

Background to the Formation of UPC/KY alliance

By Yoga Adhola

A lot of confusion exists about the UPC/KY alliance. As much of this confusion stems from ignorance of events that led to the formation of the alliance, I would like to set the record straight.

With the imposition of colonialism over Uganda completed, further development in the colony - whether initiated by the British or by the colonized people, should have been national in character as it was in other colonies. This was not the case in Uganda; development tended to assume a dichotomy: Buganda, on the one hand, and the rest of the country on the other. The initial cause of this trend is the fact that both the missionaries and the colonialist began their work in Buganda, thereby giving the kingdom a head start.

Further, the Baganda had not only been used as mercenaries in the imposition of colonial rule, but also as initial administrators in the rest of the colony. All these occurrences and factors combined to imbue the Baganda with an acute sense of chauvinism, which in the context of the 1900 Agreement that retained Buganda as a separate and distinct entity, easily translated itself into a sense of separatism.

As Professor Pratt was to observe, the Baganda continued to regard "themselves as a separate people and to view Buganda as an autonomous political unit. Buganda, not Uganda was their nation. They belonged to Uganda as part of British overrule. It touched neither their affections nor their sentiments. There was little sympathetic interest in being incorporated into a larger African nation and there was great sensitivity to any slight to tribal pride."(Low, D.A. & Pratt, R.C. 1960: 253)

There is no doubt this kind of feeling was bound to clash with national development. The first time, Ganda separatism went against national development was in relation to the Legislative Council (Legico). When the Legico was initiated in 1921, the Kabaka of Buganda and his ministers rather than argue for greater African representation, as it was being done in other African colonies, sought to obtain assurances that Legico would not affect the 1900 Agreement.

They wrote: "The safeguarding of native interests can best be done by maintaining inviolate the existing Agreement. The interests and welfare of Buganda will necessarily form a secondary consideration in view of the general interest and progress of the whole territory."(Low, D.A. & Pratt, R.C. 1960: 254; Furley, O. 1982: 138-39) The same sentiments were to be expressed by Serwano Kulubya, the leading Buganda delegate to the Joint Select Committee on Closer Union in 1931. (Low, D.A. & Pratt, R.C. 1960: 254 ref. 2)

The mere raising of these objections served to underscore the distinctiveness of the Kingdom of Buganda; and, the apparent success, such as in the case of Closer Union when it appeared Ganda pressure thwarted the move to East African federation, tended to fuel the fires of separatism. (Santhamurthy, T.V. 1986: 243)

From then on, Baganda developed a tendency of resisting what in their opinion would result in interference in what they regarded as their internal affairs or would undermine Buganda's institutions or position as guaranteed by the practice of indirect rule and the 1900 Agreement. It is this tendency and the resistance to it by the rest of the people of Uganda that was to dichotomize the politics of the country.

By 1953, the decolonization process which had begun with India in 1947 was fast catching-up in Uganda. Yet much as the British desired Uganda to become independent as one country, as early as 1949 it had become clear that Buganda was set on a course of separating from the rest of Uganda. (Apter, D.E. 1961: 261 ;) And so, to proceed with the decolonization of Uganda, the British found it necessary to reverse the separatist tendencies of Buganda.

The previous year Sir Andrew Cohen had been appointed Governor of Uganda. One of the main tasks he was assigned to undertake was to reverse the separatist tendencies of Buganda. To this effect Cohen sought to make changes in the governance of Buganda so as to bring into prominence the Baganda who were Uganda nationalist. The Kabaka rejected these changes and the Governor then deported Kabaka Mutesa to Britain. The intention of the deportation was to replace Mutesa as Kabaka with a prince who would accept the changes that Cohen was proposing. This strategy did not work and Mutesa had to come back and resume the kabaka ship in 1955.

Much as a new agreement to update the 1900 agreement was put in place, the unintended consequence of Mutesa's return, in a manner which appeared he had won, was to make the Baganda feel they could negotiate with the British without taking into account the views and feelings of the rest of Ugandans. Some extremist Baganda even felt that independence should be handed to them. Thus for instance, at a meeting of the Lukiiko in 1957, the Omuwanika (Treasurer) of Buganda let slip a remark that Uganda ought to become a "Federal state under the Kabaka".

These acts of chauvinism gave rise to a crescendo of hostility in the rest of the country. The Katikiros (Chancellors) of the Western Province kingdoms talked of forming the Western Provincial Council to resist Buganda. In the rest of the country, contrary to earlier expectations by the Baganda, Legico members organized the District Councils to pass angry resolutions against the chauvinism of the Baganda.

As the resentment to Ganda chauvinism mounted, Professor Anthony Low, then teaching history at Makerere, reported that rumours began to spread that "the old and widespread hostility against them (the Baganda chauvinists) would be channelled into a new-style political party." (Low, D.A. 1971: 190)

As all this was going on amongst the political groupings of Ugandans, the British methodically continued preparing the country for independence. On October 10, 1957 the British Secretary of State for the Colonies, while in Uganda as part of an East African fact finding mission, gave his approval to the unanimous view in the colony that direct elections for the Legico be held in 1958.

However, by this time, the Buganda Government's initially positive stance toward direct elections had eroded, as had its concomitant enthusiasm to be involved in the Legico. Not only did Buganda view an accelerated movement toward independence with foreboding, but the neo-traditionalist had come to realise that direct elections in Buganda, whether to the Legico or to the Lukiiko, represented a serious threat to their hold on power in Buganda. This is what informed the boycott of the Legico elections in 1958.

The following year, two things which stoked the fires of the Buganda separatism occurred. One, following internal contradictions within the Uganda National Congress, Milton Obote was elected to lead the UNC. With Obote's election as President of UNC, both the leadership of the UNC, the most significant political organisation in the country, and the unofficial members of the Legico, had dovetailed into one person. Furthermore, for the first time in about three centuries, the initiative was in the hands of the non-Baganda. The Baganda had not only lost the leadership of the forces then moving history at the time, but their opponents had the upper hand in the Wild Committee, which was setting up the ground rules for independence.

Secondly, the Wild Committee which had been tasked to study and make recommendations on constitutional development in the colony made its report in 1959. While the setting up of this committee was clearly inspired by Buganda's refusal to participate in the 1958 Legico elections, ironically Buganda refused to participate in this committee. The one thing the Wild Committee recommended which incensed the Baganda, was the principle of direct elections to the Legico with no special safeguards for Buganda, should be accepted as a prelude to government through representation.

About these two events, Prof. Mutibwa has written: "As a reaction to the publication of the Wild Report, whose committee Mengo had boycotted, Buganda authorities decided to demand once again separate independence for their kingdom." The Baganda appear to have been in a near panic. There were attempts to form a party of their own - the Uganda National Party (UNP) - which, it was even suggested, could merge with the new UPC. It was all a gamble, especially as the Mengo Establishment was faced, apparently for the first time, with fears that Obote might become Uganda's first Prime Minister. Certainly the prospects of being governed by a non-Muganda filled the Baganda with dismay."

It is against this background that the decision to renew the demand for separate independence by January 1, 1961 should be viewed. The British Government refused to be drawn into any fresh arguments with Buganda on this topic. They simply ignored the Buganda Lukiiko's resolution when it was submitted to Westminster via Entebbe, and when January 1, 1961 arrived, Buganda was as much a part of the Uganda Protectorate as before. In short, that was the end of the matter.

While ignoring Buganda's declaration of independence, the colonial authorities also continued preparing for elections. The Baganda responded by boycotting the elections. Buganda, with 24 electoral constituencies, had 36,000 voters, a mere 4 to 5 per cent of the eligible voters registering. This was in stark contrast to the rest of the country that consisted of 58 electoral constituencies, and where 1,300,433 out of the estimated 1,500,000 to 1,750,000 registered to vote, a figure which represented over 75 per cent of those enfranchised.

In an effort to resolve the crisis in the relationship between Buganda and the colonial authorities, Obote secured the appointment of a commission under the chairmanship of Lord Munster. After four months of deliberations and consultations, the Uganda Relationship Commission, as it was called, submitted its report in June 1961.

The Munster Commission recommended that Buganda's separatist demands should be incorporated in the Constitution as some sort of federal arrangement. In this regard The Munster Commission envisaged a Uganda consisting of a federal Buganda, and semi-federal Toro, Ankole, and Bunyoro.

The Commission also recommended indirect elections for Buganda's representatives to the National Assembly, the inviolability of Buganda's constitution, Buganda's independent treasury, a separate High Court and a semi-independent police force, but not an independent army, or exclusive control of Entebbe and Kampala.

The proposals of the Munster Commission were later discussed at the Lancaster House Conference in October 1961. At the deliberations, with the assistance of UPC (and strongly resisted by the DP), Buganda attained most of its desires. About this, Mutesa was to write in his book: "The talks were successful. With Obote's support we obtained a great deal of what we wanted and looked to receive the rest later....."

Notwithstanding this satisfaction with the results of the Constitutional Conference, Buganda, having boycotted the 1961 elections which brought an illegitimate DP government in power, continued its firm resistance to Kiwanuka's government. Another Constitutional conference to resolve the remaining matters was slated for later in the year, but Buganda was in no mood to attend it.

It is at this point in time that UPC (and Obote in particular) took up serious negotiations to persuade Buganda to attend the conference. Subsequently, on September 5, 1961, Obote, as UPC leader, issued a statement in which he outlined a strategy for persuading Buganda to participate in the forthcoming constitutional conference to prepare for independence.

He invited the Lukiiko to join hands with the UPC and form a "partnership" during the conference. He pointed out that it was the Lukiiko, and not the Buganda DP members of Parliament that was supported by the overwhelming majority of the people in Buganda. He argued that since, as evidenced by the results of the elections, UPC represented the majority of those outside Buganda, then "in the event of the opposition party (UPC) coming to an understanding with the Lukiiko, the British Government must accept that understanding with the Lukiiko, as one between Buganda and the rest of the country."

Obote Meets Buganda Delegation.

Four days later, a UPC delegation led by Obote met a Buganda delegation led by the Katikiro, Michael Kintu. Later in the day a reliable source was quoted by the 'Uganda Argus' as saying: "that full and complete agreement had been reached on points which were either left open when the Constitutional Committee saw the Governor, or on which there was disagreement."

Following from this accord, Buganda took steps to attend the conference that began on September 18. As expected, the UPC supported Buganda's desires on the manner of selecting her 21 representatives to the National Assembly. The two parties also advanced their common position on the timetable for the next elections. Against strong opposition from the DP, these two demands were endorsed by the conference, and a de facto alliance between UPC and the neo-traditionalists sealed.

The Constitutional Conference arrived at a unanimous consensus that however important the elections of March 1961 had been, in view of the boycott, they could not constitute the basis for governance. To remedy this, the DP had proposed that fresh elections should be held after independence. Both the UPC and the Buganda delegations pressed for fresh elections immediately and before independence. The Conference eventually resolved that elections would be held in April 1962.

It was also ruled that the elections of the Lukiiko of Buganda should be early enough for it to take decisions on the form of elections in Buganda at least 14 days before the nomination day for national elections. This deadline was necessary in case the Lukiiko opted for direct elections, and so voters in Buganda would have had to be registered at the same time as those of the rest of the country.

Elections for the Lukiko were held on February 22, 1962 and KY won 69 out of 72 seats and proceeded to elect the 21 representatives from Buganda to the National Assembly. In April, after national elections in which UPC won 37 as against DPs 22 seats, the alliance between UPC and KY formed the government led by Obote as Prime Minister. Later on, as it had been agreed, Kabaka Mutesa was elected ceremonial President of Uganda.

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