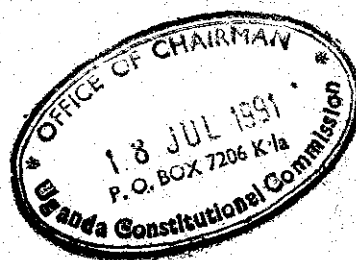


The Editor,
New Vision,
P.O. Box 9815,
Kampala - UGANDA.



Sir,

The issue of returning, "to the rightful owners", the properties which were appropriated by the government of Uganda at the peak of Uganda's political folly, seems to have taken an unprecedented course. Yet, a quick look at the issues involved does not seem to suggest anything sinister to warrant the kind of verbal attacks which have been unleashed to those who are for or against the return of the properties. On the face of it, the facts seem to be that:-

- (a) aliens in this country were expelled by the government in power some 18 years ago. That, on departure they appear to have left behind well documented properties in the hands of the government in power.
- (b) kingdoms were abolished and their rulers deposed.
- (c) both the kingdoms and the incumbent rulers at the time had properties, most of which were appropriated by the government of the day.
- (d) now that there is a government in power which respects property ownership, those who lost their properties want to get them back.

Since the government has made a statement on the properties of the expelled Asians, after a closed debate in the National Resistance Council, we can leave any property matters concerning this group out of this correspondence. What seems to be the issues to pursue now are the appropriated properties of the former kingdoms and the personal properties of the rulers of those kingdoms at the time they were abolished. The contention now is, "if the properties of the Asians are being returned to "the rightful owners", "why can't the properties of the Baganda be returned to them?"

In my view, the fate of the properties of the former kingdoms is tied up with the proposed constitution, in respect of the kind of government Uganda will have. A decision on these properties therefore, has to wait until a new constitution is in place. However, the return of personal or cultural properties and institutions of the former rulers can be done even now. The cultural places like Twekobe, Karuziika, Amalaalo, Egasani, etc. and properties like the royal drums, the royal spears, enseegu, etc. belong to the tribal people of the former kingdoms, and the head of the clans like the Ssabattaka; in the case of Buganda, ~~the~~ can receive them on behalf of the clans (Battaka). But the political institutions in the former kingdoms, which include Bulange, belong to the people of Buganda as a whole and have to be disposed of in accordance with the provisions of the new constitution.

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The fact is that, there is a clear distinction between the "cultural things" and the "political things" of these former kingdoms. The tribal people or clansmen of the kingdoms are automatically and solely entitled to their "cultural things" and institutions. But they are not solely entitled to the "political things" and institutions because these affect other people who are not tribal members of the former kingdoms but who have lived or are living in those former kingdoms.

A lot of dust has been raised about whether or not Bulange was sold. To me whether Bulange was sold, bought or not is immaterial. If it was sold or bought, it was sold and bought by Ugandans and it is still in Uganda. Ugandans are now at peace with each other and can therefore, sit down together and sort out the "rightful owner(s) of Bulange and hand it over to him/them, once its political status has been settled. As a mere property, any one with a modicum of a sense of justice would return it to its rightful owner(s) and balance the books in due time.

But, to some of us, the question of ownership of "the things of the Baganda", does not seem to be the real issue in this case. Ugandans, especially those who were mature by 1972, are aware of the events which culminated in the expulsion of Asians that year. Definitely, their expulsion was not an accident, nor was it as a result of dictator Idi Amin's dream. Their expulsion was already in the blood of any conscientious native Ugandan. Their self-made social, economic and political incompatibility and isolation had stood between them and the native Ugandans for quite a long time. At one time they had precipitated events and legislations like Augustine Kanya's boycott of the Asians businesses and laws to keep Asians from trading in certain areas or streets in the country.

No one should condone segregation; but if he does it to counter an injustice, I think he should be tolerated. Here was a group of aliens who had been brought into this country (without the approval let alone the consultation of the natives) to lay down a rail line from Mombasa to Kampala, and who, in the normal course of events, should have returned to their country of origin after the completion of the contract, but who chose to remain, and were encouraged to do so, and to assume the role of economic maharajans, over and above the native Ugandans. They could not hide this!!

Going by "the kind words" the local peasantry have spoken to those who have so far returned to repossess their properties, one would perhaps be right to say that they were an economic success. But this was achieved at the expense of the native Ugandans. The fact is that they were social, cultural and political misfits and outcasts among the people they lived in.

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In a country which harbours no racial, colour, religious or social class discrimination; it was their own arrogance, colour, socio-cultural discrimination and a dream to settle in their masters' country one day, which un-did them. They had made themselves social, economic and political aliens in a land they claimed to have lived as second, third or fourth generations, by the time they were expelled.

So far so good as far as the Asians are concerned. I however believe that, if we were to use their case as a mirror to take a hard look at ourselves, we would find that there is a very big parallel between the Asians' cultural and social isolation from the main stream of the native Ugandans, and the Baganda's cultural isolation from the rest of Ugandans. The differences which have usually come between the Baganda and the rest of Ugandans, like the dispute over the use of Luganda as the national language, the dispute over a cultural leader being made a constitutional head of Uganda as well, etc. have been due to Baganda trying to put the Ganda cultural values over and above the values of the rest of Ugandans. The clash that took place between the Ugandan government (headed by Obote) and the Kabaka's government (headed by the late Muteesa II) ~~was~~ that precipitated the abolition of kingdoms was, more than anything else, due to the failure to reconcile those differences.

In the "return of the Baganda things" call of ^{the} day, there seems to be traces of the causes of the differences which precipitated the rift between the Kabaka's and Obote's governments. Now, it is the Bulange; and one wonders what will be next? The wrangle between the Kabaka's and Obote's governments started with the "remove the central government, Buganda's soil" demand and ended up with the actual armed conflict.

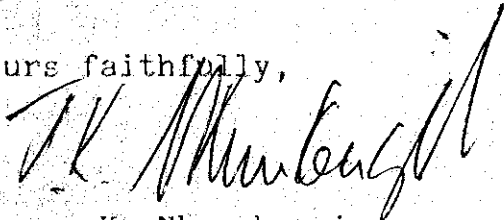
I do not think we are going to go through the same motions this time. But in this time, the Baganda could do with a little advice to the effect that they should use this opportunity to separate the cultural things and institutions from the political things and institutions, in the Ganda set up. If they want to retain the "cultural things" then they should leave out "the political things and institutions" to be decided by the operation of the constitution. At the same time they should avoid making the mistake of constitutionalising their cultural things and institutions. Constitutionalising them brings them on a collision course with parliamentary politics. If, on the other hand, they want to have political things and institutions, then they should be prepared to forgo some of their sovereignty and let the supreme law of the land (the constitution) take care of the fate of institutions like the Bulange.

It should be remembered that, the days when a cultural leader could also exercise political power ended with the "indirect rule" of the colonial era; and if only every Ugandan could always recall this truth when handling the affairs of this country, ~~ensured~~ peace, harmony and progress would not be far from being consolidated in Uganda. Let the lessons of our past mistakes and achievements be our teacher this time. ~~to that we must profitably learn~~

P.T.O.

(contd.)

Yours faithfully,



Jerome K. Nkurukenzire,

P.O. Box 30377,

KAMPALA - Uganda.

15th July, 1991

cc The Chairman,
Constitutional Commission
Kampala - Uganda