

MAYHEM IN BO

Time-9a.m. Date:January,26th 1987.

The first period of the day has just ended and the second has barely started. Students from two neighbouring schools came to my school singing protest songs condemning the appalling economic situation in the country the ineffective way the Government was handling the whole issue, and lastly the way the Government seems to be crippling education by not paying much attention to the perennial students' crises.

Students in the higher institutions of learning had appealed to the Government many a time for actions that will effectively solved the numerous problems facing the country. The Government said it was trying all in its power to contain the situation but the students felt the best efforts of the Government were not good enough to solve the problems in question.

There had been several appeals to the Government to at least come to the rescue of the students by way of increasing their maintenance allowances which was in fact nothing considering the high cost of living. (Refer to RELEASE attached). *[Note - the release has not been digitised]*

When the dialogue with the Government failed to yield positive results the students of the component institutions of the University of Sierra Leone: Fourah Bay College and the Njala University College; and Milton Margai Teachers College boycotted lectures. Most of them in fact left their respective campuses for home.

Peaceful demonstration were planned to seek support from, the public. In the beginning all went on as planned-singing and parading the streets in a peaceful manner. In the late afternoon the demonstrators returned from the campus of the Bo Teachers College to hear that some of their colleagues had been taken into Police a custody. They marched to the Police station to demand the release of their colleagues detained. The Police refused and this sparked off further actions not really intended. Some public buildings including the Regional Education Office, The Provincial Administration Office, Ministry of Agriculture and the All Peoples' Congress' offices (Official party )were burnt down,

The office of the Sierra Leone Agricultural Produce Company (SLAPCO) (where large quantities of rice was looted), the West African Examinations Council's office was ransacked; so was the offices of the Regional Veterinary Department; the Town Council came in for its share of vandalism; but the most of unfortunate was the attack on the Bank House (the residence of the Manager of the Barclays Bank). At the Ministry of Agriculture a large stock of vehicles including Motor cycles and bicycles were burnt. People then began asking if these were acts perpetrated by the students of the University and their supporters-those in the secondary schools. The students in the secondary schools had joined in the demonstrations because if the situation prevailing at the moment in the University and the Milton Margai Teachers College are not normalised then of course they have no future . They argued that there was no need for them to attend school if there was no hope of getting a University education in future.

Most people are, of the opinion that the acts of vandalism were engineered by disgruntled elements at the various office and were supported by street-boys who are always looking for such occasions to have a field day.

Some arrests have been made including two teachers; one is reported have been involved in the instigating of the students demonstrations (He was a former student activist in and a political aspirant in the last general election under President Momoh), the other is said to have some goods stolen from the Agriculture Ministry. All these allegations are yet to be proved. A student is also reported to have been shot in the leg.

Most workers did not report for duty for some two days as none was sure of what may happen while on the way to work. People reminisced of similar incidents in 1977. One wonders whether the action of the workers was in sympathy with the students or it was for their own safety.

Bo meanwhile is under curfew-7pm/7am. and all schools; primary and secondary have been closed indefinitely.

Sketchy reports reaching here state that similar incidents have taken place in Kenema where two students were killed and several of them seriously wounded. Most of the news about the demonstrations have come from the foreign press; the B.B.C., the V.O.A., and V.O.G. There is complete news blackout locally. Freetown also had its share of the demonstrations but these were quickly suppressed.

People as usual are asking the ever pressing question: Are those in authority going to find lasting solutions to these occurrences or will leave the problems to lie idly once the situation returns to normal.

The Government has officially closed the University of Sierra Leone saying the 'confrontation' by the students was a threat to the security of the state.

The official party of Sierra Leone: the All People's Congress continues with its Annual Conventions in the Provinces.

Bo has had the opportunity of enjoying regular supply of electricity since the beginning of the students' action. (A 'luxury' that the people have gone without except on special occasions and sometimes at rare weekends).

Everybody is anxiously awaiting for the Government's reaction and action on the burning issue. But when , one cannot tell.

Prices keep escalating and the price of a 50kilo bag of imported rice now costs Le520.00. This will go up very soon it is clear and salaries have kept marking time since the last increases about a year ago!

ABRAHAM K. MENSAH