

Parallels between 1966 gold and 2011 oil allegations

by Yoga Adhola.

Attempts have been made to draw parallels between the gold allegation of 1966 and the current allegations in parliament that bribes have been paid by oil interests to senior government ministers. Perhaps the most serious attempt to link the two allegations is the question which was put to Professor Mamdani by Emanuel Gyezaho of The Monitor newspaper:

Emanuel Gyezaho: "Are there any parallels you can draw between the on-going oil "scandal" and Kabaka Yekka's Daudi Ochieng's (RIP) February 4, 1966 motion in Parliament proposing a commission of inquiry into allegations that Dr Obote and then Col. Idi Amin had smuggled gold, ivory and coffee from Zaire?"

Professor Mamdani: "The 1966 event was presented by the powers that be as part of "the Buganda Question" rather than as a demand for democratic accountability. It fueled a sectional conflict rather than a democratic movement. This is the language in which supporters of the former VP (Gilbert Bukenya) have publicly tried to discredit the case against him. Parliament's willingness to cast the net wider, but not too wide, gives us a better chance today than in 1966.

Either the Professor is avoiding issues (which is understandable) or he is seriously out of touch. He seems to have even forgotten what he wrote about the 1966 events in his own book, "Politics and Class Formation in Uganda". That said, I would like to give a brief outline of what occurred in 1966.

However, before discussing the motion in detail, a little background to events immediately leading to the motion is necessary. This motion was first discussed in the UPC parliamentary group meeting on 31st January 1966. At that meeting it was agreed that when tabled, the motion would be rejected by the government/UPC side.

At the meeting of the 31st Obote had explained that Amin had admitted his possession of the money. That the Congolese rebels had given him the money. In explaining how this money came about, Obote reminded the meeting of the decision the UPC party had made in 1964 to give covert support to the Congolese Gbenya rebel government based in Stanleyville (now Kisangani). Amin had been the points man for this project and it was in the course of implementing that UPC policy that Amin received this money to purchase supplies for the rebels.

Obote had gone further to explain that given the fact that this was a sensitive security matter, it was not prudent to discuss it in a parliamentary meeting. It was for this reason that UPC Parliamentary Group decided not to accept the motion. Following that, Obote on 1st February 1966 left for northern Uganda for a tour which had been scheduled the previous November. He left Balaki Kirya, a member of the Ibingira group which wanted to oust Obote to be acting Prime Minister.

Three days later, on 4th February 1966, in the absence of Obote, in a most curious manner, some 15 minutes before Parliament, the cabinet was hastily called and a decision was taken to reverse the position which had been taken at the parliamentary group meeting on 31st January 1966. The decision to reverse the earlier position was not conveyed to the leader of the party who was out of the capital nor was he asked to come back and be present during the discussions.

This cabinet meeting was riddled with a number of irregularities. Half of the cabinet, including the Prime Minister, were absent. The three ministers whose names had been mentioned by Ochieng were also not present; incidentally this included Onama, the Minister of Defence who would have had to answer questions as the subject concerned his portfolio.

The meeting was also timed in such a manner that there would have been no time for the Prime Minister to be informed or get back to participate in the debate.

The overwhelming majority of UPC MPs only learnt of the change when in the chambers of parliament and some during the debate itself. This caused a lot of confusion.

The foregoing is the situation which obtained when on 4th February 1966 Daudi Ochieng, Kabaka Yeka Member of Parliament moved the following motion: "That this House do urge government to suspend from duty Colonel Idi Amin of the Uganda Army pending conclusion of police investigations into allegations regarding his bank account which should then be passed on to the appropriate whose final decision on the matter made public."

As presented, the motion was limited to the person of Idi Amin. And there was reason for doing this. The forces behind the motion needed to remove Idi Amin from the army because they saw him as a stumbling block to the coup they were planning.

In the speech introducing the motion, Daudi Ochieng sought to link Obote and his two ministers to Amin, suggesting that they were also involved in the so-called scandal. The purpose of this was to cast aspersion on the person of the Prime minister so that what the British paper, The Guardian called an optimum condition for a coup could be created.

In the course of the debate, the strongest defence of Obote came from John Kakonge. He kept saying that the motion was a smokescreen for a coup. It is telling that he was the only member of Parliament who voted against the motion.

In the end Obote set up a commission of three independent judges to carry out an investigation into the allegations. The three judges were Justice Sir Clement N. de L'Estang, Vice President of the Court of Appeal of eastern Africa (Chairman); Justice Henry E. Miller, Judge of the High Court of Kenya (Member); and Justice Augustine Said, Judge of the High Court of Tanzania, (Member)

Yoga Adhola, a former Editor-in-Chief of the UPC paper, "The People" and a leading ideologue of the party. He can be reached at yogaadhola@msn.com