.1, Mr. LEFEVRE (Special Representative) pointed out that the authors of those petitions were confusing incidents which had occurred in the same region but with an interval of one month between them. He had already given the Committee an account of the incidents which had occurred in the Bamiléké area in April. With regard to the incidents in May, he stated that the UPC had tried to organize a demonstration at Bafoussam on 28 May and at Bafang on 29 May. In both areas, the hut which constituted the UPC headquarters had been destroyed by members of the indigenous population. It was true that some group chiefs who were openly hostile to the UPC had been touring certain villages but they had not committed any outrages.

The CHAIRMAN, speaking as the representative of India, asked if those responsible for the destruction had been arrested.

Mr. LEFEVRE (Special Representative) explained that in each case the police had arrived too late and there had had to be an investigation before any arrests could be made. Twelve people had been charged at Bafoussam and five at Bafang. By 30 December 1955, three of the accused had been released on probation and fourteen were in prison.

Mr. SERAPHIN (Haiti) asked whether the authorities had been aware of the presence of hirelings in the Bamiléké area.

Mr. LEFEVRE (Special Representative) said that the word "hireling" conveyed nothing to the Administering Authority in the case in point. There had been no movements of population in the region: the incidents at Bafoussam and Bafang had been the work of elements of the local population or of people from the immediate surroundings.

In reply to another question from Mr. SERAPHIN (Haiti), Mr. LEFEVRE (Special Representative) said that the Administering Authority did not know what had happened to the Chairman and Secretary of the Bafang Central Committee of the UPC. Their disappearance had not been reported.

In reply to questions from the CHAIRMAN, Mr. LEFEVRE (Special Representative) said that even if there were any foundation for the allegations in petition T/PET.5/691, it had not been until the end of May that measures had been taken against the active members of the UPC.

The CHAIRMAN asked whether the meeting of the traditional chiefs at Bafang had really been held under the chairmanship of the local authorities.

Mr. LEFEVRE (Special Representative) said that the petitioners' allegation was devoid of any foundation. If the authorities had been aware of the intentions of the indigenous inhabitants, they would have tried, by persuasion and if necessary by force, to prevent the disturbances.

In reply to a further question from the CHAIRMAN, Mr. LEFEVRE (Special Representative) said that Mr. Moise Lontchi's allegations were unfounded. No one had been either killed or injured in the area and there had been no destruction beyond that already mentioned.

The CHAIRMAN inquired why Mr. Lontchi had been deposed from the chieftainship of the village of Batcham.

Mr. LEFEVRE (Special Representative) pointed out that that was a matter of customary law, in which there had been no reason for the Administering Authority to intervene. Mr. Lontchi seemed to think that, as the son of the former chief, he should automatically succeed to that position. The people of the village had, however, chosen to elect someone else.

In reply to further questions from the CHAIRMAN, Mr. LEFEVRE (Special Representative) denied that there had been any incidents at M'Balmayo or that there had been any military forces or police there other than the police usually stationed in the area. He admitted that the authorities had checked some identities in the course of their efforts to ascertain the whereabouts of one Mpaye Hyacinthe, who had been reported to be in M'Balmayo at the end of May.

The CHAIRMAN asked who were the agitators who had come from Douala to Foubot and whether they had been brought to trial.

Mr. LEFEVRE (Special Representative) explained that the presence of five armed persons had been reported to the Chief Subdivisional Officer, who had taken them into custody; they had then admitted that they had been sent from Douala to murder the Sultan of the Bamouns. Up to 30 November they had not yet been brought up for trial.

Mr. SERAPHIN (Haiti) asked for details of the disturbances which the UPC had been trying to work up in the Bamiléké and Bamoun regions.

Mr. LEFEVRE (Special Representative) said that the UPC had created disturbances by organizing meetings on the public highway and building barricades across the roads.

In reply to questions from Mr. SERAPHIN (Haiti) and Mr. BENDRYSHEV (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics), Mr. LEFEVRE (Special Representative) said that on the occasion of the incidents at Bafoussam and Bafang the police had taken action as soon as the authorities had been informed of the disturbances. There had not been many police available, for the two platoons of guards normally stationed in the region had had to be sent to Mungo. There had been seven guards at Bafoussam and twelve at Bafang. Their appearance had sufficed to calm the population and they had not been obliged either to give the statutory warnings or to use their weapons. There had been no casualties.

Mr. SERAPHIN (Haiti) inquired whether the police intervened when members of the UPC were attacked.

Mr. LEFEVRE (Special Representative) said that the Administering Authority did everything in its power to protect people and organizations and their property, regardless of their affiliation to any particular political party.

In reply to a question from Mr. BENDRYSHEV (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics), Mr. LEFEVRE (Special Representative) pointed out that the Administering Authority had been unable to take any preventive measures or any precautions for it had been unaware that the UPC intended to hold any meetings.

Mr. BENDRYSHEV (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) was astonished that in the present case the Administering Authority had done nothing to prevent the disturbances, whereas it took every measure to guarantee the holding of meetings by other parties or organizations. He asked whether steps had been taken to punish the guilty and to grant the injured parties compensation.

Mr. LEFEVRE (Special Representative) pointed out that determination of the damages to be paid by the culprits was a matter for the courts and not for the civil authorities. The malefactors, who were opponents of the UPC, had been arrested and were awaiting trial.

Mr. BENDRYSHEV (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) asked whether among the seventeen persons arrested there were supporters of the UPC.

Mr. LEFEVRE (Special Representative) repeated that no member of the UPC had been among those arrested after the destruction of the two huts. Certain members of the UPC had admittedly been arrested in the Bamiléké area but that was only because a warrant for their arrest had been issued after the Mungo and Douala incidents. During the months of May and June there had been a total of fifteen probable members of the UPC arrested on account of incidents in other areas.

Mr. BENDRYSHEV (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) asked how the Administering Authority had learned that the five agitators arrested at Foubot had been planning to assassinate the Sultan of the Bamouns.

Mr. LEFEVRE (Special Representative) explained that after their arrest they themselves had confessed to that intention.

Mr. BENDRYSHEV (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) asked what had been the reason for their arrest and what those five persons were agitating for.

Mr. LEFEVRE (Special Representative) admitted that their term "agitation" was not capable of precise legal definition. In the case in question it was the people of Foubot who had notified the Chief Subdivisional Officer of the presence of armed men; it was only after their arrest had been decided upon that they had confessed their intention. The decision to charge them had been taken by the examining magistrate, who had considered that their movements might be part of a general plan, the serious nature of which could be conjectured in the light of the incidents happening elsewhere.

Mr. BENDRYSHEV (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) pointed out that the Administering Authority, in its written statement, spoke about "five agitators". He would like to know what they were agitating for and how this had led to their arrest.

Mr. LEFEVRE (Special Representative) agreed that the term "agitators" might lend itself to confusion. He was prepared to amend the text of the Administering Authority's observations and to replace the sentence in question by the following: "At Foubot, five persons who had come from Douala and were thought to be a danger to law and order were arrested."

Mr. BENDRYSHEV (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) asked what was the basis of the Administering Authority's statement that there were no more than thirty supporters of the UPC in the Bamoun region, since the Special Representative had said that the Administration had not counted the members or supporters of any party.

Mr. LEFEVRE (Special Representative) stated that in any given region the supporters of a party as well known as the UPC could easily be recognized, especially when there were not many of them. The Administering Authority had, however, given their number only approximately.

Mr. BENDRYSHEV (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) noted that in its observations (T/OBS.5/71) the Administering Authority stated that "a few barricades were set up on the roads". He asked who had set them up and, if they had been set up by the people who wanted to hold a meeting, why they were necessary.

Mr. LEFEVRE (Special Representative) explained that the barricades had been set up by UPC members but that the local public had destroyed them at the same time as it had scattered the demonstrators, about an hour before the police had intervened. In the Cameroons barricades of that type, even though "defensive", as the Soviet Union representative considered, were prohibited by the authorities.

Mr. BENDRYSHEV (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) thought it strange that the police had noticed neither the construction of the barricades, which had presumably been erected by the UPC members for fear of an attack, nor the gathering of the UPC nor even that of the local population. He went on to inquire who were Nitchou Jean, Kamga Joseph and Tapchom Joseph, mentioned in petition T/PET.5/634.

Mr. LEFEVRE (Special Representative) said that they were traditional tribal chiefs of the Bamiléké.

Mr. BENDRYSHEV (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) observed that in the same petition it was said that some elements had been conveyed in lorries belonging to the Administration and had subsequently proceeded to commit acts of violence, in particular looting Jean Bouedeu's village on 29 May. He asked whether the Administering Authority had taken any action against those persons who had committed acts of violence.

Mr. LEFEVRE (Special Representative) said it was true that certain local chiefs had made a tour of their chiefdoms at the end of May, no doubt to conjure the people to remain calm. The Administration's lorries were not, however, and never had been, at their disposal. The police had been unable to intervene, since there had been neither looting nor destruction. The petitioner's statements were entirely without foundation.

Mr. BENDRYSHEV (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics), referring to petition T/PET.5/796, asked who had been Chief of Batcham for two years if, as it would appear from the replies of the Special Representative, it was not the petitioner himself.

Mr. LEFEVRE (Special Representative) stated that the Administering Authority had checked the petitioner's position with regard to the chiefdom of the village of Batcham but that there were thousands of villages in the Bamiléké area and it had been unable to carry its inquiries further.

Mr. BENDRYSHEV (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) observed that the Trusteeship Council had not been receiving petitions from every Bamiléké village. The petition to which he was referring dealt with a specific complaint which it would not have been difficult to verify. He wished to know whether it was true that the new chief had a criminal record.

Mr. LEFEVRE (Special Representative) replied that the Administering Authority had inquired into the petitioner's complaint but had found no reason to pursue the matter further. Chiefs were elected democratically and the Administration was content to ratify the expressed will of the people. Moreover, there was no legislative or administrative measure which prohibited the election of a man who had been sentenced, if at the time of his election, he was not under any legal disability.

Mr. BENDRYSHEV (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) did not think that the tribal system was a democratic one. He noted that the Trusteeship Council itself, in a number of resolutions, had urged the Administering Authorities to replace the tribal system by a democratic system of representative organs of local government.

The criminal past of the new chief was a matter of interest because the chief was alleged to have caused disorders resulting in dead and wounded.

Turning to petition T/PET.5/774, he wished to know whether it was true that the Journal Officiel of 30 March had published the sentence quoted by the petitioners.

Mr. LEFEVRE (Special Representative) said that he would secure the information without delay.

Mr. de CAMARET (France) observed that that incident bore no direct relation to those which the Committee had been examining at its recent meetings.

Mr. BERENDSEN (Secretary of the Committee) explained that the Secretariat had included in document T/C.2/L.197 summaries of some petitions which dealt almost entirely with the May incidents, although they did touch on other questions. The object was to avoid any need for the Committee to return to those petitions later, especially as the secondary matters related to the end of May. That meant that they were almost simultaneous with the May incidents but if the Administering Authority was not yet in a position to communicate its observations on them, the Committee might leave them aside for discussion at a later stage.

The CHAIRMAN said that the Committee would defer consideration of the matters in petition T/PET.5/774 which had no direct connexion with the May incidents.

Mr. BENDRYSHEV (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) requested details of the fire which, according to the authors of petition T/PET.5/774, took place in the night of 19/20 May.

Mr. LEFEVRE (Special Representative) replied that there had been no fire at M'Balmayo on that date.

Mr. BENDRYSHEV (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) asked whether corporal punishment was prohibited in the Territory and whether the petitioners' allegations concerning whipping were correct.

Mr. LEFEVRE (Special Representative) replied that corporal punishment was strictly prohibited and that the allegations in the petition were without foundation.

Mr. BENDRYSHEV (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) wished to know what methods the police had used in searching for Mpaye Hyacinthe.

Mr. LEFEVRE (Special Representative) stated that the date on which the police had searched for Mpaye Hyacinthe was not the date indicated by the petitioners. The police investigation had been conducted without arrests, maltreatment or house searches, by questioning passers-by in public places.

Mr. HAMILTON (Australia) noted that the Administering Authority used the term "UPC troops" (T/OBS.5/71, page 22) and wished to know whether in the present instance the members of the UPC had appeared to be under strict discipline and in what hostile demonstrations they had engaged.

Mr. LEFEVRE (Special Representative) explained that, as in the Mungo area, armed troops had gathered at Bafoussam and Bafang on the public highway and had built barricades, but no doubt because their forces were small and the indigenous population had been hostile to them, they had not gone into action. The only result had been some property damage among UPC followers.

Mr. HAMILTON (Australia) concluded from the details furnished by the Special Representative and the Administering Authority's observations that the hostile demonstrations against institutions with a wide following in the region, in other words against the Rassemblement du peuple camerounais and the traditional chiefs, had by no means been spontaneous demonstrations but premeditated acts of provocation. He asked if the Administration had been able to establish whether the counter-demonstrations and the burning of the UPC headquarters had been organized or spontaneous.

Mr. LEFEVRE (Special Representative) said that it was rather difficult for him to reply since the police had arrived after the people had intervened. However, from eye-witness reports the Administering Authority was certain that the public reaction had been spontaneous.

Mr. HAMILTON (Australia) asked if the inquiry had established whether those who participated in the counter-demonstrations had belonged to a political party other than the UPC.

Mr. LEFEVRE (Special Representative) said that a very small minority of them had been followers of the Rassemblement du peuple camerounais but that most of them had reacted against the intrusion of what they had considered to be outside elements.

Mr. HAMILTON (Australia) asked whether in the view of the Administering Authority the UPC demonstration had been an attack on public order and whether the police would have intervened if they had arrived in time.

Mr. LEFEVRE (Special Representative) replied that the UPC gathering had been absolutely illegal from the very beginning since it consisted of armed persons assembled on the public highway and the police would have used every means to disperse them.

Mr. BENDRYSHEV (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) asked how the Administering Authority reconciled the provisions of the Trusteeship Agreement, including its objectives of promoting the political advancement of the Territory, with the fact that political parties recognized by the Administration had to arm their followers in order to hold a meeting, had to build barricades around their meeting places and even with such precautions were prevented from assembling by the intervention of elements supported by the police.

Mr. LEFEVRE (Special Representative) observed that the people who had interfered with UPC meetings had never been supported by the police. He added that freedom of assembly was recognized throughout the Territory except on the public highway. One of the principal duties imposed on the Administering Authority by the Trusteeship Agreement was to ensure public order and therefore to disperse armed assemblies which might endanger it.

Mr. de CAMARET (France) pointed out that the UPC had held thousands of meetings in the Cameroons in complete liberty.

The meeting rose at 4.35 p.m.