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11 June 1990

Dear Ellen,

Most of what appears below was written on June 8. I decided to forward the thoughts to you--after our telephone discussion Sunday--because specific names are not as important as the reasoning (or failure to reason) which might have influenced selection.

After reflecting on our discussion, your question, about my plans--whether I would remain in LAP or join LPP--I become much troubled. Here are some of the things that trouble me.

Is there an element or group perceiving itself as purer LAP than others?

If the little view of politics--exclusion--is maintained, it might be that a contest for the soul or core of LAP--which really is a phantom--is undertaken. I would guess that with the sting gone out of the code "socialists or communists", LAP could easily be split up, and of course UPP would reap all the benefits from such a split.

Let us not forget that (a) tribalism and violence have been introduced into Liberian politics. The implications for this development, whatever one perceives them to be, require a careful approach to any post-Doe political activities. (B) Doe's excesses notwithstanding, the problems associated with and arising from Montserrado domination of Liberia which inspired the democracy movement in the 1970s must not be brought back, or ignored, (C) Even if the expression, in terms of logic, is nonsensical, that the soul of LAP is a phantom should be clear. In 1985 and after, a not insignificant share of the party's achievements was due to cooperation with those present at the creation of LAP.

I always thought the evidence was clear that those who were "natural" allies of LAP preferred to see a trend, and then follow incognito, and not lead. For that reason, I am inclined not to trust

their willingness to lead in a charged situation. This is part of what I mean when I say LA P is a phantom.

I prefer the “big” view of political development, and am committed to it; it is that view which requires that fairplay, rule of law and equality of access to opportunity be created. Only those whose behavior and belief during the reign of terror established their commitment to these objectives are the persons I would start begin with as allies.

If, however, the little view prevailed--preventing the creation of a situation which would correct the Doe aberrations as well as the fundamental problems of our society, then as one who is not from Montserrado, I shall cast my lot with those who seek, among other goals, devolution of power.

Let me say this in closing. I do not know Tipoteh nor Fahnbulleh; what I know of them, I have considerable differences with, as is well known. My view is that even if these, and Amos, had refused to publicly support the NPF, there appears evidence that such a view may be supported by subsequent developments. Woweiyu [Woewiyu] has not marginalized all of us, including those who helped most to turn the tide. Could not it be said that, “I told you so”?

But to say, “I told you so” is to rub Liberia. I think the chances of any of those who have come to be identified with the quest for democracy in Liberia in the past decade or longer influencing an interim NPF government from within are very slim. Our collective--not competitive--efforts might better be focused on mobilizing domestic and external support to ensure a free and fair elections early. Such an election could be lost by fiat, unless those forces that worked together before--in the Grand Coalition, in various other publicized and unpublicized roles--work together again to that end, I propose:

1. An urgent meeting of LAP, LUP, LPP/MOJA, UP and independents, in July. Should NPP be invited?
2. The chair, to be agreed, might be Emma Walser or Mary Sherman or Elwood Dunn or Taylor Major.
3. I propose to draft an agenda, to be circulated to all members/groups at least three weeks before the meeting. The first item on such agenda would be to agree on the agenda.

8 June 1990

Thanks for the promised copy of Harry Greaves Jr.'s paper, "A Proposed Political Agenda for the National Patriotic Front of Liberia".

In several telephone discussions with me, you praised the paper highly. I don't know who else you shared that view with. Minus the cabinet suggestion, it deserves praise; with it, it expresses naivety or arrogance. Both characteristics would hamper evolution of an environment that would facilitate solution to our monumental problems.

I appreciate that Harry's paper represents a personal effort, but certain perceptions may transform it--in the minds of readers--from a personal effort to that of a group.

Circulation of personal documents might better be minimized in these difficult, tense times. Doe's success in consolidating his power arose when "individuals" acted; these efforts often lead to expression of disagreements, and African "leaders" are inclined to exploit the apparent division that results. Rather, "personal opinions" prepared without consultation and then widely circulated for reactions might be useful, but "personal documents" discussed with selected members (or presumed members) of a group and then circulated as personal, are likely to create difficulties for those not included among the consulted. The question becomes whether in fact to regard the document as personal, or as that of those consulted. The problems are compounded when such documents are naïve or insensitive to the feelings and perceptions. Such documents might undermine all efforts at uniting the various groups whose cooperation is essential to commencing solving our monumental problems. Politics is what it is--consultation and compromises—because its complexity, and the critical importance of perception to it, make it difficult for one person to have the foresight to anticipate many of the possible reactions to views or actions.

Here are some of the problem I have the document.

The substance of the paper as a draft for discussion is laudable; that is why it should be exposed to those whose views or perspectives might differ.

Remember Doe's first address to the nation? The problem with it was that pronouncement was not correlated with behavior.

Harry's paper prepares the basis for asymmetry between words and behavior. That is my distinct impression after reading Harry's proposal for cabinet. I am afraid one cannot dismiss the paper and nominations so easily.

Is the proposed agenda to be Harry's, or a joint effort with you? With Richard's? with Jim's? These questions are raised because Levi, who was in your office, was not considered.

One notes that neither you, Jackson, Ed Kesselly, nor Kpolleh is listed for a cabinet position. Is that to mean anything? You, Jackson and Kpolleh are proposed to head commissions. What is the logic behind this suggestion? Why is Kesselly left out? Matthews took himself out of consideration, so as far as, one hopes, an interim government is concerned, there could be no role for him.

If Harry had not consulted anyone, one could readily conclude that his cabinet proposals represent naivety. But consultations, as Harry did, followed the traditional habit of "Monrovia" people consulting among themselves. Levi was in your office, but was only given a completed copy. This guy stayed home, and in my opinion, carried on after we left. He tells me you thought the failure to show him a draft was possibly because of Moja connections.

Boley practiced the politics of exclusion starting in April 1980; that led us to a ten-year reign of terror. Are we going to follow that path again?

The proposed cabinet gives me my greatest fears. Four of the proposed ministers--Dunn, Tarr, Sherman and H. Dennis left Liberia, did not have any involvement in starting or prosecuting the civil war. Doe might be removed because of that civil war! Another group--Vinton, Bedell, Shannon, Knuckles, Cooper--remained in Liberia, but did not take any position indicative of a commitment to democratic values. Vinton and Knuckles worked consistently for the regime. Supuwood is proposed as an alternate to Banks, Winston & Robert Tubman's partner. Of course, you know my own personal admiration of Banks, but is there a reason why he should be preferred to Supuwood?

None of those fighting, nor their known close allies, is listed for any position. What does one think of Dokie, Yuan, and Duopu? Surely, they may not be one's best friends, or have international savvy, but is it likely that given what happened, those fellows will

agree to trust welfare into the hands of a group whose common denominator is “educated abroad; extensively travelled?” Does one think that the Gios and Manos would--or should--accept a government brought into power through the blood of their fighters and civilians that did not include anyone they may feel (or perceive) they have easy access to and affinity with?

D. Tarpeh, who as Yekeson’s second in command when Levi was fired for criticizing the suppression of individual rights--and who, to my knowledge, never said a word against the excesses of the university--is proposed for a job, but not Levi. Why is Teah Tarpeh not nominated, he behaved like his cousin D. Tarpeh, and perhaps like ballot counter Joe Richards’ son Marbue!

I must state what I think you know: I nor any of the people I might mention is looking for a job; a job is not the important thing.

Why did he propose these individuals for inclusion in government, and for the positions for which they are proposed? Are they committed to democracy? Are they competent? Do they balance (tribal/geographic) the government? Does their inclusion help ease the fears--resulting from brutal tribal persecution--that will linger when the mayhem comes to an end? What is the evidence that these people combine demonstrated, personal commitment to fair play with competence? Is esoteric “competence” what one believes would create the environment within which we can begin to find solutions to our problems?

Why should Terence Moore be listed and not Garlawulo? Hammond, to the best of my knowledge, did not want to “get involved” in these people’s thing. Do we “reward” such behavior? Ward told me in an Air Afrique flight in May 1990, how hard Doe had tried to reform the economy. I am afraid I must be personal about this. If a person thinks that my usefulness to any future government is equivalent to that of Ward’s, I have no desire to associate with such a person, or a government in which he had influence.

I also noticed that except for Carlon, most of the proposed persons are or can be presumed sympathizer/affiliated with LAP. LAP’s electoral victory has yet to be confirmed. National reconciliation requires a broader based government.

What ever one’s feelings might be, to exclude persons from the government that would succeed Doe’s because of those feelings would ensure destabilization in the immediate future.

Look at the geographic distribution. For now, let's look at places of origin (forget that everyone on the list, except those out of Liberia, lives in Monrovia). Dunn, Woewiyu, Brown and Tarr are from Bassa; Vinton is from Cape Palmas; Banks, Holder, Sherman, Divine, Knuckles, King, Cooper, Dennis and Grimes are from Montserrado; Nganana, Jallah and Kesselly (by marriage), Lofa; Carlon, Cape Mount and Kpolleh, Bong. Gwaikolo is the only person of Nimba origin. (More about this, later) Presuming that Taylor (Montserrado) is slated for President, is that what we want? Are we keeping Grand Gedeh a conquered territory? What about the other counties?

One historical sources of the problems that the emerging democratic forces were set to correct before Doe hijacked the process, was concentration of power. There has been no local governmental structure which was not subservient to Monrovia. When Arthur Barclay's interior policy was shelved and the frontiers force was created, the "interior department" became the instrument for further marginalizing the "natives". Tubman's extension of county status did not fundamentally correct that agency's role.

Critically important to Liberia is conscious evolution of democratic, responsive local governmental structure. This brings me to the suggested place for the suggested position for Gwaikolo. I presume he has been out of Liberia for a considerable time. Is this the agency in which he might make the most effective contributions? Does he have status in the society, Nimba and beyond? Keep in mind that tribalism is now a big factor in Liberian politics. Perhaps there is a general question I should ask: What factor--touching the mission of the agency, the reputation, status and character of the person proposed to head it--were considered in matching individuals and agencies?

What is Ebu King's position on civil rights? Is there any public knowledge of this?

The second string, except for Supuwood, raises more questions than the first team.

Someone suggested that perhaps there is no justification for rushing into filling cabinet posts. What might usefully be done while the military action continues, is to prepare papers on various issues. Such papers should then be circulated as broadly as possible--not to friends or those who think like one. In addition to

papers on the economy (general; special sectors: mining, foreigners--Lebanese, Indians), general political issues (devolution of power to local governmental units); judiciary; military, etc. one specific issues that requires attention revolves around legal, financial and other arguments for reducing the number of cabinet agencies. Perhaps this should be done first and early, and should the NPF capture Monrovia before it was done, then only caretakers should run ministries for a week (two even) until a broadly accepted document has been accepted by the NPF.

Playing up to divisiveness, as in the way Boley instructed Doe, will certainly lead us further into morass.

Perhaps in closing I might mention what I have said to you on several times. For personal and other reasons, the odds are better than nine out of ten that I would not want to join a Liberian government. Surely, I won't want to join the one Harry suggested.

Dr. S. Byron Tarr's Letter to Madam Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf

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