After experiencing multi-partyism for over 20 years, a group

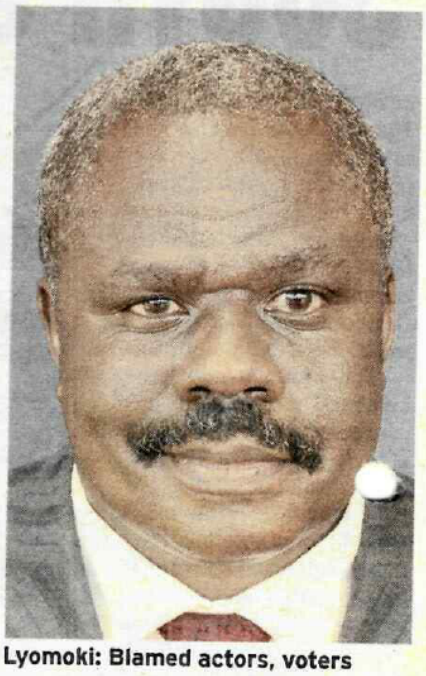
DEBATE ON MOVEMENT SYSTEM RETURNS



Ssimbwa: Had enough of pluralism



Kabwegyere: Wants China system



Lyomoki: Blamed actors, voters

BY DEDAN KIMATHI

In Uganda, when President Yoweri Museveni captured power in 1986, the National Resistance Army/ Movement established a *de jure* non-partisan system known as the Movement. It established *de jure* because under Legal Notice No. 1 of 1986, all political parties and their activities were suspended.

Under the system, the country held the 1989 National Resistance Council (NRC), Constituent Assembly (CA), 1996 and 2001 elections, with candidates being voted on individual merit.

LIFTING THE BAN

And yet by 2005, when political space was reopened, former ethics and integrity minister Miria Matembe observes in her book: *The Struggle for Freedom and Democracy Betrayed*, that the situation within the Movement family had come to resemble that of co-wives unable to live under the same roof.

Matembe claims that in the aftermath of the lifting of the term limits in July 2005, which she opposed, she was invited on three occasions by President Yoweri Museveni in a bid to iron out differences. During one such meeting, Matembe bluntly put it to the President that there was need to open up the political space.

"I asked him to let Forum for Democratic Change and its then leader, Col Dr Kizza Besigye, organise and mobilise members to build a strong opposition without disturbance and harassment. That would enable healthy competition in the next general election. I told him that since he had been in the field for so long, he could salvage some pride and honour for himself and create a legacy by allowing the country to peacefully transform into a good multi-party democracy," she added.

BITTER PILL

Shortly thereafter, a constitutional amendment on lifting the ban on political parties was tabled in Parliament, followed by a referendum.

Yet, as Ondoga ori Amaza noted in his book: *Museveni's Long March from Guerrilla to Statesman*, the shift was a bitter pill for Museveni to swallow.

"The crux of the matter is that President Museveni has never wanted multi-party democracy. He had always said if the country decided to go back to multi-party politics, he would retreat to his home in Rwakitura and watch as the country crumbled and people hacked each other with machetes," Amaza said in his book.

DONOR PRESSURE

Long-serving Dokolo South MP Felix Okot Ogong, however, said the shift was not as spontaneous. It came, he added, after careful consideration.

"Regarding term limits, I was the minister for parliamentary affairs and I was the one chairing some of those issues. There were many issues. In 2003/2004, we decided to go multi-party because of two things. There were people who were not comfortable staying in the Movement system. So, the President decided that those who wanted to go, let them go," Okot said.

He added: "The second position was that of the western world, which was insisting on multi-partyism or pluralism. They were hard on it, and it affected our relationship with them."

DEBATE RETURNS

Yet after experiencing multi-partyism for over two decades, a group of former MPs led by former Makindye East MP John Ssimbwa argue that they have had enough of pluralism.

These argue that only a return to the Movement system can deal with political polarisation, commercialisation of politics and creeping tendencies of sectarianism, which have dogged multi-party politics.

"The Movement system prevents sectarian tendencies, which is always based on ethnicity, religion and region in a multi-party setting. Under the Movement system, consensus-based governance is encouraged unlike under a multi-party arrangement, where the majority takes it all. Structured competition during the Movement system is healthier than suppressed rivalry under multi-partyism," Ssimbwa said.

He added that the situation has been made worse by the failure of existing parties to strengthen internal democracy and governance in broader sense.

"No efforts under the multi-party political system are being made to strengthen local governance autonomy. The checks and balances, accountability and alternative policy guidance mechanism that were expected to be provided by opposition political parties in a multi-party political system have not been forthcoming," Ssimbwa added.



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MIXED REACTION

Speaking to *The Weekend Vision*, former minister, MP and CA delegate Prof. Tarsis Bazana Kabwegyere saluted the move to return the Movement system.

"Those of us who have known the history of Uganda, divisions have not helped us. Those of us who were involved in Uganda National Liberation Front, we wanted a front, not a division of parties and so on. We rooted for the Movement system from 1986 onwards before we went into parties. That is a formula that we wish would work," he said.

However, Kabwegyere added, in a world where a novel approach to politics is often defined by modelling governance on the political systems of the US and the UK, the country's political landscape has, unfortunately, become clouded by several parties whose contributions to national development remains debatable.

He cited the Uganda People's Congress (UPC), Democratic Party (DP) and the National Unity Platform, which instead are increasingly getting embroiled in internal strife.

Kabwegyere has instead rooted for a more radical system such as that of China, which operates a one-party system.

"What is it that you like about Britain or America? The majority can be ignorant, if they are ignorant, they are a majority in numbers. That's one of the reasons why democracy probably doesn't work with us because we are still relatively ignorant of what is right and what is good," he said.

Article 75 of the Constitution, which is one of the entrenched provisions, prohibits the establishment of a one-party state in Uganda. The provision also takes away the legislative powers of Parliament to enact laws establishing a one-party state.

The change of any political system, according to Article 74 of the Constitution, is through a referendum.

BAN ON POLITICAL PARTIES

The 1989-1995 Constitution-making process came with many controversial and contentious issues.

Writing about this process, in his essay: *The Politics of Constitution-making in Uganda*, Aili Mari Tripp said one of the substantive issues at the heart of the Constitution-making process regarded the nature of the political system in Uganda.