

<https://www.internationalviewpoint.org/spip.php?article430>



Senegal

From alternation to the need for an alternative

- IV Online magazine - 2002 - IV341 - June 2002 -

Publication date: Saturday 15 June 2002

Copyright © International Viewpoint - online socialist magazine - All rights reserved

As the dominant force in Senegal for 40 years, the Parti Socialiste (PS - a member of the Socialist International) consciously built a party-state on the basis of implementing the diktats of the imperialist powers. The model of socialist management was marked by the arrogance of the party leaders, mass corruption, repression of opponents and radical union leaders and the restriction of civil liberties.

[<https://www.internationalviewpoint.org/IMG/jpg/23africa.jpg>]

This model of development and management of the country was accompanied by a growing inequality between and inside towns and regions, strengthening centrifugal forces of which the most significant is the guerrilla struggle led by the Mouvement des Forces de Casamance (MFDC) in the Casamance region.

Faced with this situation strategies of social resistance have developed along with opposition to the policies implemented by the PS in the framework of structural adjustment.

Crisis of the PS

Throughout the 40 years of PS rule, the opposition denounced its fraudulent elections, monopolizing of the media and brutal repression of trade unions.

Through campaigns of consciousness raising and information at both national and international levels the opposition won space for expression embodied in the electoral code, as well as the right to hold public meetings without restriction.

These points of support have been used to profoundly undermine the political and moral authority of a PS sapped by often deadly internecine wars, in a context of confusion between the management of the state and that of the PS.

All this was reflected inside the PS, from base to summit, leading to the defection of leaders at all levels to other parties and the creation of new ones; the Alliance des forces de progrès (AFP) led by a former PS Prime Minister who became prime minister during the transition, the Union pour le renouveau démocratique (URD) led by Diouf's former Interior Minister, the Parti pour le progrès et la citoyenneté (PPC) created by the mayor of the town of Rufisque and so on.

Other problems include conflicts with Gambia, Mauritania, Guinea-Bissau which threaten to destabilize the West African sub region (massacres, harassment at borders and so on).

On the eve of the elections of March 2000, the PS was undermined by upheavals, with its first secretary, Ousmane Tanor Dieng, joining the opposition and a breakdown of communication between Abdou Diouf (president of the Republic and the PS) and the Senegalese people.

Social crises

The CNTS (Confédération Nationale des Travailleurs du Senegal) is the union federation organizing the numerical majority of workers and is linked to the PS through ideology and 'responsible participation', guaranteeing its leaders emoluments and impunity against any attempt to challenge the social bases of the regime. The existence of a combative federation led by Mademba Sock, the Union nationale des syndicats autonomes du Senegal (UNSAS), has been a powerful instrument in social resistance in strategic sectors like health, electricity, post and telecommunications, education and social security.

The UNSAS has contributed to a rejection of 'responsible participation' in the union movement, weakening a key pillar of the PS. Other union federations (CSA, UDTS, CGTDS and so on) have also contributed to this process of independent recomposition and a break with 'responsible participation'. The struggles of the local federations of the CNTS have also contributed to the process.

The response of the PS was articulated around an institutional and social opening by cooption inside the Social and Economic Council of all the combative union organizations including the UNSAS. Also there were proposals of participation in enlarge presidential majority governments as well as repression (arrest of UNSAS leaders, dismissals for union activity, challenges to the right to work and so on).

Youth

Young people in the schools and popular neighbourhoods, characterized by Abdou Diouf as 'unhealthy youth' during the urban insurrections of 1988, have progressively grown aware of the necessity of participation in mass struggles, political battles and electoral campaigns.

Since 1988, youth has distinguished itself from the PS though struggles in schools and universities and in neighbourhoods and villages, struggles against unemployment and in defence of civil liberties, while condemning the attitude of the electoralist parties and political compromises dangerous for the country (participation in enlarged majority governments and so on).

The response of Diouf and the PS was: the creation of the National Council of Youth (CNJS) whose relations with the political youth have been conflictual; the holding of youth parliaments without results or perspectives; and the definition and implementation of policies of insecure work as recommended by the World Bank without social guarantees or real waged incomes. Meanwhile, the government undertook reforms that have accelerated the crisis in the universities and schools.

The peripheral regions

In the execution of its policies the PS has given a weak priority to the peripheral regions of Senegal, which for some years have experienced difficulties because of infrastructural deficiencies (roads, hospitals, training centres and so on.), difficulties in access to radio and television, new information and communication technologies and so on. This situation has led to frustration and mass protests in the northern, eastern and southern prefectures.

The high point is the situation in Casamance where for 20 years there have been problems linked to the land question and structural adjustment policies which have modified the whole local economy and restructured age old relations between local peoples, with a new redistribution of forces benefiting people from other parts of the country.

Another decisive subjective factor is that the people of Casamance rightly had the feeling of being marginalized by the regime. Separated by Gambia from the rest of Senegal, Casamance possesses enormous agricultural potential that has not been exploited for the benefit of its people.

Finally, sub regional geopolitics has a direct effect on the dynamic of struggle of the Mouvement démocratique des forces de Casamance (MFDC). General Ansoumana Mané

holds the real power in Guinea Bissau and protects Salif Sadio, a factional leader in the MFDC, whose forces fought against Nino Vieyra, Guinea-Bissau's head of state between 1998 and 1999. Gambia also shelters members of the MFDC. Such a situation has created instability in the south of the country and in relations with our neighbours.

The response in Casamance has been the division of the zone into two regions - Ziguinchor and Kolda - and their militarisation with the aim of repressing the MFDC. A general was made military governor. However, the MFDC remains a significant social force despite its internal divisions. Hence the state has combined repression with the establishment of mediation commissions. Direct negotiations (the Cacheu accords in Guinea-Bissau in 1991, Banjul negotiations 1994-1998 and so on) failed because there was a plurality of interlocutors facing the MFDC and the MFDC itself was divided into several tendencies. While the MFDC spoke of independence for Casamance, the regime completely rejected the idea of partition and stressed the indivisibility of Senegal. The conflict has continued, with death and destruction, showing the total inability of the PS to lead a peace process.

The social question

The army participated in different interventions integrated with UN missions and in the framework of Diouf's bellicose policy for which promised bonuses were not paid. For the first time in Senegal's history, a part of the army emerged from the barracks and occupied the street in protest. The military hierarchy was shaken, as was Diouf.

The resistance unfolded against a background of the corruption of the regime's leaders, poverty, unemployment and growing social difficulties, leading to the electoral defeat of the PS in the elections of March 19, 2000.

Defeat of the PS

For 20 years, all opposition tendencies had participated in presidential, legislative and local elections without ever beating the PS. This situation was explained by the division between the political parties; the people, in various demonstrations, demanded a common front to defeat the PS.

What facilitated the unity of the parties was firstly the key role played by And-Jef/PADS which contributed to the creation of the Coalition Alternance 2000 (CA 2000). The forces of the opposition (nationalist and left) had taken their distance from the PDS, which often seemed close to the PS when the people sought the overthrow of the latter (participation in a round table in 1988 when the urban insurrections led by the Popular Resistance Committees threatened Diouf, participation in enlarged majority governments and so on).

High in political credibility because of its intransigence towards the PS and its refusal to participate in any form of government, the PADS created an electoral alliance to defeat the PS around a programme of transition.

Another equally important factor was the creation of the Front pour la Transparence des Élections (FRTE) uniting all

the opposition parties for transparency in the elections and resistance to fraud by the PS.

Finally, another political framework grouping other opposition forces was created around former PS prime minister, Moustapha Niasse, and it participated actively in the opposition forces.

This alliance of the main left forces (And-Jef/PADS, Ligue démocratique /Mouvement pour le Parti du travail and Parti pour l'indépendance et le travail) and the liberals of the PDS (Parti Démocratique Sénégalais) inside CA 2000 was justified by the political and social situation and the objectives expressed through the programme of CA 2000.

During colonization Senegal was one of the most powerful centres of political and trade union resistance in Africa, as was shown by the violent demonstrations against General De Gaulle's visit to Dakar in 1958 during the referendum on independence, as well as the strikes of the Union Générale des Travailleurs d'Afrique Noire (UGETAN) which led to the first Labour Code, whose gains are now being dismantled by the World Bank. After independence, the Union progressiste Sénégalaise (UPS) became the PS and set itself to dismantling all these gains in a perspective of submission to French imperialist domination. In Senegalese mass consciousness, an experience of victory was needed so that these gains were not definitively lost.

Moreover, the programme of the 2000 was an appeal to a real democratic revolution through its main objectives: setting up a transitional government; dismantling the PS party-state to create an enlarged and consolidated space of liberties favourable to more radical political action; the struggle against corruption; dissolution of the National Assembly; adoption of a new constitution favourable to democracy; abandonment of political, economic and social choices made by the PS in favour of meeting the basic needs of the people; revision of the accords linking us with France.

This democratic programme concentrating the demands of the people justified the tactical choice of alliance with the liberals, all the more so in that the project of a left front/pole launched by the PADS did not find a favourable echo. On this basis and in these conditions candidate Wade of the PDS won at the second round with the support of the majority of opposition parties (60% of the vote against 40% for the PS) and set up a 'government of transition'.

The left and the 'government of transition'

The programme of transition posited emergency measures concerning institutional reforms, the auditing of state companies managed by the old PS team, the broadening of civil liberties and so on.

The left could have refused to participate in the government but it would have been incomprehensible for the people that, after having fought for 40 years and paid a heavy human price for Diouf's defeat, for broadened freedoms, against corruption, for the reparation of injustices, the left did not participate at the institutional level in finishing off the struggle which had begun on the electoral terrain.

For And-JEF/PADS, participation in the transitional government should mean the pursuit of the fight both at social and institutional levels for political hegemony over the urban and rural masses. Thus the government should not be a space of consensus around different axes of those defined in the programme of transition and its dynamic. And participation should not mean reining in the trade union movement and the other social instruments of combat. It should mean also autonomy in the formulation and expression of the parties in the government.

This vision justified and explained the presence of the left in the transitional government. The masses did not vote for

Wade but against Diouf - it was a protest against the PS regime. The new relationship of forces should be built resting on the support of the state apparatus. The involvement of the left at the governmental level was conceived as a means of accumulation of forces with a view to a more systematic political and social structuring.

Lost illusions of alternation

The new President took office on the basis of the old constitution, which made Diouf a quasi-monarch. Until January 7, 2001 this constitution, which said that the president of the republic defined the politics of the nation, was in force. But Wade did not immediately dissolve the National Assembly with a PS majority and he named as transitional prime minister Moustapha Niassé, of the Alliance des Forces et progrès (AFP), a party which represented 18% of the electorate and which did not participate in CA 2000.

The transition did not mean the end of social struggles; indeed they took on a certain breadth. But the transition also meant repression in Casamance. Two journalists were arrested for 'damaging peace efforts'. Amath Dansokho, general secretary of the PIT, was expelled from the government for demanding that commitments made in the context of the transition be respected.

In the opinion of this writer, And-Jef/PADS should have quit the government after the death in still unclear circumstances of the student Balla Gaye, a member of AJ/PADS, following a big student struggle against structural adjustment in education. Its ministers should have resigned given the failure of the government to fulfil commitments made by CA 2000.

Finally, the left has no place in a neo-liberal government. Nothing can justify this disastrous political position. 'Governmental entryism' leads to a political institutionalisation which is distant from the concerns of the people to the profit of a 'political class', leading to political combinations without principles or dignity. This has sown doubt in the minds of several radical activists in the PADS who, disorientated, have left the party.

Wade's Republic?

The increasingly obvious danger is that a neo-liberal party-state - the Republic of Wade - replaces the PS party-state. Already membership of the ruling party seems to be a precondition for acceding to certain responsibilities. Such a transformation cannot happen under a finished form without a double movement: a social democratisation of the main left political forces (particularly And-Jef/PADS) and a taming of the trade union movement. The second will be much more difficult, or at least involves risks the liberals are not currently ready to run.

The first is underway in an unfinished form. The process of social democratisation of some left political forces (including And-Jef/PADS) currently underway has deep social roots. Inside PADS, the debate on joining the Socialist International, which took place at the congress of February 1998, was revealing; the rejection of this project demonstrated the existence inside the party of a radical current that leads mass struggles. The ability of this current to lead the combat against the party's adaptation to neo-liberal demands will determine the political profile of And-Jef/PADS: social democratic or revolutionary radical.

For the democratic future of Senegal and struggles in the west African sub region, the completion of the social democratisation of the PADS would mean a grave setback and the end of the immense hopes raised on the African continent by this unification of the forces of the radical left, initially undertaken in 1991.

The constitutional referendum of January 7, 2001, instead of being a convocation around a vision of rupture, became a veritable plebiscite on Wade and the liberals. The alliance between the main political forces in the regime and other forces of the opposition led to a 'yes' vote of more than 95%.

On first sight, the new Constitution contained advances, banning degrading practices like the excision of women and forced marriage. Also women's right to own land was constitutionally recognized (article 15). But the new constitution reproduced the quasi-monarchist presidentialism of its forerunner.

More seriously still, the restrictions on the right to strike seriously threaten civil liberties and the trade union movement. Article 25 recognizes the right to strike, but says this right can 'in no way impinge on the freedom to work or put the enterprise in danger'. This article is full of dangers and is a concession to the employers and the international financial institutions who increasingly demand the dismantling of social gains.

The measures adopted reflect an enormous concentration of powers in the hands of the President and the strategic levers for the restoration of the party-state.

A conflictual process of restoration

Because it presupposes the subjection of political forces capable of providing a counterweight to its hegemonic drive, as well as the domestication of the union movement, the restoration of the party-state is a process that can only be conflictual. Thus, after the eviction of the PIT from the government, the neo-liberals pursued their offensive in forcing the resignation of Moustapha Niasse (AFP) from the post of prime minister.

The process of restoration has also a dimension of institutional reform. The regime has systematically oriented towards building a quasi-absolute grip on all the main levers of the state and the central and local civil service.

After winning (with 49% of the votes) the April 2001 parliamentary elections (which saw a setback for AJ/PADS, which had 2 deputies elected against 4 in 1996), the PDS attacked the CNTS trade union federation with a view to gaining a social base. The CNTS Congress was postponed twice because of attempts by the oil industry section (supported by the PDS) to take over the union. Their defeat was a strong signal of resistance to the process of restoration underway and the existence of a potential to resist the neo-liberal drift.

This was shown again when the regime adopted a VAT rate of 18% conforming to the criteria of convergence of West African Monetary Economic Union. A front of all the union federations forced the government to increase wages by 5-10%. Admittedly wage earners are only 5% of the population and it would have been more just to lower taxes on the prices of basic necessities (rice, oil, sugar, water, electricity and so on). However, in a context of structural adjustment, it was a sizeable victory.

Two years after alternation

The World Bank and the IMF have demanded the privatisation of SENELEC national electricity company. Begun by the PS regime, privatisation has for the moment foundered with the breakdown of negotiations with the buyers.

At the behest of the World Bank the marketing of peanuts, the main activity in rural areas, was privatised. Private

operators abandoned the official sales outlets for secondary markets where the sale price was 65 FCFA per kilo against 120 FCFA at the official rate. This has led to a dramatic situation with numerous zones experiencing slump, growing poverty in rural areas and a multiplication of peasant protests. This situation also risks the destabilization of the agricultural industries that play an important role in the redistribution of agricultural incomes.

In the education sector there is open conflict. Instead of publicly trained and recruited teachers the government has followed a policy of employing temporary workers, part-timers and volunteers in violation of the Labour Code and the international conventions of the ILO - this has led to teachers and students launching nationwide strikes for better conditions of work and study.

In a social context where unemployment grows incessantly the trade union movement is in a very specific historical phase. The split of the CNTS into two bodies (CNTS and CNTS-FC, the latter led by neo-liberals) has led to real tension with the union centre being set on fire by elements supposedly led by the CNTS-FC tendency.

The other tendency, led by the PS, practices unity in action with the CSA and steers towards social confrontation. Employers say that 40% of jobs have been lost in 20 years, in other words precisely over the period of structural adjustment. Already different sectors have entered in struggle and confronted the police. The prime minister has accused the workers of 'disturbing the public order' (action has been taken by caretakers, municipal workers, school and college students, teachers, transport sector, post, banks and financial establishments and so on). It is a front against the government's draft social charter, a means of institutionalising the unions and inserting them in the bodies of 'responsible participation'. It is also the beginning of the end of the honeymoon period for the Wade government.

Elections, May 12, 2002

To consolidate its power, the PDS must win a majority in the elections of May 12, 2002. The government has dissolved the local collectivities set up by Diouf, which were overwhelmingly under PS control and played no positive social role. However, they have been replaced by 'special delegations' whose composition has been contested because in some areas neo-liberal activists have been nominated by the regime. Then the PDS opposed the creation of the National Independent Electoral Commission (CENI), which was a common demand of the opposition before March 2000. Throughout all this, the PDS was riven by often very violent internal wars, including on the university campuses.

The situation it is entering is in contradiction with the project of building a stable mass social base. Le PDS faces a complex situation: the 21 parties which are members of or who support the government have come together in a unitary framework called CAP 21 to form a common list against the opposition bloc, united inside the CPC (Coordination des partis de l'opposition) which will also present a common list.

The AJ/PADS and the LD/MPT (another left party in the government) have just held a joint press conference to denounce the fact that the PDS wants to grab all the strategic positions on the electoral lists, with a background of threats to quit the government. If some hardline sectors of the PDS would welcome this, to make room for their neo-liberal political clientele, others are ready to make concessions to give the government a real social stability. While the electoral weight of these two parties is weaker than that of the PDS or the AFP or even the PS, they are strong in the autonomous trade union movement whose combativity threatens the restoration - while the PDS has no significant political presence in the union movement. Already rank and file activists of the AJ/PADS and LD/MPT have decided to contest the elections in their areas on their own lists, without the PDS. It is unclear whether pressure from the top will make them back off, but what is certain is that the May 12 elections will affect the configuration of the government, the political alliances, the attitude of the unions, the relation of forces between the governing parties and

the recomposition of political forces.