

## The Removal of John Kakonge

by Yoga Adhola

***It may come as a shock to many in UPC for one to describe the removal of John Kakonge at the 1964 Gulu conference as saving UPC, but a deeper look into the situation then will reveal that as the case.***

I would like to respond to the article, "There's no shadow to what happened to UPC in 1964" by Kalundi Serumaga which appeared in The Monitor of Tuesday, February 11 2014. In the first place I do agree with him that Harold Acemah erred in attempting to treat what happened at the UPC Gulu conference of 1964 as casting a shadow over subsequent events.

What Acemah views as a shadow are actually the struggles for national-democratic liberation. The only link with the Gulu conference is that the conference was the first episode of that struggle. What happened later were not caused by the events of the Gulu conference nor were they shadows of it as Acemah seems to imply.

Secondly Serumaga challenges Acemah ".....on the possible meanings of the Uganda Peoples' Congress first delegate's conference, and the extent to which the fall-out from that event is being felt today."

To interpret the conference, it is necessary to bear in mind the teaching of Chairman Mao that struggles take place in phases. We went through the phase of the anti-colonial struggles which run from around 1900 to 1962 when Uganda attained Independence.

Then from the eve of Independence up to now and for the next 100 years or so we shall be going through the struggles for national-democratic liberation.

By national-democratic revolution we mean revolutions which seek to end national and colonial oppression as a means of laying a basis of further struggles. They also seek to eliminate feudal and pre-feudal relations as well as establish new nations. National-democratic liberation also resists imperialism and its agents.

It is in this context that the 1964 UPC Conference should be viewed. In my view Grace Ibingira represented the anti-national-democratic forces and John Kakonge those of the national democratic liberation.

Kalundi Sumaga goes on to write: "Much as Ibingira did emerge "victorious" from the historic conference, the facts about how he came to be so need to be brought out. "Imperialism and Revolution in Uganda" (Tanzania Publishing House, 1978), the late Professor Nabudere's seminal analysis of the history of the progressive movement in Uganda may help here."

Before I go into bringing the facts behind Ibingira's victory, let me say something about the authority upon which Serumaga bases his account.

Serumaga bases his account of the conference on Dan Nabudere's book, which he describes as "seminal analysis of the history of the progressive movement in Uganda ....." Unlike Kalundi Serumaga, I have never been enamoured by Nabudere's appreciation of the progressive movement in Uganda.

Over the years Nabudere has conducted himself as someone who never knew the phase of struggle at which Uganda is. At times he has even been downright opportunistic. If one is to value the tittle professor the way Serumaga does, then I will also quote a professor on Nabudere.

In his encyclopedic book, "The political development of Uganda, 1900-1986" Professor Sathyamurthy describes Nabudere as "...a self-proclaimed and somewhat garrulous 'Marxist-Leninist' windbag and author of several turgid works of dubious quality on imperialism in East Africa" (page 662)

In the specific case of national-democratic liberation, Nabudere has demonstrated a terrible inability to appreciate this phase of the struggle. A good example of both his opportunism as well his failure to understand this phase of the struggle is that whereas in early and mid 60s he was with John Kakonge against Grace Ibingira, in 1979 in Moshi and there after he was with Grace Ibingira against UPC.

It is also interesting to note that while John Kakonge made up with Milton Obote to the point of becoming the most outspoken person during the 1966 struggles in parliament, Nabudere never made up with Obote. It was only John Kakonge who voted against the Duadi Ochineg motion against Obote in 1966.

With that settled, let us deal with Grace Ibingira's victory over John Kakonge. Ibingira's victory or John Konge's loss hinged on two main issues. One, it must be remembered that at its formation UPC was essentially a coming together of notables from various districts.

From Busoga was Nadiope, from Lango was Obote, from Acholi was Peter Oola from West Nile was Felix Onama etc.

Now going into the Gulu Conference almost all the notables were against John Kakonge. And these notable were not small men in the party. Kirunda Kivejinj, in his albeit badly written book, recounts a case when Nadiope threatened to carry his members of Parliament and join the DP if John Kakonge was not "tamed". In such circumstances, what would one have expected Obote to do?

Secondly, the UPC Youth League had become a nuisance. At one time they held up Felix Onama, then Assistant Secretary General of the party at UPC headquarters against his will. At another they made the editor of Uganda Argus, a muzungu carry a bunch of matooke on his head as a sign of Uganda's Independence. They also were constantly in and out of police cells, being released by Obote.

The then leader opposition, then Basil Bataringaya once raised the issue of the behaviour of the UPC Youth League in Parliament thus: "Mr. Speaker, I am very serious on this [the affairs of the League]... surely the Youth Wing, be it DP or UPC or ICY Youth Wing is not primarily concerned with looking for political offenders and 'bringing them to justice, ...

"Mr Speaker, we cannot go on like this. Let us face the fact that these Youth Wingers, if they are not stopped in good time, are going to be very difficult to handle because other political parties are going to organise their Youth Wingers to meet the UPC and the result would not be good." (Parliamentary Debates Second series, Vol 15 (1963/64), page 666)

This behaviour of the UPC Youth League was generally blamed on John Kakonge because he was seen as its patron and mentor.

What Obote did at the conference which Kalundi Serumaga describes as "to ensure the conference outcomes would be more to the Big Men's liking" was to keep the UPC from disintegrating. I believe it is a strategy which worked and later John Kakonge and Obote reconciled as I have already indicated. On the other hand the views of people like Nabudere could have led the party to disintegrate before it was consolidated.

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