Cameroon Public Administration: Civil Servants Involvement in Politics and the Impact on State Performance

Prof. Simon Tata Ngenge

Vice Dean, Faculty of Law and Political Science, University of Bamenda, Cameroon

Abstract:-The public service in Sub Saharan Africa has always been the tool available to governments for the implementation of their developmental agenda. In this direction, civil servants constitute a vital force in the day to day functioning of the State. Cameroon somehow presents a startling deviation from this standard as civil servants freely combine public work life and political militancy. This paper from this perspective contends among other issues that the involvement of civil servants in partisan politics creates a precarious balance between productivity and performance in the civil service. The problem is that the thin divide between the civil service and political parties wears down the financial resources of the state. It is also observed that patrimonial political links contribute to break down the spirit of discipline, hard work, and meritocracy and encourages corrupt practices like, lack of accountability, bribery, nepotism, misappropriation and embezzlement of public funds. The end of the Federal System of Government in 1992 merged the Civil Servants of West and East Cameroons. The end result was that workers in the Public Sector became militants of the ruling party, Cameroon National Union (CNU)/ Cameroon People's Democratic Movement (CPDM). The Public Service was politicised which made the re-emergence of Multipartym of 1990 impossible for opposition parties to win any major election.

Keywords: Colonial Administration, Civil Servants, Public Service, Party Politics, State Funds.

I. INTRODUCTION

The Cameroon civil service of today (2018) has over 400,000 strong force on its payroll excluding those working in Government corporations. Although with a population of 20 million people, it is a very strong force in the society that the private sector is underdeveloped. The general concept is that civil servants serve government by running the administrative machinery of the state, keeping it functional to response to citizens' needs.

To better understand the issues of civil servants and political militancy in Cameroon, it is necessary to trace the inherited cultures of that core from the two colonial legacies. The British and French colonization of Cameroon had an impact on the civil servants political behaviours.²

What is at stake is the malfunctioning of the public service because of polarization and the waste of state resources for the activities of the ruling partyvis-à-vis the other political parties. Thus if the core absented itself from

partisan politics it would enhanced efficiency and promote inclusiveness.

II. WHAT IS NEW?

It is the fact that in Cameroon since the rebirth of multiparty democracy, the ruling Cameroon People's Democratic Movement (CPDM) party has continued politicisation of the civil service as it was during the one party system. There is no Civil Service Commission. Civil servants are managed by Ministers. All top civil servants and heads of government corporations are militants of the ruling party or from the presidential majority parties. This has held democracy hostage and promoted bad governance. It is rareto find a top ranking civil servant of the opposition party in position of authority and power in spite his/her competence.

The Cameroon civil service core is virtually a branch/wing of the ruling party. The overwhelming power of the party over state institutions has enormously influenced the consciences of the electorate. They declare in favour of the ruling party in other to survive and live in affluence. They squander state revenue to make sure the party wins in all elections to maintain their privileged positions. What would happen tothese civil servants if another party came to power?

III. BACKGROUND OF CAMEROON CIVIL SERVANTS

The Republic of Cameroon is made of two entities from different colonial backgrounds. French Cameroun that was colonised by the French and Southern Cameroons that was colonized by the British after World War I following the defeat ofthe Germans. Historically, there was one country from 1884 to 1916when she was annexed by the Germans. The German administration in Kamerun ended with the First World War when she was defeated by the combined forces of Britain, France and Belgium. 3After the defeat, the Belgians withdrew and the British and French set up a joined administration in German Kamerun. The joined administration known as the condominium lasted from 1914 to 1916, after which the two colonial powers partitioned Kamerun into a ratio of 1:5. Britain took the smallest part while France had the largest. The partition was confirmed by the League of Nations in 1922. It then became a League of Nations Mandated territory under tutelage of Britain and France. When the United Nations Organisation was created in 1945 the territory was still governed by Britain and France as a UN trusteeship. It should be noted that the British who took 1/5 of Kamerun, further divided it into two parts namely: the British Southern Cameroons and British Northern Cameroons. The British during the period introduced the Indirect Rule system of governance by the use of Traditional Rulers to govern the people following their traditional laws. On the other hand the French introduced the direct rule system of administration based on assimilation.⁴

The background of these two colonial states helps us to understand the approaches civil servants adopted towards political militancy during the epoch of colonial administration, independence, re-unification and the creation of a unified civil servant core in 1972.

From historical records, the people of French Cameroun after World War II as nationalist movement emerged on the political arena were active militants of political parties and civil servants at the same time. This illuminated by the rapid spread of Union des population du Cameroun (Union of the Populations of Cameroon) (UPC) in the 1950s. The UPC party widely viewed as the first nationalist party in French Cameroun was created in 1948 in Bassa Douala by Bouly Leonard.⁵ Its political agenda which requested for immediate independence of Cameroon, Reunification of Cameroons and a nation free from French and British influence was seen by the French colonial authorities as radical and dangerous to her interest in Cameroon. 6The party because of its ideology and perceptionsof independent Cameroon ran in conflict with the French colonial government. One of the quick measures the government took was to transfer many of its militants who were civil servants to remote parts of French Cameroun. The spillovereffect was that they introduced the UPC party in the regions where they posted. To this effect the party became widely known and its ideology spread like wild fire.

The government even worked in complicity with the missions for some of their servants(Teachers) suspected to be supporters of the UPC to be transferred to remote areas. This was with the aim of containing their political activities in the urban areas where they were teaching for the missions. The teachers of Douala and Yaounde were those mostly affected. This political victimization of both public andprivate servants of the UPC militants through punitive transfers did not off root the spirit of their political activism. In the interior areas where they were sent, they instead radicalized their political opinions and educated people on their political platform. The policy government adopted by using technics in an attempt to water down the growth of UPC by sending ring leaders to remote areas instead popularized the party in the entire territory of French Cameroun and beyond.

This wanton transfer of both public and private servants slowed down state functioning. The UPC civil servants and others suspected tobe UPC adherence were

constantly transferred by the colonial administration from one place to another. This had an impact on the functioning mechanism of the state in terms of cost and destabilization of families. Families were divided as those transferred could not carry their families along all the time.¹⁰

From this brief analysis, it is evident that in French Cameroun, civil servants were heavily involved in politics. The other Nationalist Parties that emerged in French Cameroun such as *Bloc Democratique* (BD) of Andre Marie Mbida and Union Camerounaise (UC) of Ahmadou Ahidjo had many of their active militants who were civil servants. Ahmadou Ahidio who was the founder of UC himself was a servant with the Ministry of Post civil Telecommunication. These parties and others were not seen by the French colonial administration as radical and their civil servant militants were not persecuted as those of the UPC.¹¹

The UPC was banned in 1955 and they were out of the political scene. The elections that were held in 1957, Andre Marie Mbida became the first Prime Minister in the government that was preparing the trusteeship territory to independence. Because of political differences and approaches to national issues and in particular the method he adopted to deal with UPC issue engendered the French to drop him as Prime Minister and he was succeeded by Ahamadou Ahid join 1958 who led French Cameroon to independence on 1st January 1960.

The UPC civil servants after the party was banned moved into hidings in the Bassa and Bamileke regions and organized themselves in a resistance front against the French colonial rule. The leaders of this home front were referred to as the *margusards* in other words as terrorists. The ring leaders were Reuben Um-Nyobe, Mayi Matip and Wambou De Courrant. Others in their majority fled to Southern Cameroons and established a base in Kumbatown. In that trust territory, the party changed its name to One Kamerun (OK) with front line militants like Albert Mukong. Others like Dr. Felix Moumie went on exile to Guinea Conakry, some to Egypt, Ghana, USSR and UK. After the banned of the UPC, civil servants continued to militate in the parties of Mbida and Ahidjoand other parties that were seen by the French as friendly. They played a vital role in the transition of French Cameroun to independence. The French colonial masters saw Ahidjo after Mbidaas a more likely leader to solve the UPC uprising which was draining away all human, financial and military resources. 12

IV. THE SITUATION OF CIVIL SERVANTS AND POLITICS IN SOUTHERN CAMEROONS

In the Southern Cameroons political landscape, the situation was quite different. The civil services core although very small was not involved in partisan politics. E.M.L. Endeley on becoming Leader of Government Business and later Prime Minister of Southern Cameroons recruited Yorubas into the civil service and the judiciary. ¹³In February 1960, the Southern Cameroons public service instituted an

advisory Public Service Commission. The Igbos that constituted a majority of foreigners in the territory were not recruited. They were mostly in the private sector. The leading political parties as the territory was moving towards independence included Kamerun National Congress(KNC), Kamerun People's Party (KPP)of P.M Kale, which later merged with KNC in June 1960 gave birth to Cameroon People's National congress (CPNC) with E.M.L.En deley as its leader and Kamerun National Democratic Party (KNDP) of J.N.Foncha. Civil servants like Foncha resigned from his public servicebefore engaging in politics. They did politics as full time politicians. Statistics of those in Southern Cameroons Public service shows that:

Out of a total of 7184 persons employed in the government service, 5,161 were Cameroonians, 1,877 were other Africans and 146 were non-Africans. Of this total, 4,328 were employed by the Department of Public Works. The number of Native Authority staff was estimated at 1810. 14

When Foncha became Premier of Southern Cameroons in 1959, he launched the recruitment of Cameroonians into the public service. He invited those who were working elsewhere and integrated them in to the public service. To meet up with the demand of man power, there was a mass education crusade to recruit in the civil service. To attain these objectives, grants were given to religious denominations to train Cameroonians, foreign scholarships were granted to Cameroonians to study abroad. Anthony Ndi points out that:

This system was so effective and productive that by the time of the merger of the civil service of West and East Cameroons to form a federal civil service, West Cameroon with only 20% of the population provided many more graduate civil servants than their East Cameroun counterpart. The competence of the Southern/West Cameroon civil service remains inestimable, proverbial nostalgic to those who experienced it operating without computers but equipped with highly motivated, assiduous and diligent personnel, a civil servant employed on 29th of the month was sure to be paid his dues salary at month end just as those who retired had their pension benefits paid on the spot or spread over a period of months.¹⁵

Southern Cameroons became independent and reunited with Republic of Cameroun on 1st October 1961. By the federal constitution arrived at in Foumban it became the Federated States of West Cameroon while Cameroon Republic became East Cameroon. In the state of West Cameroon, the CPNC and KNDP of Endeley and Foncha were the most powerful political parties. The civil servants were not involved in partisan politics. Thus the civil service

was not politicizedas in East Cameroon. Civil servants were sympathizers of political parties and their militancy's was not publicly manifested. Unlike in East Cameroon, they were not involved political meetings or campaigns. Individuals who wanted to join a political formation had to resign from their post. The state of West Cameroon had a parliamentary system of government whereby the Prime Minister came from the party that won the highest number of seats in Parliament. ¹⁶ The Parliament evolved from 1957 with 13 seats to 36 seats in 1965.

On this score, the civil servants were not victimized by any political party that came to power. There was a Secretary of State for Public Service and a Civil Services Commission that evaluated and promoted civil servants by their performance. Since civil servants were not involved in partisan politics, they were no abusive transfers, laxity in state administrative machinery and low output emanating from psychological trauma and separation of families as was the case in French Cameroun. The state did not losemoney from the government treasury through abusive transfers of civil servant neither was money lost on civil servants who went on campaigns, re-organization of basic wings of the party nor sensitization.¹⁷

While the civil servants were not by and large victimized, for non-militancy in political parties, the traditional rulers who did not support the party in power did not receive favours. For example, those who did not support J.N.Foncha's party were taken off from the list of candidates into the West Cameroon House of Chiefs. The KNDP led government favoured traditional rulers who were supporters of the KNDP party and many of them became members of the West Cameroon House of Chiefs. The areas that favoured the political party at the time also received development packets and those who were in opposition were side-lined. This prejudicedbehaviour of political leaders led to imbalance in development. ¹⁸

V. CIVIL SERVANTS AND POLITICS DURING THE FEDERAL REPUBLIC, 1961-1972

During the era of the Federal Republic which lasted from 1st October 1961 to 20th May 1972, political parties were restricted to their states. But in the federation, a major political event occurred. The political parties of East Cameroon and those of West Cameroon on 1st September 1966, merged and formed the Cameroon National Union (CNU). By this time in East Cameroon, the government of President Ahmadou Ahidjo had silenced all the political parties and co-opted some into his party Union Camerounaise(UC). 19 In West Cameroon at the said period CPNC, KNDP and Cameroon Union Congress (CUC) of S.T.Muna joined Ahidjo's UC to form Cameroon National Union(CNU). It should be noted that in the federation there were three categories of civil servants; Federal Civil Servants and West and East Cameroon states' civil servants. The federal civil servants were under President Ahidjo and those

of West and East Cameroon were under the Prime Ministers of the respective federated states.

VI. CIVIL SERVANTS DURING ONE PARTY SYSTEM

The creation of CNU marked the beginning of the one party oligarchy. It lasted from 1 September 1966 toNovember 1990when the multiparty democracy re-emerged, following the wind of change from Eastern Europe. The creation of the CNU, which functioned like a communist party, had all the civil servants as members. It was referred to as the Grand Unified National Party. Its author preached national unity and national integration. President Ahamadou Ahidjo who was it creator was referred to as the "Father" of the Nation. It had a structure of Communist model. It had the Youth wing, Women's wing and men's wing. It had branches, sections, Central Community and the Political Bureau.²⁰ The founder of the party promised the people it was to be a free, open, grass roots, egalitarian movement within which all citizens would have a say. ²¹These lofty pronouncements therefore meant that there was to be freedom of expression and the party was to be democratic. This was themain philosophy of the party that attracted West Cameroon politicianswho saw him as a God sent leader.²²

With the creation of what its president called "Unity" party, all state functionaries and non-functionariesbecame members. Members were to buy membership cards which they hardly did. There was no separation between the state and the party. During election campaigns (which were just a formality) civil servants were those nominated by the Central Committee to lead campaign teams in their different localities. The budget of their different services went for financing of party activities. They went on government tickets to carry out party activities. They had mission orders, petrol and cars to fuel and extra money to distribute to militants during manifestations.²³ The active participation was same for those functionaries of government cooperation and businessmen. The advantage with the one party system was that political ranging or squabbles died down.Development was giving priority of place and national unity and integration became a sing song.

The disadvantages were many:

- 1. The state money was used for party activities
- 2. Civil servants were absent from work as they wished under the pretence of carrying out party activities.
- 3. Hard work was not easily rewarded as those promoted were theones who worked hard for the party.
- 4. Indiscipline became rampant as it was difficult to control civil servants. Those who failed to do their duties and when reproached, it was perceived as persecuting active militants.
- 5. Under the banner of the party, laissez-faire became the order of the day in the public services manifested by absenteeism and abuse of power.

 It caused confusion in administrative hierarchy. In an administrative division, it was not known who was thehighest authority the Senior Divisional Officer or the CNU Section President.

The overriding powers of senior political officers were enormous. Members of the Central Committee and Political Bureau became untouchable. In the name of the party, they could do and undo with the transfers of civil servants. The advisory public service commission no longer existed and the management of civil servants wasleft at the mercy of ministers, top party officials and directors of central administration. Favouritism in appointments, promotions and recruitments in lucrative state institutions became very common. This led to frustration in the civil service as competent civil servants who had no one "God fathers" remained stagnant and those favoured rose from behind tothe top. Those senior civil servants with cumulative functions in the ruling party lacked financial accountability and probity.²⁴

State performance was abysmally low and bottle necks bureaucracy instituted. As a consequence of bottle necks, corruption became an accompanying element. Civil servants involvement in politics did institutionalise corrupt practices like misappropriation of state funds, favouritism, tribalism and nepotismat all levels of the public service.

The grand unified National Party (CNU) opened branches and sections abroad, where Cameroonian could militate. These structures were occasionally visited by home bases party leaders who were in majority civil servants. From these political actives, civil servants become highly involved in politics. Civil servants leaders transport fairs, lodging, feeding and mission allowances were paid from states coffers. The time spent on political activities and works in the offices were not done, thus, the state lost money and services.

During campaigns and re-organization of the party, the central committee in Yaoundé sent central committee delegations to the various parts of the country. Like their comrades who went abroad, their activities were financed by the statetreasury. It weighed heavily on the state as money allotted for development and running of the ministries was deviated to party activities.²⁵

The one party system lasted from 1st September 1996 toNovember 1990. Civil servants and the masses who served the party at the grassroots had no say in choosing their leaders. They did not propose members of the central committee, political bureau or candidates for municipal councils or parliament. It was the Political Bureau and the Central Committee that proposed candidate for them to confirm in an election. Those of the Political Bureau and the Central Committee were chosen by the President of the party (Head of State). In this political landscape of excessive politicisation, there was lack of accountability, representation and inability to promote public interest and thus authoritarian tendencies emerged. ²⁶

VII. THE CIVIL SERVANTS IN MULTIPARTY ERA

The unique public service that emerged in 1972, failed apart with the re-emergence of multi-party democracy in 1990. At that period, the one party system of President Ahmadou Ahidjo put in place on 1st September 1966 had developed strong oppositions within its ranks. The CNU party in 1985 at the Bamenda congress under Ahidjo's successor Paul Biya changed its name to CPDM. Within the party there were conservatives, progressives and revolutionaries. A crack had developed within the party as people were tired of the one party system because it was not liberal and democratic as President Ahmadou Ahidjo had promised.²⁷

In 1990 when the wind of change from Eastern Europe blew across Francophone Sub-Saharan Africa as a deadly influenza, Cameroon was not spared. Themasses and the middle class welcomed the wind of change and called on President Paul Biya to liberalize the political space. The conservatives within the CPDM vehemently opposed the call for multi-party democracy.²⁸ In spite of their opposition the president surprised them and signed into law a decree permitting other parties to be legalized. It was a welcomed move and by the end of the year 2000, there were over 280 political parties in Cameroon.²⁹

The civil servants, who were discontented with the CNU/CPDM, massively joined the opposition parties. Those who remained in the former unique party (CPDM) continued to enjoy the privileges of using state facilities for political activities and the privilege positions they held in the public service. The CPDM that remained in power adopted a resilient strategy to hold back civil servants. Almost all the top ranking functionaries and directors of Government owned corporations were nominated from the CPDM civil servants. Like in the former one party system they used the resources allocated to them to carry out party activities when need did arise. Many of those who left the party once appointed quickly declared their allegiance to the ruling party. 30

The economic crises of 1985 that rendered the people very poor due to bad governance on the one hand and on the other the fall in cash crops prices; like coffee, tea, rubber, and cocoa contributed enormously to the deviation of civil servants and jobless individuals to return to the CPDM party. This was with hopes to have a thing that will sustain them, which the opposition did not offer. In reality a majority of civil servants returned to the CPDM with the hopes of being appointed or not be sent to remote areas. The opposition for many reasons had not succeeded to capture power like in Benin Republic. The most desired change the opposition preached never came.³¹

In this new dispensation, civil servants in the ruling party victimized those who were strong militants of front line opposition parties like SDF and UNDP. Many who were very active in urban centres were transferred to remote areas or dropped from posts of responsibility which they held. The civil servants in opposition parties suffered what the UPC

militants experienced in the late 1940s and the early 1950s in French Cameroun. The acts of wanton or abusive transfers were perpetuated mostly by section presidents in their constituencies, as a sign of commitment to the CPDM and loyalty to the president. Those who held key positions at all levels of the party hierarchy are mostly civil servants.

VIII. CONCLUSION

This paper has demonstrated that the civil servants of Cameroon evolved from two colonial backgrounds English and French. In British Southern Cameroons after independence and reunification civil servants were not involved in politics until 1972. In this part of the country, politicians resigned from public service before engagement in politics. The majority of the early political leaders were teachers working with the missionaries. They resigned and formed political parties like J. N. Foncha. The civil service core was very small and was made up mostly of foreigners who were recruited in the first government under E.M.L. Endeley. At independence, the government of J.N. Foncha equally had foreigners who held strategic positions in the civil service. Politics was for politicians and the civil servants were not involved in partisan politics. The civil servants of West Cameroon became involved in politics when the unified party CNUwas created in 1966 and later on changed to CPDM in 1985. From 1990when multipartyism was re-introduced in Cameroon, they continued to militate in different political parties.

The findings also revealed that in French Cameroun, from the advent of political parties in the 1940s, civil servants were militants of political formations. The party that raised dust was the UPC which because of its ideology antagonized the French colonial administration and post-colonial government of Ahmado Ahidjo. The civil servants of UPC party were heavily victimized through wanton transfers and persecution.

The involvement of civil servants in politics affected the administrative mechanism of the state, as they often absented from work to carry out party activities. It weighed on the state financially as these functionaries used government money and other resources to carry out party activities. The civil servants in the public and Para-public could no longer be disciplined for absenteeism as they would claimed they were doing party work. There was no enthusiasm or commitment as active militants of the ruling party were promoted or appointed over their seniors. The government treasury suffered most as money allocated for the running of government services and to carry out development projects was deviated by lackeys for the ruling party activities.

The impending danger is that if an opposition party comes to power what would happen with the top civil servants of the states who are in majority militants of the ruling party? The involvement of civil servants in politics and the absence of a public service commission made the civil service

ineffective in service delivery to the public. With this state of affairs what are the prospects of the civil service in Cameroon as she is moving towards emergence? Can a civil servant develop a career without belonging to the ruling party?

END NOTE

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