Bamenda Coffee Farmers and the Unfulfilled Expectations of Unification, 1961 – 1971: A Decade of Disappointment

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ABSTRACT

It is fifty three years since West Cameroon achieved its independence through reunification. An appraisal of the journey so far taken has been biased in favour of political issues. How the peasant farmers have fared in a reunified Cameroon remains a neglected theme. This paper examines the economic position of coffee farmers in Bamenda for the first ten years of reunification and independence. Based on archival sources and oral evidence, the paper concludes that the expectations of the Bamenda coffee farmers remained unfulfilled in a reunified Cameroon during this period.

Keywords: Bamenda, Cameroon, Coffee Farmers, Reunification, Disappointment

INTRODUCTION

At independence in 1961, coffee was one of the main sources of foreign exchange earnings in Bamenda - the present day North West Region of Cameroon. More than 85% of the rural population of this region was involved in the coffee industry in one way or the other. The independence of the territory by Re-unifying with the French speaking part on 1st October 1961 came with anxieties and great expectations on the part of the coffee farmers most of whom interpreted independence as a panacea to the problem of earning higher income from their coffee. The euphoria that followed Independence was however general as people of all walks of life were full of joy and celebration. At least, Southern Cameroonians were celebrating that the indignities of colonialism would be no more and they would be able to take their destiny into their own hands. Colonialism had subjugated, humiliated and exploited Africans with reckless inconsideration that made independence the more attractive and promising. The farmers in particular looked forward to a new era of economic advancement and prosperity. The nationalists who campaigned for Re-Unification had assured the coffee and cocoa farmers of west Cameroon that they were going to receive ample and just rewards for their efforts. S. T. Muna on one of such political campaigns in his Momo constituency encouraged the farmers to plant more coffee and that a bright feature awaits coffee farmers.[1] During the pre-independence years, Premier Endeley was even quite apprehensive of any move that would make West Cameroon to join the International coffee Organization or any other international organization dealing with coffee. This was ostensibly to give the coffee farmers more independence and enable them make more profit from their produce at independence. The comparatively better coffee prices offered in Cameroon formally under French administration, coupled with its relatively better economic development, made independence through re-unification more attractive to Bamenda coffee farmers in particular. In short, Bamenda coffee farmers received independence with a lot of enthusiasm, great expectations and hope.

[1] Interview with Stephen Forsah fon Aged, 79 years at Wumnembug Meta 0n 20-9-2003

It is over fifty three years since this great event happened in the history of Cameroon and the country celebrated its belated 50th Anniversary on the 14th of March 20014. This was an occasion for stock taking and a reflection on the journey so far taken after reunification and independence. As part of the 50th anniversary celebration, there were a number of symposia and academic publications intended to assess the performance of the different facets of the economy.[2] However, most of them focused on the political actors and the politics of reunification.[3] The performance and the condition of the ordinary peasant farmers who toiled for their daily bread in a reunified Cameroon were hardly examined. By the time of celebrations, the coffee industry in the North West region which at independence was the main source of income had collapsed. Amazingly, important aspects of the economy like this one were sacrificed for political considerations during the symposia and celebrations. It is because of the neglect of what this researcher considers as an important aspect of the people's economic life that this paper focuses on the coffee farmers of Bamenda during the first ten years of reunification. The paper attempts an analysis of some of the problems that plagued the industry between 1961 and 1971. It also provides a critique of government policies towards the industry.

BAMENDA COFFEE FARMERS AND THE NEW POLITICAL DISPENSATION

Apodictically, independence opened up with problems for the coffee farmers of the North West Province of Cameroon. The euphoria and great expectations with which the farmers greeted independence was short-lived. By 1962, barely one year after independence through reunification with East Cameroon, there was already manifest discontent among many farmers in Bamenda, who felt that the government was not doing enough to address their immediate problems. They felt that the need for prompt payment for their produce and the lack of adequate Licensed Buying agents (LBAs) was of more immediate importance to them than issues with the Inter-African Coffee Organization and the International Coffee Organisation which the government was occupying itself with. The involvement of the government with these international coffee bodies was not only seen by the coffee farmers as being less important in the mist of their problems, but it was also a volte- face from pre-independence promises. Many farmers also considered the price paid for their coffee by the Marketing Board as not being encouraging enough especially when they had to compare it with what was being offered in East Cameroon. However, government officials would seem not to have been quite sensitive to the feelings of the coffee farmers on the issue.

In a memorandum to the West Cameroon Executive Council on producer prices for the 1962/63 coffee season, the secretary of state for labour, Internal Trade, Marketing and Inspection, instead argued that the Marketing Board paid an uneconomic price for arabica coffee the previous season which resulted in a loss of £120,000 to the board, while the Federal Government did not make any subventions for that purpose.[4] He rather proposed that the government should provide additional liquid cash to the Marketing Board, by refunding the financial losses, which it incurred on Arabica coffee purchases in the 1961/62 coffee season. He also reminded that it was the Federal Government that initiated the move for the

[2] Round table conferences were held in Kolise, Fumban and a final and major one was held in Buea chaired by the Prime Minister Philemon Yang.

[3] Some of these publications are; V.J. Ngoh, The Untold Story of Reunification, J.L.Nfi, Celebrating Reunification and the Eleventh Province, Senator Victor Mukete. My Odyssey.

[4] Memorandum by the Secretary of State for labour Internal Trade, Marketing and Inspection to the West Cameroon Executive Council on Coffee producers prices for 1962-1963 season (NAB,Qc/g1960/9), File No. None,"Coffee Marketing Arrangements". P.39–40.

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Marketing Board to take over the marketing of coffee the previous year and that originally a subvention was promised to the Board in its discussions with the Federal Government to assist the Board in view of the effects of coffee marketing on the Marketing Board's finances.

This wrangling and bickering over prices was an unpleasant scenario which did not seem to have augured well with many coffee farmers of Bamenda. Unification with East Cameroon had made it imperative for some level of harmonization as far as the coffee industry was concerned. This was supposed to be so particularly with regard to prices. However, as the above memorandum observed, the arrangements for the purchase of arabica coffee in East Cameroon remained different from those in west Cameroon. In East Cameroon, it noted, the purchase of Arabica coffee was made almost entirely by the co-operative societies and the price was not subsidized by the *Caisse de Stabilization* (Stabilization Fund). At the beginning of each season an advanced price was fixed and if the world market prices improved during the season, the co-operatives then paid an addition to the producers. To substantiate, he pointed out that for the 1961 – 1962 coffee season, an additional 25-30 FRS CFA per kilo was paid at the end of the season. It was not known therefore, at the beginning of the season, what the eventual price paid for coffee was going to be.

The Secretary of State then drew the attention of the West Cameroon Executive Council to what he termed "possible dangers" inherent in the Marketing Board continuing to pay an uneconomic price for arabica coffee in 1962/63. Firstly, he iterated that arabica coffee was not being subsidized in East Cameroon and it would be inconsistent with the general policy of harmonization for it to be subsidized in West Cameroon at the expense of funds attributable to other crops. He noted that the losses of £ 120,000 incurred in 1961/62 coffee season was made up for from the surplus accruing from the marketing of cocoa arguing that it could hardly be regarded as equitable that cocoa farmers should subsidize Arabica coffee farmers and that if the situation were fully appreciated by the public, it could lead to serious trouble for the Marketing Board and for the government. He opined that if it were widely known to the public, more especially the cocoa farmers, the situation could quite well result in more serious criticism than the government had faced. He went on to argue that on the grounds of equity, the action was untenable and, indeed, illegal under the terms of the Marketing Board Law which state, in clause 30 (ii) that "The reserves or funds in the account of any commodity or commodities shall not be used to pay for or in connection with the purchase, processing, transporting, storing or clearing of any other commodity."[5] On the basis of the foregoing arguments, he concluded that the Marketing Board acted on the directions of the government, in a way that was *ultra-vires* under the terms of the law in the 1961–62 coffee season. This fact, to him, gave added emphasis to the need for the government to reimburse the West Cameroon Marketing Board the amount lost in the purchase of arabica coffee in 1961 – 62

Furthermore, he stressed that if an uneconomic price was paid for arabica coffee, it would be the only crop subsidized for the 1962/63 crop season observing that in the case of robusta coffee, cocoa and palm kernels, the prices fixed were in all cases related to the economic price, which the Marketing Board could pay, taking into account the forecasts for the world market price. In the circumstance, he noted, it was difficult to justify the continuation of an uneconomic price for one crop only. He argued that in the event of the Marketing Board paying an uneconomic price for arabica coffee again in the 1962/63 coffee season, it was going to have the effect of attracting further coffee from East Cameroon and thereby increasing the burden on the West Cameroon Marketing Board. This was particularly likely

[5] Ibid.P.40

to be so if a significantly higher price was fixed at the beginning of the season when a comparatively lower price had been fixed as an advance price in East Cameroon (WCMB). Any importation of arabica coffee into West Cameroon was in contravention of an agreement between the Federal Government of Cameroon and the United Kingdom reached in 1962. By this agreement, steps were to be taken to ensure that produce receiving the benefit of Common Wealth preference exported from West Cameroon to the United Kingdom would be confined solely to produce originating in West Cameroon.

Contrary to a previous memorandum submitted by him to the west Cameroon Executive council, he advised against the waiving of the produce sales tax on coffee on the grounds that it would be difficult to justify such a decision unless the same tax was waived on other produce. He also advised that in each produce season, consideration should be given by the selling agents of the Board to the placing of forward contracts for produce if the indicators were that prices were likely to fall.

The Secretary of State's approach to the issues did not augur well with Bamenda coffee farmers at that moment in time and underlined the conflict that characterized relations between the farmers and the West Cameroon Marketing Board (WCMB). Such differences also characterized relations between the WCMB and the West Cameroon Executive Council, WCMB and the Federal Government of Cameroon (FGC) and between the farmers and the FGC over issues concerning coffee. There was hardly any harmonized policy on coffee for the two territories at independence. This gave room for discrepancies and acrimony, especially as many farmers tended to compare the operations in West Cameroon with those in East Cameroon. It was surely wrong for the Marketing Board to use money accruing from the marketing of cocoa to subsidise coffee prices as the Secretary of State for Labour, Internal Trade, Marketing and Inspection rightly pointed out. What he did not seem to have realized or at least acknowledged publicly, was the fact that a percentage of the profits from coffee was being reserved in the Stabilization Fund. This money was supposed to be used to subsidise the prices paid to the farmers in years when there was a fall in the price of coffee in the world market. One error the Board made was that it got money rather from the reserves of cocoa. Otherwise, there was no crime in subsidizing coffee prices. Such misunderstandings characterized relations between coffee farmers and government officials from independence right up to the 1990s and contributed in no small way in bringing about the collapse of the coffee industry in the North West Province. Many farmers were also tempted to treat the co-operatives with suspicion and tended to regard the organization as an arm of the government, which could not be exonerated from what they saw as government exploitation of the farmers. Meanwhile, the government and some international organizations and accredited individuals saw the co-operative network as an indispensable partner if the coffee industry in Bamenda in particular and West Cameroon in general was to achieve an international reputation.

The Gablemann Report on West Cameroonian Co-operatives, 1966

In an effort to improve the image of the co-operatives in the eyes of the planters as a creditable working association, Mr. Ekkehart Gablemann, a German economist, was commissioned to study the problems facing the co-operatives in West Cameroon with special reference to export crops and suggest possible solutions. This was the first attempt by the post-colonial government of Cameroon to closely examine the problems of the farmers not only in Bamenda, but also in West Cameroon as a whole. As late as 1966, the majority of co-operatives in West Cameroon were concentrated in Bamenda and constituted mostly of coffee co-operative produce marketing societies. An examination of the problems confronting the

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co-operatives was therefore more or less an investigation into the problems of the coffee farmers in Bamenda.

The report examined a broad range of problems facing agriculture in West Cameroon as a whole. The report stated that the poor agrarian structure, lack of capital and the low standard of technical know-how and poor cultivation methods contributed substantially to very low yields compared with plantation agriculture. It however clarified that though yields were generally poor, it was very difficult to measure per acre yields because of interplanting of different crops, which made a comparison of the efficiency of smallholder agriculture and plantation agriculture difficult. It further observed that the low yields resulted in low incomes to the farmers and on the basis of his investigations, Gablemann recommended that the network of co-operatives that existed in the territory and which had mainly been concerned with marketing could be a good channel through which assistance could be offered to the individual farmers. The report further suggested that for the attainment of meaningful development, farmers should be provided with: the means for agricultural production, agricultural extension services, and facilities to save and borrow money. It recommended that these services should be well integrated in order to achieve the best possible results. Besides selling of produce, it recommended that the co-operatives should undertake market research and information to farmers on market trends in order to direct production to the most profitable commodities. It further recommended the gradual transformation of the existing primary and secondary marketing societies into multipurpose societies to perform the functions of marketing, agricultural extension, acceptance of savings and grant of loans for productive purposes.[6]

The report also observed that though there was a continuous fall in the price of coffee in the world market, production was on a steady increase and this was particularly the case with Bamenda. The main reason it advanced for the trend was that for a long time, coffee had been regarded to be the only exportable crop, which could be cultivated in the Bamenda highlands. Many farmers had therefore increased production in order to receive higher revenues regardless of falling prices. As a result, the report strongly recommended diversification of agricultural production in Bamenda. It then submitted that the highest target of Cameroonian farmers should be the satisfactory supply of domestic markets and substitution of food imports for local production. Such agricultural reforms, it hoped, would make the economy of Bamenda less dependent on coffee and West Cameroon would generally be food self-sufficient.

The co-operative marketing societies were reformed to an extent as recommended by the report though most of the reforms came long after our terminal date. The co-operative marketing societies incorporated the functions of supply of agricultural equipments to farmers, agricultural education and agricultural extension. Agricultural diversification also became a cornerstone of government agricultural policy as recommended by the report. However, though government took up diversification as a policy, the farmers were hardly provided with the means of achieving that. Diversification required capital that was not affordable by many farmers. Market gardening as recommended by the report, required storage facilities and good roads for immediate and easy transportation of fresh fruits and vegetables. But, these facilities eluded Bamenda long after independence, rendering the transportation and marketing of such products very difficult in most parts of the province.

Farmers Discontent and Government Reactions

[6] Ekkehart Gablemann, "Report on Study Tour of West Cameroonian co-operatives from 25th November, 1965 – 30th March, 1966". Unpublished n.d

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Be that as it may, the immediate concern of the farmers remained the price paid for their produce which was not adequately addressed by the report. In the interim, a kind of frosty relationship developed between the coffee farmers of Bamenda on the one hand, and the co-operative and the West Cameroon Marketing Board (WCMB) on the other. The Bamenda coffee farmers accused the WCMB of colluding with Licensed Buying Agents (LBAs) to exploit the farmers. Bamenda coffee farmers were also highly disappointed by the fact that despite unification with East Cameroon, there still existed discrepancies in the prices of arabica coffee paid in Bamenda and in East Cameroon. According to them, the prices paid for Arabica coffee in East Cameroon were unjustifiably higher than what obtained in Bamenda.

During the 1964-65 coffee season, a delegation of the Bamenda Co-operative Marketing Association led by the President, Mr. Geh, visited the arabica coffee co-operatives of East Cameroon in Dschang, Mbouda, Baffoussam and Foumban to see and also learn how they functioned.. While in East Cameroon, they were able to learn that *Union Centrale des Co-operatives Agricoles des L'Ouest* (UCCAO) had complete monopoly of the sale of the arabica coffee crop and that there was no marketing board intervention as in West Cameroon. They also came to understand that in East Cameroon, arabica coffee prices were higher than what obtained in West Cameroon. This infuriated most of the farmers and became a source of friction between the farmers and the WCMB.

An official complaint was lodged to that effect with the Prime Minister of West Cameroon in Buea by the Bamenda coffee farmers. In a letter (Ref. No. PMO.339/108) of 5th July 1966, the Prime Minister called on the Co-operative Department to comment on the complaints of the Bamenda coffee farmers which included accusations of; exploitation of planters by co-operatives, irregular payment for their coffee, lower prices for arabica coffee in Bamenda than in East Cameroon, and non-payment of bonuses to farmers, among others. The registrar of co-operative societies, West Cameroon, S.S. Shang, put up a spirited argument against the claims of the Bamenda coffee farmers.

Shang saw in the Bamenda coffee farmers behind the petition, "divisionist" tendencies which, to him, were unhealthy for the well-being of the co-operative movement in Bamenda. On the complaint of exploitation of the farmers by the co-operatives, he argued that the allegation was false pointing out that both arabica and robusta coffee in West Cameroon were declared marketing board crops in the 1961/62 season. This meant that the final price paid to the producer was fixed by the Board and appeared in the Official Gazette. The price was also approved by the Minister of Economic Affairs, Yaounde.[7] This implied that the prices offered by the co-operatives each season were not decided by the co-operatives, but rather, by the West Cameroon Marketing Board in consultation with Yaounde. He went further to explain that the Marketing Board used "Licensed Buying Agents (LBAs) to channel payments to the producers and that it was illegal for these agents of the Board to pay less than the minimum price fixed by the Board and all farmers were informed of the fixed price at the commencement of each coffee season. He maintained that the Co-operative Movement in Bamenda was one of the LBAs of the Marketing Board catering for the interest of nearly 75% of the arabica coffee producers in Bamenda. He stated further that the co-operatives had been known to possess the best system of payment to the producer since the organization was run from top to bottom by the producers themselves. He felt that the farmers could not exploit themselves since exploitation was the one thing that a true co-operative organization sought to destroy. His argument did not however; seem to have cancelled the exploitation accusation levied against the co-operatives by the farmers.

[7] NAB, Qc/g 1961/2 "Coffee Marketing Arrangements"

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Shang described as false, the allegation of irregular payment and argued that the Marketing Board made two payments for arabica coffee. The first payment was the season's gazetted price paid throughout a season. At the end of the season that is between July and October the second payment, the bonus, was finally paid to the producers always. Comparing these arrangements with what obtained in East Cameroon, he showed that UCCAO, the arabica co-operative, to which the petitioners referred, made as many as four payments during the season.

On non-payment of bonuses to farmers, the registrar argued that the co-operatives were instrumental in the introduction of an orderly system of paying bonuses to farmers and that he had not received a single complaint from a farmer in Bamenda who had not been paid his or her bonus by a co-operative society. He argued that the co-operative staff supervised the payment of bonus in all societies and all the records revealed that farmers who were members of co-operative societies had been paid their full dues, adding that at the end of the 1963/64 season, the co-operatives in Bamenda paid an additional franc per kilo vis-à-vis the three francs CFA paid by the Marketing Board. He added, he was inclined to suspect that the petitioners could be non-co-operative society members in which case it would be advisable to know who they were, so that the Marketing Board could investigate their case and ensure they were paid, citing that one company in the Santa Area had attempted defrauding farmers in that respect.

On the contentious issue of lower prices in Bamenda than those paid by East Cameroon co-operatives, he conceded that the total price paid to the West Cameroon Arabica coffee farmers for their coffee was less than that paid by UCCAO in East Cameroon. Using the figures for 1964-65 coffee season, he showed that while East Cameroon arabica coffee farmers received 190frs per kilo, West Cameroon farmers received only 170frs per kilogram of coffee. This was common knowledge to the farmers though. He, however, explained that the difference was due to matters of policy and that while in West Cameroon the crop was marketed by the government controlled Marketing Board which fixed the price, and was responsible for the sale of the crop overseas, the East Cameroon crop was controlled by UCCAO, the one co-operative which enjoyed complete monopoly of the purchase and sale of the crop.[8] He however exonerated himself by stating that the Chief Produce Marketing Officer was the most competent person to give details of the nature of payments to the farmers. As far as the co-operatives were concerned, they paid to the producer the price fixed by the government, and were therefore not responsible for the low prices in West Cameroon, he maintained. The registrar's argument rather vindicated the fact that the farmers were at least being exploited in a way. And, the fact therefore remains that the farmers' complaint was somehow legitimate.

On the intended plans to break away from the Bamenda co-operatives by the petitioners, he submitted that the explanation so far offered exonerated the co-operatives from any charge of exploitation. It was therefore unjustifiable for any aggrieved persons to base their secessionist intentions on the activities of the co-operatives. He maintained, and rightly so, that the threat to break away from Bamenda co-operatives was motivated exclusively by the differential prices paid in the two states and every other allegation made in the petition was merely a feeble attempt to give the matter more colour and emphasis. He acknowledged that their grievances had stemmed from the visit they made to East Cameroon during the 1964-65 coffee season where they had been able to compare a number of things. The farmers had learnt from their visit that in the final analysis, the East Cameroon arabica coffee price was

[8] Ibid

higher than in West Cameroon. Again, they also discovered that UCCAO offered a variety of services to the farmers, which were not offered by the co-operatives in West Cameroon.

Shang went further to explain that in May 1966, a delegation of East Cameroon co-operators paid a working visit to West Cameroon and spoke freely with their counterparts there. During the discussions at the Bamenda co-operatives, the two systems were examined and naturally, the members of Bamenda Co-operative Marketing Association (BCMA) were inclined to favour the UCCAO system because, unlike in Bamenda where the Marketing Board marketed the produce overseas, complete control was in the hands of the farmers in the East Cameroon co-operatives. After the discussions, it was agreed by all the board members of the BCMA, that the co-operatives would, after studying carefully the actual set up and functioning of the East Cameroon arabica coffee co-operatives, request the west Cameroon Government to either grant it a monopoly for the control of the arabica coffee in Bamenda, or seek adequate representation at the Marketing Board so that conditions in both East and West Cameroon could be harmonized.

Shang accused A. G. Geh, for orchestrating the moves by some coffee farmers to break away from the Bamenda co-operatives. He expressed surprise that Geh could initiate such action, when he was actually the president of BCMA. The Registrar opined that since Geh had led a delegation to East Cameroon and seen the advantages of UCCAO over BCMA, he felt that Bamenda co-operatives should be members of UCCAO so as to benefit from these advantages. He had also led delegations to Buea asking government to grant BCMA a monopoly in the arabica coffee trade. The Registrar held that Mr. Geh was guilty of some acts of misdemeanour for which action was being taken to remove him from office and it was therefore not surprising that he was at the point in time acting over the heads of both the West Cameroon government and the co-operatives where he had played a leading role in the past. He submitted that if Geh accused the co-operatives of exploiting the farmers, he himself must bear full responsibility because he was the president of BCMA.

The Registrar concluded that the co-operatives were not guilty of the charges levelled against them and that rather, the fact that they handled more than two-thirds of the crop was evidence that farmers preferred them to any other LBA. He drew the attention of the government to the fact that the matter threatened the very existence of the Marketing Board and that it was necessary to call a round-table conference to get more views on the matter. He expressed conviction that the two movements (UCCAO and BCMA) would succeed better and the stability of the states ensured if the collaboration and coming together was carried out on equal basis, and through mutual understanding. As far as arabica coffee was concerned, he added, the Marketing Board sold the crop overseas through the same agent that sold for East Cameroon and that the standards had been harmonized. The main difference, he pointed out, lay in the control, and the final price, which to him, and was a matter for the state government to make a statement on.

It is however not surprising that the Registrar of co-operatives put up such a spirited argument in response to the petition from the coffee producers of Bamenda. As a co-operator, he did just what was expected of him – to defend the movement he served and for which he was being paid. Though his arguments were cogent enough, many coffee farmers had their misgivings about the co-operatives even when they were members of the co-operatives. They were tempted to always associate the co-operatives with the government. They saw the co-operative as an instrument through which the government was exploiting the farmers. Meanwhile, the bone of contention was the disparity in the prices of arabica coffee in West Cameroon and East Cameroon, as the Registrar himself recognized. After adopting several methods to get the issue resolved to no avail, the farmers' anger was directed at the co-

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operatives for not having enough powers to enable the farmers to reap equal benefits as those in UCCAO. The problem was not within the competence of the co-operatives but rather, a political one that required government action. Indeed, the farmers were just beginning to see some of the economic imbalances implicit in unification. The perceived economic benefits from unification and independence appeared to be a mirage. Many farmers became disappointed with the new political dispensation, as they could not comprehend why they should get a lower price for their produce than those in East Cameroon, given that there was no difference in quality between the arabica coffee produced in East Cameroon and that produced in Bamenda in particular and West Cameroon in general. The discontent and disappointment of the farmers became an issue of concern for both the government and the co-operative authorities who started thinking seriously of doing something for the improvement of the industry. One of such authorities was A. N. Lantum.

THE A. N. LANTUM MEMORANDUM ON WEST CAMEROON COFFEE INDUSTRY

A. N. Lantum was the Assistant Registrar of co-operative societies for the Bamenda Area. His memorandum was not so much on the exploitation of farmers by the co-operatives as the coffee farmers had alleged, but rather focused on the improvement of quality through improved cultural practices, so as to attract a better price in the world market. Ironically, he was advocating for higher prices through improved quality when lower prices in Bamenda *vis-à-vis* East Cameroon was not a function of quality *per se.* He claimed that the arabica coffee industry was facing a steady decline. Prices continued to drop because of the low quality coffee offered for sale, which compared unfavourably with that from other producing countries with more modern methods of farming techniques and processing equipment. He lamented that old farms were being invaded by numerous pests and diseases, and that farmers complaining of the lack of encouragement from the government had become lax and careless in the harvesting and processing of coffee. The result of this laxity and carelessness on the part of the farmers was the presence of rotten beans, damaged beans, stinkers, insect eaten beans and extraneous matter found in the coffee delivered to the co-operatives by such farmers. He also observed that some enthusiastic farmers had attempted chemical spraying of their plants but failed because their neighbours would not do likewise and there were no artificial barriers against the spread of the air borne fungus. Others dissatisfied with the old farms abandoned them for new ones, which he saw as a more expensive and time-consuming exercise. He then stated that "when we come to think that most of Bamenda depends solely on the arabica coffee then we can see the necessity for quick action to save the industry from a total collapse."[9] Lantum then made some effort to bring to light in a clear manner, some of the remote and proximate causes, contributing to the low quality of Bamenda coffee.

The Assistant Registrar drew attention to the fact that some farmers attempted to plant more trees than they could actually afford to care for and found it financially difficult to recruit labour for the harvesting of the coffee when ripe. The result of such imprudent act was that most of the coffee dried up in cherries before the harvesting was done. In some parts the dried cherries from the trees were allowed to stay in water for several days before the pericarp was washed off with the result that the taste of the coffee was badly affected.

Lantum also bemoaned the fact that small scale farmers and even entire villages were unable to raise 28.000frs to procure pulpers. They had to depend on the generosity of richer farmers sometimes living outside the village. Such farmers harvested and stored the cherries in

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[9] A.N. Lantum, "Memo on West Cameroon coffee Industry – The Dangers that lie ahead and some possible solutions" (NAB Qc/g1961/2), p.2

baskets till the coffee pulper was lent to them. It was therefore difficult for such farmers to pulp their coffee within the recommended 12 hours after picking. He also argued that even when there was a pulper, some of the farmers considered wrongly, that it was a waste of time and energy pulping only small quantities at a time. To him, this made it necessary for the farmer to be educated and supervised constantly.

Suggestions for Improvement

After critically examining those problems which he considered as the main cause of the decline of the coffee industry in West Cameroon with special reference to Bamenda, he offered a number of suggestions for the improvement of the industry. Firstly, he strongly recommended that the Marketing Board should allocate enough funds for a "Save the Industry Campaign" for which he made a detailed estimate. Secondly, he recommended the recruitment of a dynamic coffee specialist officer for a two-year term to be attached to the Ministry of Agriculture to undertake the following:

I. Establish coffee demonstration plots at strategic areas.

II. Take responsibility for control of plant pests and diseases

III. Recruit and train workers, including those from local authorities, in order to achieve (i) and (ii) above.

Regarding information to the farmers, he suggested that pamphlets, handbills etc. should be provided *en mass* for public circulation. Churches, schools, local councils, the Ministry of Agriculture, co-operatives and community development associations were to be invaluable vehicles in explaining and spreading the information.

On plant pest and disease control, he recommended that the WCMB should supply chemicals and pumps to each coffee marketing co-operative society free. Before determining the price to be paid for coffee or in the alternative the bonus at the close of the coffee season, sufficient eduction should have been made to cover the cost of the pumps and chemicals supplied or to be supplied. All farmers residing in a village served by a co-operative were to be organized to undertake mass spraying by mutual and joint effort under the supervision of the co-operatives. Such operations were to be directly supervised by the coffee specialist officer and his extension field staff. Lantum recommended that persuasion, coercion, and other measures of force should be used in saving the arabica coffee industry. To this end, he suggested that laws and regulations on coffee cultivation and processing be enacted and a machinery for enforcement set up.

Lantum condemned the existing system of harvesting coffee whereby each farmer fended for himself as most unsatisfactory and enjoined the Ministry of Co-operatives and community development to organize the villagers in gangs for mutual and joint picking. He further called on the WCMB to make available to each district a simple mobile trailer engine driven pulper with a water tank attachment. The co-operative societies were to take charge and control of such equipment for the benefit of the entire district.

In his Memo, Lantum called on the Marketing Board and the government to take careful stock of the activities of the Licensed Buying Agents (LBAs) and find out whether they had contributed anything towards the improvement of the industry. He castigated the LBAs as concentrating on profit making for themselves and as being responsible for some of the problems, which confronted the industry. He recommended that the LBAs should get out of produce marketing, thereby advocating for a marketing monopoly for the co-operatives.

Arguably, the Lantum submission was more fundamental and realistic and addressed one of the central issues in the coffee debate. His main argument was that enough should be done to improve the quality of Bamenda coffee through proper cultivation and processing practices so as to attract better prices for it in the world market. For, as a report of the co-operative department had earlier noted,

> The greatest problems facing the area (Bamenda) are the decline in world market prices for coffee and the inferior quality produced both through ignorance of proper methods of cultivation and faulty processing. The difficulty of disposing of the last season crop was, as stated, largely due to inferior quality.[10]

Admittedly, poor or inferior quality was perhaps largely responsible for the lower prices received for Bamenda arabica coffee in the world market and so constituted a serious problem that needed to be addressed. However, this did not explain the disparities in prices for arabica coffee of the same quality within Cameroon. While the above report attributed the inferior quality to both "ignorance" of proper methods of cultivation and faulty processing, it did not explain why the coffee farmers of Bamenda were still "ignorant" and faulty in their methods, 45 years after embracing the coffee business. The explanation lies in the fact that returns hardly justified efforts. There was hardly any significant difference in prices between good quality and poor quality coffee. This was especially the case when LBAs started competing for the produce of the farmers. As such, there was no particular incentive for farmers to produce high quality coffee. Those who sold their produce to private LBAs received about the same price and at times even better prices than what was paid by the co-operatives where quality was much emphasized. The only difference was that private LBAs did not pay any bonus after the official price.

Government Response

Lantum struck the right note as far as the government was concerned and government response was almost immediate. The Prime Minister of West Cameroon realized the urgency of the matter. "I have taken note", he wrote,

> … of the grave dangers which are affecting the arabica coffee industry in West Cameroon. Since this industry is the main stay of the economy of the people of the northern sector of west Cameroon, I think that time has arrived when organized campaigns against poorly produced coffee should be staged both by the department and other government organizations, for if nothing were done and the industry went into ruins, then the consequences would be far reaching. It will be necessary for the registrar of co-operatives to inform me of what necessary action he is taking to see that this industry does not get into ruins.[11]

Some frantic efforts were made within government circles to address the issues raised by Lantum. The memo was discussed by the WCMB at its 69th meeting of 18/2/1967 barely three days after submission.

Nevertheless, the WCMB considered the Lantum Memo in detail. The Board members expressed anxiety to present a scheme to government for improving the West Cameroon arabica coffee crop and to consider the possibility of the board financing such a scheme. However, members felt it would be unwise to prepare such a scheme without checking carefully what was being done in East Cameroon to improve the arabica crop since it was

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[10] Southern Cameroons, Report of the Co-operative Department, 1956-1958. Government Press:Buea,1959 p.11

[11] NAB, Qc/g 1961/2, p. 129

understood considerable progress had been made in improving the East Cameroon arabica coffee crop during the two previous years.[12] In line with this reasoning, the Board appointed a delegation, which included Messrs. Oyebog and Lantum, to visit Bafoussam to inspect the processing arrangements there. The delegation was also expected to visit the field work of UCCAO and in particular, to meet officials of the Agricultural Department in the East Cameroon arabica area, to discuss what the said Agricultural Department was doing in this field and to see some of the agricultural extension work on arabica in process.

The outcome of this visit was the adoption of a number of measures by the WCMB to improve the quality of arabica coffee in West Cameroon. Firstly, the Board adopted the system of buying by quality practiced in East Cameroon whereby the farmer was paid at the gazetted rate for that percentage of his coffee constituting good coffee and was paid nothing for the percentage representing defective beans. This system of buying by quality was thought to be advantageous to the industry in that farmers who took adequate care of their coffee had a lower percentage of defects and therefore a higher percentage of their coffee was paid for.

Secondly, in East Cameroon UCCAO had a monopoly which enabled it to take strict measures to enforce quality and the farmers were obliged to co-operate since if their coffee was of poor quality, there was no rival buying agent that could buy it. The situation was however different in West Cameroon where government was not prepared to create such a monopoly as a matter of policy but rather directed that the Marketing Board should only give advances to co-operative organisations and the West Cameroon Development Agency.

Thirdly, the Board made 2,000,000 CFA francs (approximately 4000 USD) worth of fertilizer available to farmers. The fertilizer was to be distributed to the farmers on credit the cost of which was to be deducted from their bonuses for the 1966/67 coffee season expected to be paid in October 1967.

Fourthly, the Board requested the Department of Agriculture to draw up a scheme for an extension service purely for arabica coffee to be financed by the board. An essential part of this was to be (assuming the Department considered it feasible), a trained blacksmith in each of the main arabica areas with equipment to enable him to repair pulping machines. It requested that the extension service should also include staff to move round and advise farmers on how to ferment their coffee and on proper use of their pulping machines and to see that these machines were correctly set. Emphasis was placed on pulping machines maintenance and fermentation since it was felt that a large part of the stinkers and damaged beans were created at this stage. The Chief Produce Marketing Officer suggested that the Department of Agriculture should put up an arabica coffee scheme of 3,000,000 CFA, which could be in operation by November 1967 bearing in mind that the Board would be prepared to consider making such expenditure recurrent, and perhaps be able to increase it at a later stage.[13]

While it may be conceded that much of what was recommended in the Lantum Memorandum especially concerning quality improvement received attention in terms of implementation, one must also recognize the fact that the Memo itself did not address all the problems afflicting the coffee industry in Bamenda in particular and west Cameroon in general.[14]

[12] NAB, File No. None Qc/g1961/2 "Coffee Marketing Arrangements. P.132

[13] The Chief Produce Marketing Officer to the Director of Agriculture, 7th July 1967, NAB Qc/g1961/2. P.2

[14] For a detailed examination of the implementation of the Lantum recommendations, see Emmanuel Kengo," Coffee in the Economy of the North West Province of Cameroon, 1923 – 1993" Ph.D. Thesis Submitted to the Department of History, Faculty of Arts, University of Nigeria, Nsukka. Pp 145-150.

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Consciously or unconsciously, Lantum left out one of the most vexing issues of the time which was causing a lot of acrimony among the arabica coffee farmers of Bamenda, and which was already causing some political tension also. While recommending the system of "Buying by Quality" adopted in East Cameroon for quality control following his visit to Baffoussam, he failed to remind the WCMB that prices of arabica coffee were higher in East Cameroon than in Bamenda, with no major differences in quality to justify the higher prices in the Eastern part of the territory. Meanwhile, the price dichotomy between East and West Cameroon without any meaningful economic justification was an existing fact, which had been recognized by the Registrar of Co-operative societies, West Cameroon, S.S. Shang. [15]While recognizing the problem, he had however expressed his incompetence to resolve it conceding that only the state government could adequately explain the rationale behind the policy.

Lantum's Memo would have made more impact had he raised the issue. The implementation of the recommendations made in the memo therefore, did not address the price issue, as far as the coffee farmers of Bamenda were concerned. True, he felt the prices could be improved through improved coffee quality, but he failed to address a crucial issue, which was that of differential prices for coffee of the same quality in the two regions.

Bamenda Co-operative Marketing Association Protests Government Injustice

This grievance found expression at an Annual General Meeting of the BCMA held on the 22 December, 1967. At that meeting, the BCMA resolved to petition the government over the matter. The petition was addressed to the Prime Minister of West Cameroon, and stated emphatically, *inter alia*, that;

> Unification has brought along with it harmonization in several fields of activity at different stages, and those affected are now enjoying the fruits of it. But the arabica coffee farmers seem to have been forgotten as this does not seem to have affected them directly. The arabica coffee farmer of East Cameroon continues to receive higher price for the same quality of coffee year after year than ourselves and this is striking to note, when it is considered that all our coffee is being sold in the same world market. Formerly we were not grading our coffee in the same way as they were doing and this was responsible for the difference in the price, but two years ago we acquired the necessary grading machines, processing techniques and have since been producing same qualities as they of the East; but still we do not receive the same price for our coffee. This is confirmed by the recent report of Mr. Frank Cavanagh, the Cameroon coffee broker, for the 1966/67 coffee season.[16]

In its petition, the BCMA adduced reasons for the better price paid in east Cameroon. It explained that all world arabica coffee was sold in the traditional world market by quota allocations. The quota allocated to Cameroon was always so small that it did not allow for the sale of all her coffee to the traditional market, which paid quite a good price. As such, the broker was forced to sell the rest of Cameroon's coffee in the new market, which paid but very low price for it. In east Cameroon, the government levied produce sales tax only on the coffee sold in the traditional market as it fetched a good price and no taxes were collected on any coffee sold to the new market. This brought a better price on the whole to the East Cameroon arabica coffee farmer. Contrasting it with West Cameroon, the petition pointed out

[15] See his response of 7th July, 1966 to the complaint by Bamenda coffee producers of the accusation that they were being exploited by the co-operatives. NAB, Qc/g1961/2 p.4

[16] BCMA Ltd to the Hon. Prime Minister of West Cameroon, 28th December 1967 NAB, Qc/g1961/2

that the west Cameroon farmer paid produce sales tax on all his coffee irrespective of where it was sold. The petition maintained that such arrangement would continue to affect the price year in year out if the same system was not adopted as in East Cameroon as there could be no other remedy.

The petition went on to point out that in addition to the non-payment of tax on coffee sold in the new market, the East Cameroon price was further subsidized by the government by means of payment of a block sum to the farmers' organization. The BCMA could therefore not understand why the government could not adopt the same policies for the arabica coffee farmers of Bamenda. The BCMA also pointed out in its petition that arabica coffee was charged the highest Produce Sales Tax in the country compared to what was levied on other crops such as cocoa, palm kernel, and robusta coffee, with the rate for arabica as high as 12.500frs per ton.

In view of the above observations, the BCMA pleaded with the government as follows;

Firstly, that the Produce Sales Tax of 12.500frs per ton, which it was paying, was too high and should be reduced. Secondly, no produce sales tax should be paid on any coffee sold to the new market. Thirdly, the Marketing Board should subsidize prices fetched on coffee sold to the new markets. It concluded by reminding the government that the economies of most families in the arabica regions rested on the coffee industry adding that coffee was a seasonal crop and each family had to spread its meager earnings over 12 months of the year.

The case of BCMA was too true and straightforward to demand any objections from the government. In a correspondence to the Secretary to the Prime Minister, the Permanent Secretary, Ministry of National Resources concurred with the petitioners and noted that:

> The arabica coffee crop pays the highest produce sales tax in West Cameroon.
>
> The rate is arbitrary and since it was bequeathed to us by the colonial administration, it has no relation to our present marketing situation. Considering that in addition to this very high tax, the farmers have to pay an export (federal) tax on their coffee, this appears to leave the farmers in an unviable situation demanding the most urgent relief measures. It is because of these considerations that the Registrar of Co-operative Societies has expressed sympathy for the plight of the farmers and has in consequence recommended a review of the rate of the Produce Sales Tax and an abolition of such on arabica coffee exported to the new markets. The issues raised in the petition are both pathetic and intricate and thus requiring quite careful study. [17]

He explained that the "New Markets" referred to in the petition included the Eastern countries of the communist bloc where, because prices were uneconomically low, the official stabilization fund in East Cameroon did not only exempt coffee exported to such countries from the usual taxes, but in addition, granted a subsidy to the tune of 15000francs CFA per ton so as to improve the price and the lot of the farmers as well.

He however, pointed out that in building up the current estimates account was taken of the revenue accruing from produce sales tax at the prevailing rates and in that connection, his Ministry could not recommend a reduction of the current rate of 12.500 francs CFA per ton of produce sales tax. He could not determine the quantity of arabica coffee that was sold to the new markets and could not therefore endorse the suggestion that produce sales tax on them be abolished. The Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Natural Resources, was therefore of the opinion that:-

[17] NAB, Qc/g 1961/2 File No. None "Coffee Marketing Arrangements" P.147.

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a. Produce Sales Tax should remain at the prevailing rate at least up to the close of that financial year.

b. A careful study should be made to determine the amount of coffee sold in the new markets. Since the Marketing Board was seen to be very helpful in this direction, it should be requested to comment on the petition pointing out the possible immediate effects of either reducing the rate of Produce Sales Tax or completely exempting coffee sold in the new markets from the tax. It should also comment on the long term effects of the alternatives open to the government and any decision on the subject should be reflected in the 1968/69 budget.

c. It was unfortunately impracticable at that moment to subsidize the new market prices since the Marketing Board reserves on arabica coffee were already so gravely depleted. This depletion, he added, had been progressively aggravated by the fact that Marketing Board produce were being evacuated through East Cameroon and so the sooner the government sought measures to arrest the trend, the better it would be.

The Permanent Secretary's comments were intended to guide the Prime Minister to whom the petition was addressed, in responding to the petitioners. The Prime Minister then acted accordingly. He requested the Chief Produce Marketing Officer to assess the amount of coffee sold in the "new markets" and the possible immediate and long term effects of either reducing the rate of Produce Sales Tax or completely exempting coffee sold in the "new markets" from the tax. In view of the fact that the preparation of the 1968/69 Draft Estimates was near, he was requested to treat the issue with urgency.

Calculations were accordingly made to that effect showing the export of coffee (both arabica and robusta) from West Cameroon to the traditional markets and the "new markets" for the two previous international coffee years that is from 1st October to 30th September.

The chief produce marketing officer then buttressed the point of the BCMA by explaining that the ICO laid down quotas for each country or group of countries for the export of coffee to traditional markets during each international coffee year with the object of ensuring that more coffee was not brought into the market than demanded so as to affect the price negatively.[18] These quotas, he went further, were either increased or decreased during the international coffee year if the market price varied greatly; the quotas being reduced if the price fell and being raised if the price went up. Coffee exporting countries then had to sell all the coffee which they had above their given quota in what were termed "new markets" such as the Middle East, the Far East, and communist countries. The price of coffee in the "new markets" was just between 60 to 70% of the price paid in the traditional markets because of the small demand in the new markets and the competition to sell in them.

The PMO revealed that in West Cameroon, 12,713 CFA a ton produce sales tax was being charged on arabica coffee. This was paid by the WCMB and not directly by the farmers and the WCMB paid the same 150CFA francs advance price to the farmers as was paid in East Cameroon. However, the result of the produce sales tax, which was not paid at all in East Cameroon, was that the Board had less balance available with which to pay further advance prices and bonuses to the farmer than in the case of East Cameroon.

Though the East Cameroon arabica coffee farmers did not pay produce sales tax, their marketing organization, UCCAO, had to pay 15 CFA a kilo i.e. 15000 CFA a ton to the stabilization fund of the Caisse for arabica coffee. However, UCCAO did not have to pay this

[18] NAB, Qc/g 1961/2 p.153

15 CFA a kilo to the Caisse in respect of "new market" shipments; instead it received a subsidy of 25 CFA a kilo. This contrasted sharply with what obtained in West Cameroon where the sales tax was paid on coffee exported to both the traditional markets and the "new markets." In a letter reference No. 215/110 of 21/11/1966, the Prime Minister had put up proposals to the financial secretary for revising the rates of produce sales tax which the Ministry of Finance later informed him were realistic and were being considered against the 1968 financial year without any amendments. In drawing up draft estimates of revenue from produce sales tax for the next financial year 1969, he again drew the attention of the Ministry of Finance to his proposals for the adjustment of rates.

On the suggestion by BCMA that no produce sales tax be paid on coffee sold in the "new markets", he observed that he had put up to the Permanent Secretary of the Department of state Development in his letter WCMB/CONF/20/18 of 21/2/68, detailed proposals for improving the financial position of the Marketing Board for the consideration of government. These proposals included a suggested means by which produce sales tax could be waived in the current financial year (1968) and the next financial year at no cost to government while government endeavour to find other means of revenue to replace the loss of revenue which the permanent abolition of produce sales tax on new market sales of coffee would involve.

On the subsidizing of "new market" sales by the Marketing Board, he noted that for the past two seasons the Marketing Board had incurred a loss on arabica coffee in order to be able to pay a bonus of 10CFA a kilo to arabica coffee farmers at the end of the season. This was necessary since even 10 CFA a kilo was less than the amount the East Cameroon arabica coffee farmers were receiving. He however pointed out that the board's law forbids the Board from using funds from one produce to finance another produce, and that the arabica coffee reserve of the Board was becoming so depleted that the Board would not be able to subsidize the arabica payment much longer.

The case as presented by the BCMA and confirmed *in toto* by the Chief Produce Marketing Officer, Victoria, was an indictment on the government and required speedy action to redress such injustice. In order to harmonise and regularize the position, the Financial Secretary, West Cameroon, entreated the Legal Adviser, Prime Minister's Office, Buea, to draw up the necessary draft bill to effect the amendment required for the exemption of coffee sold to "new markets" from Produce Tax. It was proposed that the draft legislation come into effect on 1st July, 1968.[19] However, it was not until the end of 1968 that the legislation came into effect and arabica coffee from Bamenda, which was sold in the "new markets", was exempted from produce sales tax.

The Bamenda Coffee Farmers Association (BCFA)

Growing apprehension and dissatisfaction with the co-operative movement in Bamenda, which many coffee farmers accused of colluding with the government to exploit them, had led to the formation of the Bamenda Coffee Farmers Association (BCFA) by a section of the coffee farmers of Bamenda. The BCFA sought to achieve for the farmers, what they felt the co-operatives had failed to do. Its membership included some members of the co-operatives as well as non-members. It considered itself as the mouthpiece of the farmers and without trying to assume the role of a Licensed Buying Agent, championed the course for better and regular payment for the farmer's produce.

As an association that aimed at safeguarding the welfare of its members, petition writing became its characteristic weapon. It sought to draw the attention of the government to the

[19] See Financial Secretary, West Cameroon to the Legal Adviser, Prime Minister's Office, Buea, West Cameroon.

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problems facing the coffee farmers of Bamenda through petitions. It addressed a number of petitions to both the WCMB and the government on the problems facing the coffee industry in Bamenda. In one of such petitions addressed to the Prime Minister of West Cameroon, the farmers reminded that on the 5th of October, 1967, in a welcome address presented to the Secretary of State for Development and Internal Economic Planning, they did outline some of the difficulties facing the arabica coffee farmers. The farmers added that in another letter of 10th October 1967 to the CPMO, Victoria, they took up another issue, which affected the ordinary coffee farmer in Bamenda very seriously[20]. They then proceeded to outline the problems facing the farmers more closely while appealing to the government to help solve their difficulties.

Firstly, the Association noted with satisfaction that the method of payment for coffee adopted in 1965/66 coffee season was very suitable as payment was made on declaration of stock in hand. They could not understand why this method had to be abandoned when a more efficient system had not been found. The Association expressed dissatisfaction over the fact that LBA's usually delayed in paying the farmers for their produce and implored the government to look into better ways of paying the farmers. It suggested that in the absence of a better option, the government should adopt the former method of payment whereby farmers were paid for their produce on declaration of stock in hand.

Secondly, the Association pointed out that there were many privileges enjoyed by the LBAs, such as the middleman's buying allowance, transport facilities etc while the farmers enjoyed none of these privileges from the LBA. It noted that in the 1965/66 coffee season, bonus was declared to be 35 frs per kilo of coffee. The farmers could not understand why the rate of bonus payable was reduced to 10 francs per kilo, when a farmer hardly earned 5.000francs when the bonus rate was 35francs per kilo. The Association then called on the government to take steps to halt what they termed a "system of milking the farmers".

On Board membership, the Association alleged that many of its difficulties were as a result of the inadequate representation, which farmers had on the Marketing Board. The petitioners argued that most of the non-farmer members were not in any way acquainted with the problems of growing and producing coffee. They therefore tended to regard any reasonable price paid for this crop as fantastic. They maintained that it was not even correct for people who were not conversant with the problems of producing a given crop to be entrusted with the authority to take major decisions affecting the producer of the crop. The farmers' representation on the Board must be increased to correct this abnormally, they argued. They added that only farmers and those who knew the crops could make fair and just decisions concerning them.

The Association also expressed concern over the fate of Direct Suppliers Company Limited (DSC), one of the Licensed Buying Agents which had been operating in the region and which licenses were said to have been withdrawn by the government at the behest of farmers. It argued that the withdrawal of the company's licenses did not help the coffee farmers in any way. The Association pointed out that the company was owing coffee farmers about 11 million francs CFA and it did not see how the farmers could recover the money if the company was prevented from continuing in business. Members expressed surprise over the allegation that the licenses of the company were withdrawn because farmers wrote complaining that the said company owed them. The Association denied ever advocating in any of its letters that the licenses of the company should be withdrawn though not all coffee farmers in Bamenda were members of it. The Association dismissed an explanation it

[20] NAB, File Number 1527 Archive No. Qc/g 1965 p.1

understood was being advanced that the licenses were withdrawn because the company owed both the WCMB and the farmers. The Association felt the reason was quite unconvincing because some other licensed buying agents also owed the Board and or farmers and yet their licenses were not withheld.

It further noted that when the DSC did business in coffee, it provided employment to well over 200 men and women in its coffee factory alone, thereby reducing the scale of unemployment in Bamenda and consequently the whole country. It also assisted the poor farmers in various ways by making it possible for them to have fertilizer, coffee pulpers, palm kernel crackers, zinc, cement, corn mills etc.[21] The Association then expressed the opinion that, it was not in the common interest of the farmers to force liquidation upon this company. It called on the government to grant as many licenses as possible to agents to buy the farmer's coffee in Bamenda. It noted that arabica coffee occupied almost the first position in terms of income generated and quantity exported among export crops in West Cameroon and should therefore be given priority by the government. It argued that there were over twelve licensed buying agents for cocoa and robusta coffee in Kumba and that there was no convincing reason why government should appoint only three or four licensed buying agents for arabica coffee in Bamenda. It opined that the more the licensed buying agents, the more open the competition and the better the price offered to farmers.

The Association expressed surprise over a statement made by the Secretary of State for Development and Internal Economic Planning, in a publication of the Cameroon Times of 18 October, 1967, that debts owed farmers by licensed buying agents for their produce was a private affair. The Association maintained that government should have informed farmers of its position earlier and not to have kept them in suspense while making vague promises that efforts were being made to recover this money from the DSC for the farmers when actually it did not intend to do so. "This is therefore the good reason why we pray the government to return the said company into business, so as to enable it settle its debts with the farmers", the Association maintained. It concluded that it had been revealed to the farmers by the Secretary of State's statement that the withholding of the said company's license was not in the interest of the farmers. The Association questioned why the government recovered only the debts of the Nkambe farmers from the Company. It blamed the government over the fact that even when it had been well known to it that DSC was indebted to many farmers and some farmers also owed the company, the government still went on to by-pass the said company and paid bonuses to farmers who owed the company. It argued that the company could have recovered monies from the farmers who owed it to pay those it owed. It then submitted that many farmers doing business with the company had not up to the time of writing the petition received their own bonus because of the negligence. The Association prayed the government to get into immediate arrangement with the company so as to pay the farmers who had not yet received their bonus from the Board/Company for the 1965/66 season. It observed that, the fact that the Board/Company undertook to collect the DSC debts from the farmers and could not collect the farmers' own debts from the same company was clear indication that the interest of the arabica coffee farmers of Bamenda was not being safeguarded by the government.

The Chief Produce Marketing Officer duly commented on the petition of the BCFA. His comments were not kind on the petitioners and portrayed them as being ignorant of what obtained in the industry. He began by questioning the authority of BCFA to pontificate on behalf of coffee farmers in Bamenda. To buttress his point, he pointed out that in the

[21] Ibid p.2

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preceding arabica coffee season, 75% of the arabica coffee farmers of West Cameroon marketed their produce through the West Cameroon Development Authority. He maintained that all the farmers who were members of the co-operatives expressed their grievances through the co-operatives while those who sold their produce through the WCDA were in a position to voice their own grievances through the Agency. To him, BCFA did not represent any group of farmers and could therefore not speak for the coffee farmers. He reminded that four out of the five unofficial members on the recently dissolved Marketing Board, were from the arabica coffee area and were all acquainted with the problems of arabica coffee farmers. His personal opinion was that arabica coffee was over-represented on the Board and the case of the petitioners on this issue lacked credence. On the question of debts owed to the farmers by LBAs, he stated that government had made a decision on the matter of DSC. However, on the issue of LBAs, he responded that robusta coffee was easy to sell but arabica coffee was becoming more and more difficult to sell. It could only be sold by continually improving its quality since the standard demanded by the buyers became stricter each year. The difficulty faced in selling arabica was reflected in the fact that over the past 10 years its FOB price had fallen from about 270.000 CFA a ton to 200.000 CFA while that of robusta had risen from 135.000 CFA a ton to 160.000 CFA. To further improve the quality of the arabica crop, he opined, it was necessary to limit competition in buying arabica coffee so that farmers who did not produce high quality arabica would find it impossible to sell their bad coffee. He argued that with competition in buying, farmers who had poor quality coffee could still sell it because competing LBAs would lower their standards in a competing market since they know that if there refuse to buy the coffee, their rivals could do. He again reminded that there was only one organization for marketing all the farmers' arabica coffee in East Cameroon for that very reason and it was recommended that there should be only one for West Cameroon also.[22]

The BCFA might have overstated its point: the fact, however, remains that the Bamenda arabica coffee farmers continued to confront many challenges after independence. It is true that a majority of the farmers were members of the Co-operative Marketing Societies. But, the co-operative movement was becoming complacent for the liking of many farmers. Arguably, most of the members of the BCFA represented mainly customers of Kameroun Mountain Company, Kilo Bros. Limited, former customers of Nikang and Kamsang Company and DSC which were all LBAs. The fact is, most of the grievances expressed in the petition reflected the general feelings of the farmers in Bamenda. While a majority of the farmers belonged to the co-operatives, the cooperative as a LBA of the WCMB often acquiesced to the decisions of the latter and by implication, those of the government. The BCFA established the tradition of meeting whenever a major problem affecting the farmers cropped up and addressed many petitions to both the WCMB and the government in that direction. By so doing, it became so militant that the government was not comfortable with its meetings. This resulted in the cancellation of some of its meetings by government officials while others were attended by security officials both overtly and covertly. The relationship between the government and the farmers remained frosty and a cat and mouse relation right up to the end of the Federal State in 1972 when the federal structures were dismantled for a unitary state.

CONCLUSION

This paper has contributed to the debate on the performance of a reunified Cameroon since 1961 by examining the situation of Bamenda coffee farmers which so far has been a

[22] This view is consistent with the Jervis Recommendations and the Lantum Memorandum.

neglected subject. It has asserted that while many of the farmers' worries during this period centered on the price of their produce and the method of payment, most of the factors affecting the price and quantity of coffee demanded were beyond the scope and influence of the WCMB. Such included changes in coffee production in other countries, changes in the consumption of and demand for coffee, political and economic problems in other countries, and world price controlling schemes. These external factors apart, many other concerns of the coffee farmers remained internal and genuine mainly the discrepancies that persisted in the marketing arrangements and price between the two territories - West and East Cameroon. The BCMA, like the BCFA, tried to voice the disappointment and frustrations of the farmers and to find a common and lasting solution to their problems with very limited success. The high expectations of the Bamenda coffee farmers that they were going to get better prices for their crop and improve their lot after reunification and independence remained very elusive ten years after. Reunification remained largely a political slogan than a practical reality in the eyes of the coffee farmers. This left many farmers very disappointed and their expectations remained unfulfilled ten years after reunification.

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