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Dear Peter,

Senegal lurches from one educational crisis to another, and in Senegal an educational crisis is a political crisis.

In January, it was a nationwide student strike to protest the killing of a high school student by a policeman in the southern city of Ziguinchor. As I described in a previous letter, the death resulted from a confrontation between Ziguinchor youths and government officials over the high school principal's conduct. That test of strength resulted in a draw, with the principal being transferred and several leaders of the student revolt being expelled.

On May 13 a secondary-school teachers' union staged a one-day walkout, and it now threatens to boycott national competitive examinations for students scheduled at the end of June. As it did in January, the ruling Parti Socialiste has accused its opponents of instigating the protest to embarrass the government. The overt facts support the party's contention. The provocatively named Syndicat Unique Democratique des Enseignants du Senegal (Only Democratic Teachers Union of Senegal) is a conglomeration of leftist ideologists whose sole unifying force is their opposition to President Leopold Senghor's conservative, pro-French regime. Teachers who support the government belong to another union, the Syndicat National des Enseignants du Senegal (National Teachers Union of Senegal), which has not participated in the protest.

SUDES is demanding substantial pay raises and higher housing allowances, benefits that Education Minister Abdel Kader Fall said in a newspaper interview would add up to a 20 to 50 percent increase in the teachers' incomes. Fall appears to be justified in calling the union's demands unreasonable. Public school teachers are government employees paid according to the national salary scale applicable to all state workers, and, because of the government's emphasis on increasing educational opportunities, teachers receive a 20 percent bonus on their grade level pay. So they already earn much more than their apparent equivalents in the civil service; any further increase would probably create discord among other government workers.

The teachers may be irritated because they earn less than their French colleagues who make up a large part of the high

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school teaching corps. At Lycée Faidherbe in St. Louis, the nation's oldest high school, 25 of the 80 teachers are French, and there are also four Russians, a German and an American on the staff, all language teachers. At Lycée Van Vollenhoven in Dakar only 63 of the 172 teachers are Senegalese. To correct this situation the government will have to break free of a Catch-22 that compels it to pay higher salaries to the French than they could find in their country while many Senegalese are lured to Europe by more attractive jobs than they can find at home.

The government has to allow these teachers from France, called cooperants, to receive higher salaries than they would earn in their country to get them to come to Senegal. The country could never afford to pay its nationals at this rate. Moreover, as it replaces the French with Senegalese teachers, it will lose some of the substantial monetary support it receives from France to help pay for the imported teachers. The most acute shortage of qualified nationals for teaching is in the sciences. Technically skilled Senegalese are in demand by French private industry in Africa and in Europe, and the French companies can pay them much more than they would get as teachers. So Senegal gets little benefit from many of its brightest citizens while depending on overpaid Europeans to staff its high schools. At Lycée Faidherbe the principal told me he expects it will be at least 20 years before the school can have a completely Senegalese staff. A government attempt to make science students at the University of Dakar sign a contract for 10 years of public service led to student riots in 1977 and the proposal was dropped.

Because of the large number of foreign teachers in the Faidherbe and Van Vollenhoven lycees, they appeared to be functioning normally when I visited, despite a SUDES job action in which the teachers have threatened to hold up students' grades. The protest is a sensitive subject and administrators and teachers are reticent about it. The Van Vollenhoven principal said the teachers weren't causing any problems at his school, but some students told me they have not received marks on exams in classes taught by Senegalese teachers. The Faidherbe principal admitted that the SUDES protest was causing administrative problems, but he wouldn't offer any opinion on the matter.

Senegal has 10 of these general high schools, which take students for seven years, plus some specialized technical, professional and military high schools, with a total enrollment of 17,215 students last year. Most secondary school students, more than 66,000 in 1979, go to colleges, which provide four-year programs. The best of the college students will enter lycees for the "second cycle," the last three years of secondary education.

The colleges are almost fully staffed by Senegalese teachers and I suspect the SUDES protest has had much more effect in these schools. When I visited one in St. Louis, there was little work going on, but the directress said this was normal end-of-the-year laxity. She showed me a stack of English test papers to prove that the final examinations were taking place.

The showdown between SUDES and the government will come in the last weeks of June and the first weeks of July, when students and teachers convene at central locations in the country for the national examinations that decide which of the fourth-year students from the collèges get into the lycées and which of high school students will go to a university. The SUDES teachers have threatened to boycott these exams. This would impede the sixth- and seventh-year examinations for university entrance, but administrators, foreign teachers and non-protesting Senegalese could manage to conduct the tests. A boycott would probably disrupt the fourth-year examinations completely. The government vows the exams will not be halted and threatens any teacher who boycotts them with immediate dismissal.

If the SUDES protest is politically motivated, I don't know what the opposition hopes to gain from it. The legal opposition provides little counterweight to the Senghor administration. As I mentioned in a previous letter, a 1976 constitutional change returned Senegal to a multi-party democracy, but one limited to three political parties that must be identified by government-selected labels as socialist, liberal or Marxist-Leninist. The strongest of the legal opposition parties, the liberal Parti Democratique Senegalais, has only 16 members in the 100-seat National Assembly. At the start of the assembly's budgetary session in the second week of June, the PDS members walked out over a disagreement in debating procedure, which seemed to me to be an empty gesture.

As a columnist in Le Soleil, the country's only major daily newspaper, pointed out, the opposition could have better shown its disagreements with the government by airing its views in the assembly. The opposition's speeches would have received public attention. Although Le Soleil is pro-government, it is not a propaganda sheet and offers at least the appearance of impartiality. Government supporters praise the ruling party's tolerance of criticism, and while such boasts can't be taken at face value, for there is a strict press law, some freedom of expression is allowed. Opposition pamphlets hostile to the government are sold openly on the streets, as are French and francophone African newspapers and magazines that often carry articles that are embarrassing to the Senghor administration. The PDS protest was made more puzzling by an interview with its leader, Abdoulaye Wade, that appeared in Jeune Afrique, the largest-selling French-language magazine about Africa, the week after the assembly walkout. Wade espoused policies similar to those of Parti Socialiste. His only real difference with the government is that he wants new elections to try to boost his party's strength.

It is not Wade and the PDS that Senghor refers to when he warns about a "crypto-personal" opposition. The strongest resistance to his pro-Western policies, which despite his party's socialist label eagerly embrace capitalism, is from various clandestine parties. I saw no indication of the brutal repression of teachers and political opponents reported by the Nigerian-owned weekly magazine West Africa, which I referred to in my earlier letters, but there is one ominous sign on the horizon. Senghor has called for an increase in the size of the army and in its budget. It is hard for me to imagine what

external threat could have prompted this decision at a time when the government is cutting back in other important areas. In the assembly's recent budget session, for example, the 1980-81 appropriation for the foreign affairs ministry was reduced by 11 percent from the current planned expenditures. The cuts will entail the closure of 23 embassies and consulates.

The army buildup seems to be a response to perceived internal threats, which come from opposite directions--the more ardently socialist left and the religious, conservative right. How dangerous these threats are, I don't know, but pressures on the country are growing. While I was in Dakar, the government announced an increase in the price of gasoline, the third hike in a year. The cost of a gallon of gas went up the equivalent of 6 to 8 cents; a gallon of regular now costs about \$2.24. The government would appear to have some justification in blaming the flagging pace of Senegalese development on imported inflation.

The other scapegoat for the government is the sahelian drought, and this, too, doesn't seem to be getting any better. The rains are late again. Traveling through the northwestern part of the country, I saw the carcasses of many cows, and the herds were walking skeletons. Boys in carts transport water in ten-gallon barrels to villages where dug wells have gone dry, but the horses that pull the carts won't last much longer either. Water alone is not enough; there is almost nothing for the animals to eat. The grass is gone, bushes have been picked bare and even trees have been denuded by herdsmen to give the cattle some forage.

With this backdrop, the opposition may be hoping that the teacher strike will be the shove that topples the government. If so, I think it is mistaken. I recall the Ziguinchor townspeople's reaction to the student riots. They backed the students and overlooked the vandalism and irresponsibility of the youngsters. These students are their families' only hope, and anything that threatens that hope will be countered savagely. I expect the teacher protest to divert attention from the country's other problems and strengthen the government's hand.

Best regards,



Bowden Quinn