



COTE D'IVOIRE RESEARCH NOTE

## Tempest in a teapot

*Despite all the sturm und drungg, it is worth noting that the ongoing drama<sup>1</sup> is unfolding entirely within the confines of the PDCI<sup>2</sup>. Côte d'Ivoire's oldest party is now facing an increasingly open revolt against the authority of its octogenarian leader, Henri Konan Bédié who sees himself as the keeper of the Houphouëtiste flame<sup>3</sup>.*

- 1) The most direct challenge to this claim is President Ouattara himself who, it will be recalled, served as Prime Minister and leader of government business under Côte d'Ivoire's first president. Indeed, the project for a *Rassemblement houphouëtiste pour la démocratie et la paix* party can be seen as **Ouattara's bid to wrest Houphouët's legacy from the clutches of the party founder<sup>4</sup>**.
- 2) The emergence of a pro-RHDP tendency within the PDCI must have been galling enough for Bédié. The fact that the dissidents chose to name their faction *In the footsteps of Houphouët-Boigny* will have added **salt to the wound**.
- 3) By appointing to his 35-member cabinet no fewer than 13 members associated with the dissident faction, and then convening an RHDP General Assembly<sup>5</sup> the following week, **Ouattara "placed his knife on the things holding the PDCI together"** (to borrow Achebe's phrase). Although Bédié expressly forbade any party members from attending the assembly, there was never any question of this deterring the dissidents<sup>6</sup>.
- 4) His bluff called, Bédié has resorted to having the PDCI's Executive Secretariat issue **a communique announcing the expulsion of the 18 leading dissidents** from the party, and the PDCI's decision to field its own slate of candidates at the local elections scheduled for mid-October<sup>7</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> The regime in Yamoussoukro is often described as a coalition government, which is a complete misnomer. In fact power is held by the *Rassemblement pour la démocratie*, the party that Ouattara founded in 1994. Initially elected in 2010, when he defeated then President Laurent Gbagbo (of the Front patriotique ivoirienne), Ouattara was re-elected in 2015 with the help of an informal coalition of five other parties, known as the RHDP. The largest of these allied parties was the PDCI, whose support was allegedly based on a promise that, come the 2020 election, the RDR would back whichever candidate the RDR chose to nominate.

<sup>2</sup> I.e. Parti démocratique de la Côte d'Ivoire, founded by Félix Houphouët-Boigny in 1946.

<sup>3</sup> As will be recalled, when the ailing President Houphouët-Boigny died in 1994 he was succeeded by Bédié the constitutional heir-apparent, who simultaneously became leader of the PDCI. At the time Ouattara had been running the country for the better part of a year, Bédié viewed him as the biggest threat to his chances of winning the presidency in his own right, in the elections scheduled for 1995. This is why he forced through the infamous nationality clause (Article 35) that prevented his rival from running for president.

<sup>4</sup> Clearly, Ouattara also has a more personal motive: seeking retribution for Article 35.

<sup>5</sup> To launch the formal process of transforming the informal coalition into a formal political organization, into which the six member parties are expected to merge.

<sup>6</sup> In the first place, *Sur les traces d' Houphouët-Boigny* had been actively canvassing their PDCI colleagues to 'come one, come all'. In addition, a number of the faction's most prominent members just been appointed to ministerial positions, as mentioned above.

<sup>7</sup> Viz.: « Ces personnes ne peuvent ni parler ni agir au nom du PDCI ni arborer les insignes du PDCI . Ils se sont exclus d'eux-mêmes en choisissant de devenir militants du parti unifié RHDP. » Statement by Maurice Kakou Guikahue (le secrétaire exécutif du PDCI), as quoted in "Le PDCI menace d'aller seul aux élections municipales et regionals"; *Jeune Afrique*, Jul. 23, 2018.

5) This salvo seems to have landed like a damp squib. **Ouattara has not even dignified Bédié’s threat with comment**, while the members of the *Sur les traces* tendency have ridiculed their purported dismissal as “null and void”. As their sarcastic riposte<sup>8</sup> notes, under the party’s rules, any such move would have required, *inter alia*, a decision adopted at a formal session of the Disciplinary committee, chaired by the president of the party. Neither procedure

6) In contrast to the situation in Nigeria’s APC, **the PDCI dissidents** have no intention whatsoever of decamping from their party. Instead, they **seem bent on demonstrating to the embattled Bédié that it is his position vis-à-vis the RHDP, not theirs, that is untenable**<sup>9</sup>.

Bottom line: Ouattara and his government must be experiencing frissons of *schadenfreude* at the **growing chaos within what must be regarded as a prospective opposition party**.

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<sup>8</sup> Viz.: “Ces décisions sont tout à fait ridicules, risibles et inopérantes. Elles sont nulles et de nul effet.” Statement by Kobenan Kouassi Adjoumani, as reported in “La réplique cinglante d’Adjoumani à Guikahué et à la direction du Pdc-Rda”; L’Infodrôme, Jul. 24, 2018.

<sup>9</sup> In fact, they have embarked on a nationwide tour of that will take them to Bedie’s own district, next week, where they plan to demonstrate that there is strong grass-roots supports for the RHDP party.

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