

# Where will the New Deal intellectual/ Writer Stand at the Trumpet of Reckoning?

(To the memory of Kenjo wa Jumbam, playwright, educationist and novelist,  
who died in his sleep on 12 December, 2005) \*

By BATE BESONG

Brahmins of our higher institutions of learning have not provided the elixir that would redeem our inchoate democracy from its prolonged, socio- economic death sleep, and, political quagmire.

This refusal to turn history into a useful dialogue has given rise to the perverted culture of glorification of a parasitic, comprador bourgeois ruling class, as well as, the encrustation of a pleasing propaganda image of the Establishment.

In *Moving the Center : The Struggle for Cultural Freedoms* (1993), Ngugi wa Thiong'O has pointed out that 'One can only meaningfully say that there are two types of writers in Kenya today. They are the official writers, or officially approved writers, and the unofficial ones, that is those who are not accepted by the government' (31). No where could this assertion be so provocatively relevant, especially, in the last two and a half decades or so, than at our state universities which are the breeding ground for our writers, technocrats, lawgivers, intellectuals etc.

The ivory tower, in a very fundamental sense, has become synonymous with the *dramatis personae* who have become obsessed with the cult of personality, abuse of responsibility and shirking of duty.

We cannot, aver, that our state universities, have been imbued, with doggedness, visionary and purposeful leadership, and commitment to the struggle for the enthronement of a just society where none is oppressed.

Higher institutions of learning, in our time, have become the hadaan wand for brewing the culture of bootlicking, sycophancy and unnecessary obeisance to the status quo.

How did we get to this stage? A brief biographical information of the 'new' Deal intellectual/writer may be helpful.

## **A GENERALIZED LOGORRHEA OF VISION**

Amilcar Cabral, in *Revolution in Guinea : An African People's Struggle* (New York, 1969) describes, the African petty bourgeoisie who inherited the colonial state apparatus 'as a class that suffers from a revolutionary mythology: the moment national liberation comes and the petty bourgeoisie takes power we encounter, or rather we return to history, and thus the internal contradictions break out again' (55).

The 'new' deal writer and intellectual has been seducible to money, power, ethnic politics on campus, nepotism, favouritism, bribery and other forms of graft.

Instead of stemming the increasing political tensions, social frictions and economic repressions that could be considered as decisive in shaping the views and visions of the nation, the 'new' deal intellectual and writer has been soundly conservative and quiescent. This species has been imbued by a static and submissive mentality.

He has neither made an indelible mark on the life of the ordinary Cameroonian nor has he fired the zeal in them to trust in a resurgent, patriotic and committed leadership. His has not been a clear way of interrogating the nation. His scholarship or creative work does not show that poverty and injustice are best served by rigorous analysis and disciplined work. He has not called for a restructuring of the polity to reflect fairness, justice and equity. Nor has he privileged issues bordering on marginality, and what we have come to regard as the Anglophone Question.

In a period of collective vulnerability, national rupture and internal colonialism, he has allowed himself to be swept away by the euphoria of bureaucratic, civil service appointments and has, therefore, been incapable of demonstrating a revolutionary commitment to the topical issues affecting the nation.

To see facts as they are, unclouded by sentimentality, fear and academic insecurity, requires a very special effort in our campuses today.

The University has become the epicentre of a most base intellectual culture that flourishes under conditions of social injustice, academic morosity and political opportunism. Instead of fulfilling the expectations of the people they are supposed to serve, the academia has become the metonymy of the muzzling of all revolutionary acorns that may serve to provide human affirmation and progress.

This excessive politicization and bureaucratization of the University campus, then, has given rise to the generalised logorrhea of vision that has permeated all facets of national life.

## HOME OR EXILE

The 'new' Deal intellectual or writer lacks the innovative spirit that we have seen demonstrated in such Cameroonian self-exile iconoclasts as Achille Mbembe, Francis B. Nyamnjoh, Alexis Tcheuyap, Benedict Nantang Jua, Alain Patrice Nganang etc., whose engagement with the social and political imperatives of their time sets them, apart from their predecessors.

As Chinua Achebe has however pointed out in *The Trouble with Nigeria* (1983) that 'Nigerians are what they are because their leaders are not what they should be' (10). It is to be regretted that we have not performed our duties with great honesty and in the best interest of the nation. We have been unable to look honestly at our leadership and our people.

Even when - as of now - the militarization of the polity is complete and the hierarchs of internal colonialism bare their killer-incisors and are using the resources of the state to hold us all to ransom, we have, from our obfuscated psyches, proffered, a literature of *hexis* one that not only produces a synthetic and explanatory view of the world, but which carries neither a range nor depth of vision. We have not read our country's history as a didactic book of pedagogy from where we can learn how best to live up to the finest image of an evolving state of the union. In all that we have done since 1982 we have not avoided hysteria and all types of posturing.

As we enjoy the 23 anniversary celebrations of the 'new' Deal government of President Paul Biya and look beyond 2005 to the next anniversary landmark, our task should include a reflexion on how to portray our country as we can so that anybody who wishes to know about us may have a true guide.

I will not conceal my own conviction that if we have to develop, we must begin to learn how to build bridges in society; to know the art of brotherhood in the struggle against nature, and to know how to identify those social forces whose electoral calendar is to work against our collective development.

*\*(This article is the result of a December 7, 2005 special appeal from Mr. Zachee Nzoh-Ngandembou, Editor/Publisher of Eden Radio and Eden Newspaper, Limbe, as part of a special end of year package for its readership).*