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## BURKINA FASO : LAND OF THE INCORRUPTIBLE MEN

This Brief Report is based on a recent visit by André du Pisani, Director of Research at the SAIIA, to Burkina Faso and two other West African states, Senegal and Ghana.

### THE COUNTRY AND ITS PEOPLE

Burkina Faso (formerly the Republic of Upper Volta) is a land-locked state in West Africa, bordered by Mali to the west and north, by Niger to the east, and by Benin, Togo, Ghana and the Ivory Coast to the south.

The climate is hot and mainly dry, with an average annual temperature of 28°C (82°F).

The official language is French and there are various other indigenous languages (principally Mossi).

The majority of the population follow animistic beliefs, some 30% are Muslims, with fewer than 10% Christians, principally Roman Catholics.

The National Flag has two horizontal stripes of red and green, with a five-pointed gold star in the centre.

The capital is Ouagadougou.

The official currency is CFA (franc de la Communauté financière africaine. 100 Centimes = 1 franc.

### RECENT HISTORY - VACILLATION BETWEEN MILITARY AND CIVILIAN RULE

Burkina Faso (known as Upper Volta until August 1984) was formerly a province of French West Africa. It became a self-governing republic within the French Community in December 1958 and achieved independence on 5 August 1960, with Maurice Yaméogo as President. In January 1966, President Yaméogo was deposed in a successful military coup, led by Lt-Col. (later General) Sangoulé Lamizana. Lamizana took office as President and Prime Minister. The military regime dissolved the French-style National Assembly, suspended the Constitution and established a Supreme Council of the Armed Forces.

In November 1969 all political restrictions were lifted. A new constitution, approved by popular referendum in June 1970, provided a return to civilian rule after a four-year transitional regime of joint military and civilian administration. Elections for a National Assembly were held in December 1969 and the Union démocratique voltaïque (UDV) won thirty-seven of the fifty-seven seats. In January 1971 the President appointed the UDV leader, Gérard Ouedraogo, as Prime Minister, leading a mixed civilian and military Council of Ministers.

However, this fractious arrangement resulted in growing conflict between the military and the National Assembly and, in February 1974, the President, General Lamizana, announced that the military had taken over power once more. He dismissed the Prime Minister and dissolved the National Assembly. The Constitution was suspended and all political activity was prohibited. In May 1974 the new military regime banned all political parties. The National Assembly was replaced by a National Consultative Council for Renewal, formed in July 1974, its sixty-five members nominated by the President.

A semblance of political normality was restored in October 1977, when political parties were allowed to resume their activities. A referendum in November 1977 approved a draft constitution which provided for a return to civilian rule. Seven parties registered to contest elections for a new National Assembly, held in April 1978. The UDV won twenty-eight of the fifty-seven seats, while the newly formed Union nationale pour la défense de la démocratie (UNDD) won thirteen seats. General Lamizana was elected President in May and the seven parties formed three alliances in the Assembly, as required by the Constitution. The main opposition came from the UNDD and the Union progressiviste voltaïque (UPV). In July 1978, the National Assembly elected Dr Joseph Conombo (a leading member of the UDV), as Prime Minister.

Unfortunately the newly-formed government made little progress on economic issues and national unity, while internal fractiousness and conflict between the military and the trade unions led to growing disillusionment and economic decline.

Principally as a result of the deteriorating economic situation, the country suffered extended labour action in 1979 and 1980. After protracted industrial unrest, President Lamizana was toppled in November 1980 in a bloodless coup, led by Colonel Saye Zerbo, who had been Minister of Foreign Affairs during the previous period of military rule. A Comité militaire de redressement pour le progrès national (CMRPN), consisting of thirty-one members (all soldiers), was formed. In December 1980 a Government of National Recovery, comprising both army officers and civilians, was convened. Once again, the Constitution was suspended and a ban placed on political activity. The National Assembly was dissolved.

The period 1981 to February 1982 was characterised by growing confrontation between the Zerbo regime and the trade unions. In November 1982, however, Col. Zerbo was ousted in another military coup, led by non-commissioned officers. Major Jean-Baptiste Ouedraogo emerged as the leader of the new military regime and established the Conseil de salut du peuple (CSP). The CMRPN was dissolved and a predominantly civilian government was formed.

#### THE SANKARA REGIME

In August 1983 Captain Thomas Sankara seized power in a coup. Opposition politicians were placed under house arrest, a strict curfew was imposed and a Conseil nationale révolutionnaire (CNR) (National Council of the Revolution) set up. Citizens were called to join local committees, Comités pour la défense de la révolution (CDR's) (Committees for the Defence of the Revolution), in an attempt to mobilise popular support for the regime.

In September 1983 ex-President Zerbo was formally arrested, after his supporters attempted to overthrow the Sankara government. Captain Sankara then announced various administrative, judicial and military reforms. Revolutionary People's Tribunals (Les tribunaux populaires de la révolution) were established to try former politicians and civil servants, several of whom (including Zerbo) were imprisoned.

Since its inception in August 1983, the Sankara regime has battled with the problems of popular legitimisation and state-building. For example, in June 1984, seven people were executed, convicted of plotting to overthrow the Government. Sankara accused an outlawed political party, the Front progressiviste voltaïque (which included members of the former UFV and other leftist groups), of complicity in the plot, alleging that it had been supported by the French Government. The latter vigorously denied any involvement and relations between the two countries have since been strained.

#### LAND OF THE INCORRUPTIBLE MEN

In August 1984, on the first anniversary of the coup which brought him to power, Sankara announced that Upper Volta would henceforth be known as Burkina Faso - the 'Land of the Incorruptible Men' - and introduced a new national flag and anthem.

In September 1984 a recomposed Council of Ministers was announced. Significantly, the influence of the Marxist-oriented Ligue patriotique pour le développement (LIPAD), which had become increasingly at odds with Sankara's populist approach, was markedly reduced. Captain Sankara proceeded to dissolve and reconstitute the Government in a similar manner on the two following anniversaries of the coup, in August 1985 and August 1986, justifying the process of transformation as a response to the 'revolutionary tradition', that he claimed had now been established in the country.

By the beginning of 1986 it appeared as if the extended system of Committees for the Defence of the Revolution (CDR's) that exercise military, administrative, social, economic and security functions at the local level, had consolidated both the Revolution and Sankara's position as leader. A further factor seems to have consolidated Sankara's rule - the establishment, in December 1985, of the Libyan-inspired jamahiri system in the country. Some 300 co-ordination bureaux were established in order to collect and collate the views of the 'revolutionary popular masses'.

Revolutionary fervour is being kept alive by the system of CDR's and by various youth, women's and farmers' co-operatives. Each village boasts a CDR, the deputy-general of which must be a woman, to enable liberated women to stand for political office. The emancipation of women generally is a high priority of the revolution.

For administrative purposes, the country is divided into twenty-five provinces, which, in turn, are divided into departments, districts and villages. All legislative and executive authority rests with the CNR, whose Chairman is Head of State.

#### DEFENCE

National service is voluntary and lasts for two years. Since 1983 the armed forces have grown steadily, from 1 200 to 4 000 in 1986, reaching a figure of 5 200 in July 1987. Burkina Faso has a small air force and there are some 2 100 men in paramilitary forces. Defence expenditure was budgeted at US\$ 34,1 million in 1985/6.

#### ECONOMY

The economy is predominantly based on subsistence agriculture. More than 80% of the working population are small farmers or nomadic pastoralists. The agricultural sector contributed about 44% of gross domestic product (GDP) in 1985. The principal cash crops are sorghum, sugar cane, millet, beans and maize, most of which are consumed locally. The major export crop is cotton, followed by karité nuts. Since 1976 Burkina Faso has been the third largest cotton producer in West Africa.

The economy has been hit by a devastating drought that affected the whole Sahel region (Senegal, Mauritania, Togo, Mali, Niger) from 1968 to 1974. Erratic rainfall remains a constant problem. In May 1985 it was estimated that nearly 1,5 million Burkinabe were suffering the effects of famine.

## ECONOMIC PLANNING

The People's Development Plan, introduced in May 1984, aims to achieve self-sufficiency in basic foods and essential capital goods through economic decentralisation and small-scale agricultural projects. The 1986-1991 Economic Plan, involving an estimated total investment of 630 000 million francs CFA (of which some 21% was to be met from domestic sources), will allocate a large proportion of resources to the manufacturing sector. It is hoped that an average annual growth rate of 3,1% will be achieved over the five-year period.

In August 1984 the traditional land ownership system was abolished and all land and mineral rights were nationalised. The Sankara Government has also started constructing various dams, notably at Komienga near the Togo border, at Bagre on the Nankabe (White Volta) river, and at Noubiel on the Mouhoun (Black Volta) river.

Burkina Faso has limited mining potential but does produce some manganese and two tons of gold annually.

Foreign assistance comes mainly from the European Investment Bank (EIB) and the Islamic Development Bank (IDB).

The country remains exceptionally poor, even by Third World standards. According to estimates by the World Bank, its gross national product (GNP) per capita, measured at average 1982-84 figures, was US\$ 160 in 1984, showing an annual increase of only 1,2% since 1965.

Burkina Faso's foreign debt totalled US\$ 407,4 million at the end of 1984, according to the World Bank, and is estimated to have risen even higher in 1985.

## SOCIAL WELFARE

The Government provides hospitals and rural medical services. A special medical service for schools is in operation.

Education is available free of charge and is officially compulsory for children between the ages of seven and thirteen years. Primary education begins at seven years of age and lasts for up to six years. Secondary education, from the age of thirteen, lasts for up to seven years.

In August 1983 President Sankara announced plans to introduce adult 'functional literacy' programmes in national languages. In 1985, according to UNESCO estimates, adult illiteracy averaged 86,8% (males 79,3%; females 93,9%).

## PROSPECTS AND PROBLEMS

From this thumbnail sketch it should be clear that Burkina Faso has many of the problems typically associated with micro and small states: limited resources; political instability; rural underdevelopment; illiteracy; foreign debt; economic and technological dependency; and problems relating to the political legitimacy of the regime.

Two additional factors will continue to influence political and economic developments in 1987 - the simmering border conflict with Mali over the mineral-rich Agacher Strip (this erupted into a cross-border war in late 1985, leaving more than fifty people dead); and an intensification of a long-standing conflict between the military and the trade unions.

In the capital, Ouagadougou, and other main centres, action against trade unionists, who are being presented by the Government press as enemies of the revolution, has been spearheaded by the CDR's and the police. Although Burkina Faso has a small unionised labour force, it is significant nonetheless and has generally opposed Captain Sankara's attempts to bring the peasantry within the political arena. (via the CDR's).

The unions have traditionally been powerful in Burkina Faso. It was they who brought down Maurice Yaméogo, the first President of the Republic, in 1966. No-one has forgotten this, least of all the flamboyant Thomas Sankara.

The Sankara Government is a fragile political alliance of the left. The major partners are: the Organisation militaire révolutionnaire (OMR), the Union des luttes communistes (ULC), the Union des communistes burkinabe (UCB), the Union des marxistes-léninistes du Burkina (UMLB), and the Groupe communiste burkinabe (GCB).

Indications are that organisational and personal rivalries between the ULC and the UCB may undermine the cohesion of the Sankara Government.

However, despite its many problems, Sankara's social revolution has some positive aspects to it. It has given a sense of pride to the people of Burkina Faso. The objectives of rural development, women's emancipation, mass education and reforestation, especially in the rural areas, are worthy of support. Sankara's realistic approach to rural underdevelopment and his charming personality may perhaps restore a sense of national identity to the land of the incorruptible men.