
Interview: Francis Wodié

New Ivory Coast party: Africa must integrate production, then markets

Francis Wodié spoke with French journalist Christine Bierre about his two priorities: holding a national, all-parties congress and the economic revival of his country.

EIR: Mr. Wodié, you are the first national secretary of the Parti Ivoirien des Travailleurs [Ivory Coast Workers Party—PIT], and you live in one of the few countries that has not organized a national convention to open the way to democracy. How do things stand today?

Wodié: As you know, Ivory Coast lived for a very long time under a one-party system, and for a little more than a year, the multi-party system has been recognized. We do not think it is normal that the rules of the single party are still being applied. That is why we are proposing a national convention, which seems needed, as a framework for concerted action inside the country where the new rules will be imposed, and where a transitional government will be designated in order to organize regular elections, because, under a multi-party system, the participating political parties should be on an equal footing. The 1990 elections were organized under the reign of the one-party system, and, of course, the opposition couldn't get anything out of such elections. After this experience, we decided that a convention was needed: It is the only forum that allows a peaceful transition from a one-party system to a multi-party system, and for all the conditions to come together to really open up the road to democratization in Ivory Coast.

EIR: Beyond the problem of democracy, who in power do you blame; is it [Prime Minister] Alassane Ouattara?

Wodié: We think the crisis in Ivory Coast is the fault of the PDCI government. The crisis has a political and economic cause. It comes from the way the country is managed, by the deliberate confusion between state property and politicians' property. This sloppy management has given rise to diversions of funds, and misappropriations, which have led to the current problems. Alassane Ouattara was called in to bring order to the crisis, which was analyzed as a technical crisis, and so, they called in a technocrat. We are starting to realize that since he has been in Ivory Coast, he has discovered a

calling as a politician, perhaps because he realized that *the crisis has a political dimension*, but, being unprepared to take on the political aspect, things are drifting more and more out of control. Our view now is that neither Alassane Ouattara nor the previous governments are capable of handling this crisis.

EIR: You say that the country's resources have been diverted. What should have been done?

Wodié: They should have been invested in priority sectors, which are health, education, and modernization of agriculture, so that when the peasants' buying power grew, it would get big enough to increase demand, and thus allow further growth in production. Furthermore, reserves should have been held back to deal with hard times. That is the reason for the currency stabilization. But this system was not implemented right, and now we need to husband our remaining meager resources so we can gradually get out of this crisis. We should perhaps also seek other means to complement existing resources. The creditor institutions and other states, if they recognize that we are serious and rigorous managers, might more readily come to our country's aid than they do today.

EIR: A few months back, the World Bank changed its strategy: It no longer lends to states, but is turning toward a strategy of lending almost entirely to small, private projects. What are your thoughts on that?

Wodié: Let me back up first to the subject of utilizing export revenues. These funds would have allowed the Ivory Coast to free itself, as much as possible, from its indebtedness, which weighs far too heavily on the economy. They would also have been a factor in furthering development. The fact that the World Bank is orienting toward financing small projects must be because it no longer trusts governments to use the resources that are lent. It's an interesting viewpoint, but one which can bring up organizational problems, problems in managing the national economy, and we think that certain vital sectors, such as those you mentioned—energy, communications, dams—belong to the state. The government has

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NORA HAMERMAN, Editor.

to build the infrastructure that is going to back up the production of small and medium-sized enterprises. Therefore, we must be able to join the role of the state, which is to make large-scale investments in infrastructure, and the private enterprises, which, by making use of the environment thereby created, can then set productive activities in motion.

EIR: Abdou Diouf, the President of Senegal, said: "It has now been 10 years that we have been applying the policies set forth by the lending institutions, and, in particular, the 'structural adjustment programs,' of the International Monetary Fund, and we never see the funds promised in exchange for such budgetary austerity and so much sacrifice imposed on the African people."

Wodié: We must recognize the part of the blame that lies with foreign bodies and states; but we think that the main culprits are we Africans, especially our politicians. We have to learn how to organize ourselves, to better manage our affairs so that foreign resources do not become the motor for our development. The foreign contributions must supplement what the countries themselves free up by good management. So these criticisms, in my view, must be tempered and put in context.

EIR: President Nicéphore Soglo of Benin said, at a recent international conference in Cotonou, that "there can be no democracy without bread." He added, "How do you expect us to continue to develop our countries if we are always under the yoke of Caudine Forks of austerity programs like the Structural Adjustment Facilities (SAFs)?"

Wodié: It is true that the social cost of the SAFs is too heavy for the African countries and in particular, for the most disadvantaged social layers, because the structural adjustment, under the pretext of true pricing, ends up increasing prices: Prices rise, buying power is eroded, and the popular masses suffer most. That explains the numerous revolts. From this standpoint, we think it is appropriate to review structural adjustments system. So long as it's a question of rebalancing state finances, it's a good management measure, but we have to see how this cost is transmitted to the most privileged social layers, who, in general, are to blame for the crisis. This policy seems to be mainly aimed against the little people: Licensing requirements multiply, unemployment gets worse, and the cost of living goes up. I think the criticism is well be founded from this standpoint.

EIR: You represent the Ivoirean Workers Party, and soon you might be in power. What will you do then to reestablish your country's economy? How are you going to deal with the debt and at the same time, achieve economic development?

Wodié: First of all, democracy has to be reinforced, in the political sense, by reinforcing the population's taking responsibility, its freedom of expression, and the people's participation in their own development. We have to stop shutting the

people concerned out of the development process, which otherwise risks being implemented against them. Economically, we must take new measures, in the new political climate that will be created by the trust that will be reestablished between the people and their leaders, with the priority being food self-sufficiency. More than anything, the economy must feed the people, and also assure them health care and education, because investment in these two domains is what accelerates development.

EIR: The last Organization of African Unity meeting adopted a plan for a common market for all of Africa. How will it be set up?

Wodié: Within our party, we are all very aware that the narrowness of the markets cannot assure true development. So, we are partial to sub-regional and regional integration. What we have participated in up to now was integrated currency exchanges. But, as you know, Africa is more outward than inward-oriented: We often produce for export, and trade among African states remains poorly developed. A true integration should lead to creating structures—roads and other things—which will be the means of communication and trade. But, to trade what? Africa has to be able to produce goods worth being traded among African states, such that, rather than favoring market integration, we should orient toward production integration. Africans must learn to *produce together*, with respect to the needs of the populations. This way, a regional market could exist, leading to the trade downstream which would develop it. That is the opposite of what is being done. So while we approve of the idea of a common market in Africa, it remains to be seen how this integration should be implemented.

EIR: Many are celebrating the end of communism and the full-scale victory of liberalism today.

Wodié: We are partisans of a mixed economy. The PIT thinks that we must not turn over the economy to the appetites of investors or traders. Private initiative must be freed, while also being steered and controlled. What we seek is, therefore, a balanced regime, because unbridled liberalism risks adding to inequalities. Total centralization doesn't allow freedom of initiative, quite the opposite. A regime that reconciles public state enterprises (infrastructure, etc.) and private ones for daily production seems to be the best system.

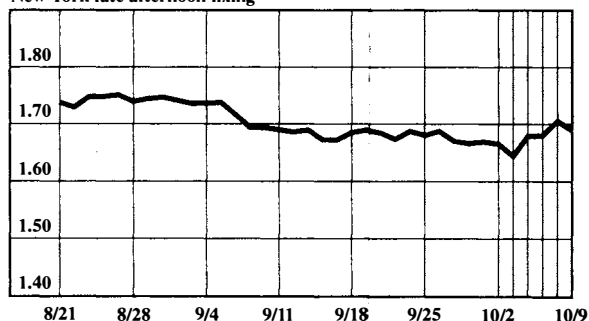
EIR: What do you think of the attitude of France and the United States toward Africa?

Wodié: International relations ought to be organized under the banner of equality of states, of independence of peoples, and mutual benefit. The solidarity that exists between states and their people should lead to more freedom and more development. We think the most advanced states ought to be helping the development of other states, which in turn should create the means to use the foreign contributions.

Currency Rates

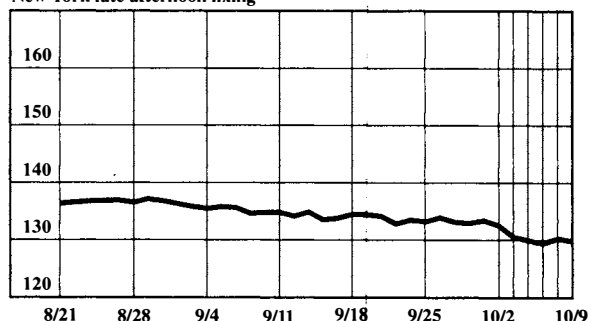
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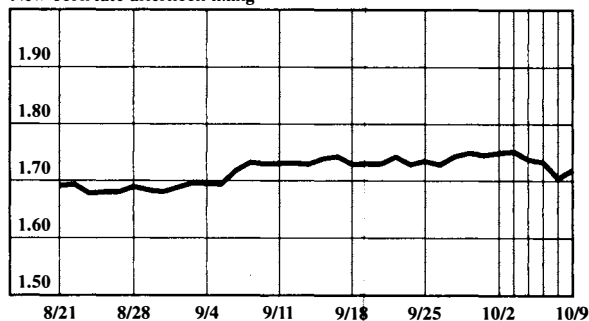
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