

Independence Day in the Cameroons

THE REPUBLIC of the Cameroons is the second United Nations trust territory to achieve its independence since the establishment of the international trusteeship system in 1946. (British Togoland, the first, joined with the Gold Coast on March 6, 1957, to become the sovereign state of Ghana.)

The final stages before complete independence were marred by serious disturbances provoked by the Union Populaire Camerounaise (UPC), a left-wing party that had been outlawed by the Cameroons Government. For several consecutive seasons the General Assembly of the United Nations had heard accounts of repression and terrorism from petitioners from the Cameroons and denials and counter accusations from the authorities. Many delegates believed new elections should be held before the Cameroons became independent. The Assembly, however, agreed with the findings of a United Nations visiting mission to the territory that the 1956 elections, which had brought Prime Minister Ahidjo's Government into power, had been conducted in a democratic fashion and that the majority of the inhabitants truly desired their independence on January 1, 1960, the date previously agreed upon between the French and the Government of the Cameroons and approved by the General Assembly.

To celebrate the coming of independence, the Cameroons Government planned extensive festivities throughout the country and invited all member states of the United Nations to be represented at the ceremonies. Over forty-two foreign delegations were present, as well as leaders from nearly all the autonomous republics of the French Community, the already independent African states and the Secretary-General of the United Nations. Canada was represented by Mr. Paul Comtois, Minister of Mines and Technical Surveys. Mr. Comtois was accompanied by his wife and by a member of the Department of External Affairs.

Although the celebrations were only scheduled to start in Yaoundé, the capital of the Cameroons, on December 31, the eve of Independence Day, they began for the Canadian delegation when the special flight arranged by the Cameroons Government left Paris on the evening of December 30. The plane was filled with French administrators going out to watch their "child" attain its majority, Cameroonians returning to their country and a large group of personal guests of the Prime Minister from the permanent missions to the United Nations, who had been particularly helpful to the Cameroons cause during discussions at the General Assembly.

Arrival in the heart of Africa after leaving Canada deep in snow and Paris under fog and rain was a delightful surprise, the beauty of West Africa, with its brilliant sunshine, luxuriant vegetation, glorious flowers, and gold, green and red Cameroons flags flying everywhere, set the tone as the plane landed at Yaoundé. The hospitality committee had made excellent arrangements and, as