

AFRICA NEWS

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MALI Discontent With UPDM Rule

[AN] One year after Mali's long-awaited return to constitutional government, an economic crisis verging on bankruptcy has spurred political instability and widespread condemnation of the twelve-year rule of President Moussa Traore. Members of the ruling party agree the current crisis is the most difficult Traore has faced since taking power from former President Modibo Keita in a bloodless coup in 1968.

As the economy worsens, political tensions are fed by nostalgia for Keita's government, which pursued socialist development policies. Keita himself, considered to be Mali's counterpart to Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana, died in prison in 1977, an event which sparked protests.

A country of farmers and herders, Mali has lost 80% of its livestock in a decade-long drought, and its main export crops of cotton and peanuts have sold poorly on the international market. Mismanagement and corruption have contributed to an already perilous economic situation. Mali's debt from foreign aid annually amounts to one-third more than the country's \$60 million budget.

With an annual per capita income of \$90, Mali is one of the poorest nations in the world. Experts agree that major changes must be made in the administration of the country if life is to be breathed back into the economy.

The current crisis facing the Traore government is due in large part to frustrated expectations

over the return to constitutional rule. A new political party, the Democratic Union of Malian People (UPDM) was formed to replace the military junta that ruled from 1968 to 1979, and elections were held last June, but neither development brought the civilian rule that Malians had hoped for. Though a number of civilians were elected, the military holds one-fifth of the seats in the 137-member National Council, a disproportionate number in relation to its size of 4500. In addition, on the 18-person central executive bureau of the UPDM, six come from the military.

Turnout in the election was considered high, with over three million votes cast — a fact that many nevertheless interpreted more as a bid for participation in government than as support for President Traore, who was the only candidate. The lack of enthusiastic support for the government was in evidence on March 22, when only several hundred persons showed up for a pro-Traore rally for which the UPDM had declared a work holiday. According to one observer, students threw rocks at those involved in the demonstration.

Traore has survived difficult crises before, most notably the severe drought of the early '70s and a 1978 coup plot that resulted in the purge of three powerful members of the military council. In addition, the Malian head of state has managed to nullify the remnants of the Keita regime, the leaders of which are now living in exile in Africa and Europe. This group in-

cludes: Sidi Demba Soumounou, a close Keita associate who regularly calls for revolt from his exile in Libya; former Planning Minister Seydou Badian Kouyate, a Dakar-based writer who embodies the spiritual heritage of the Keita regime; Madeira Keita, the principal ideologue of Malian socialism, who lives in Guinea; and the former president's brother, Moussa Keita, who resides in France.

By most accounts there is neither contact among the exiled leaders nor cooperation between them and the student dissidents. Consequently, Traore has been able to concentrate on maintaining loyalty and unity in the military.

Despite the lack of a well-organized political opposition, continuing student unrest has caused major problems in recent months. At one point, in the capital of Bamako, soldiers armed with French hardware patrolled the city streets in Soviet tanks and stood guard at principal buildings.

The turbulence began last November, with student strikes that have since spread throughout the country, often spilling into the streets and involving other disaffected youths in violent confrontations with the army. In March, Amnesty International reported that mass arrests, torture and death had resulted. Some fifteen youths were killed in December, the organization said, and thirteen more were shot, bayoneted or tortured to death in March, including the Secretary General of the National Union of Pupils and Students (UNEM), Abdul Karim Camara. Although the school strikes have reportedly ended, several students are still unaccounted for, and it is doubtful that the harshness with which authorities met the protests will be forgotten.

The stage was set for the student protests early in 1979 when representatives of UNEM broke their ties with the IDPM's youth movement and advocated scientific socialist development while the UDPM was in favor of an "independent and planned national economy." The strikes erupted in November when new entrance exams for further training were instituted, making it more difficult to qualify for civil service employment in one of the 26 state-owned enterprises.

Traore gave in to all the student demands, including amnesty for students and teachers arrested during the disturbances, before classes could be resumed early this month.

State-owned enterprises are often virtually the only employer of graduates looking for jobs corresponding to a particular skill. The organizations employ 13,000 people and represent 290 million Malian francs (35% of Mali's gross national product), but they have a debt of 250 million MF. Besides having to cope with near bankruptcy, the state-run businesses are made almost totally ineffective by mismanagement and corruption.

France has often paid government debts to prevent bankruptcy but refused to do so last year, reportedly because Paris wanted to dictate terms of government reorganization which were unacceptable to the UDPM. As a result, the national bank is running on the day-to-day deposits of foreign aid, civil servants are not paid regularly and most people are straining to meet family needs. These conditions nurture a considerable amount of petty corruption — largely attempts to turn public money into private funds for subsistence survival.

Freak floods along the Niger River near Timbuktu last September

washed away rice crops, compounding the difficulties Mali has found in feeding its 5.5 million residents. The food shortage in the area is so severe that it has forced people to eat the grain found in the small prickly seedcase of burrs.

Though landlocked, Mali holds a strategic position between north and west Africa, and is the site of numerous ancient empires, including those of the Ouagadougou, Manding and Songhai, which were built on trans-Saharan trade and the production capabilities of Malians. This has given Mali a unified past with rich traditions which many hope will be the basis for the mobilization needed to bring the country back to prosperity.

Mali has the potential to become one of the stronger economies in west Africa through the planned development of agriculture and animal husbandry. Projection by the U.S. Agency for Inter-

national Development and by the French government show that Mali is not far from self-sufficiency in staple nuts and grains. Food shortages arise from

a poor transport system and the illicit trade by farmers with neighboring countries; by crossing the border they can earn up to four times as much for



Mali Struggles Toward Solid Economy

Despite its agricultural potential, Mali is gripped by economic and political malaise. (Left) A Mali youth on way to market with chickens. (Above) Typical 'banco' (mud brick) architecture in the Malian town of Sofara. UN Photo

their produce. The government's food pricing policy is designed to provide the urban centers with low-cost food in order to minimize political unrest. To do so, prices paid to the farmer must be kept unreasonably low.

In an effort to make Mali's potential a reality, the international community has financed projects such as the Senegal River Valley Development Organization, which in-

corporates Mali, Senegal and Mauritania in a regional project of the Sahel nations. After fifteen years of planning, and the largest contribution of Arab oil money to Africa's development, the Organization began construction of a dam in Senegal last December and is expected to begin work on another in Mali this year.

In addition, both [Continued on Page 16]

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BY THE WAY...

By Joe Black



The Good Book tells us: "a little child shall lead them"; and in the complex and changing society of today, our young people represent the future leadership of the Black community and some aspects of our national government. However, they need some guidance, and we, Black adults and designated Black leaders, have a responsibility to encourage and assist these leaders of tomorrow. We must remember that a college graduate of 1975 was probably born in 1953; thus, he or she was only 2 when Mrs. Rosa Parks was too tired to move to the back of the bus; 10 years of age during the outrage of snarling dogs and forceful fire hoses in the park in Birmingham and the memorable "March On Washington," and 12 when thousands marched from Selma to Montgomery. As a result, too many of our young don't know, or understand, the thrust of the Civil Rights Movement. Too many of them have chosen to be guided by emotion and want to believe that it was to prove that Black can beat white or mistakenly thinking that we were to receive something just because we're Black. It's time for Black adults to forget popularity and have the intestinal fortitude to tell youthful Blacks that they are spending too much time worrying about the word—"racism." It is not something new... when we were young, we called it "prejudice," "segregation," and "Jim Crow." Despite the fact that we have more college-educated Blacks than ever before, we also have higher unemployment. Racism is not, I repeat—is not the primary reason. Too often our college-bound students select "sop" courses rather than those studies that will make them competitive in today's labor market. In other words, it is a combination of a college diploma and the quality of their preparation that will enable them to take advantage of the doors opened by the Civil Rights Movement. If we get this message across to our youths, then we can borrow from Dr. King and say: "This will be the day when all of God's children will be able to sing with a new meaning, 'my country 'tis of thee, sweet land of liberty, of thee I sing. Land where my father died, land of the Pilgrim's pride, from every mountainside, let freedom ring.'"

Joe Black

Vice President
The Greyhound Corporation

