

## **IMF AS A SMOKESCREEN TO RAM AUSTERITY BUDGET DOWN THE THROATS OF GHANAIS: BY MARTIN A. B. K. AMIDU**

There is a saying that: “to be forewarned is to be forearmed.” It is also said that: “history does not repeat itself but it rhymes.” Ghanaian patriots and civil society organizations should, therefore, heed the signal of impunity sent out by the Government to use the International Monetary Fund (IMF) as a smokescreen behind which to ram down the throat of Ghanaians an austerity budget in November 2022 without any extensive and in-depth transparent and accountable consultations with “We the People” as required under any democracy.

In the November 2021 Budget for the year 2022, this government rammed down our throats the E-Levy that went to Parliament without any prior consultation with the generality of the people and stakeholders. It is an understatement to say that a majority of Ghanaians were against the E-Levy but with arrogance and impunity the government corruptly bought its way with the political elite to approve and enact the E-Levy into law. The consequent reaction from Ghanaians is there for all to see how successful a reception that policy received and is receiving. Hopefully, the government has not forgotten the length of time and labour it took it to organize post facto consultations with Ghanaians after it had presented the 2022 Budget Statement to Parliament without a prior respect for the views of the ordinary voters of this country.

But this is a government that does not learn any lesson from its unpopular economic policies. It, therefore, impudently refuses to be guided by the rhymes of history. This Government operates on the assumption that Ghana is a satellite state of international capital and its neocolonialist masters to the extent that the compradors now ruling this country have developed such a relationship with and control over the International Monetary Fund (IMF) that it is capable of fast-tracking “...negotiations with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to ensure key aspects of the programme are reflected in the 2023 budget statement”. The audacity of the Minister for Finance to announce this intention of the Government at a press briefing on Wednesday, 28 September 2022 is supposed to be:

“In line with the President’s dialogue with the IMF Managing Director, Kristalina Georgieva, negotiations will be fast-tracked to ensure that key aspects of the programme are reflected in the 2023 Annual Budget Statement in November 2022.”

We the People are entitled to know the content of the dialogue the President, a well-known comprador bourgeoisie who has run this country into its present economic mess, has had with the IMF Managing Director, Kristalina Georgieva, that they have both already sealed the fate of Ghanaians from being part of or privy to the on-going negotiations which she had agreed with the President will form part of the Minister for Finance’s November 2022 Budget Statement to Parliament.

As is usual with developing and emerging nations, the international community has stood by while the natural resources of this country have been mismanaged by this government for the benefit of its international collaborators and facilitators. The new normal is for the looted resources of this nation to be secreted away in offshore companies in the British Bailiwick of Jersey, the British Overseas Territories of the Cayman Islands, the British Overseas Territories of the Virgin Islands, and the like, to the knowledge of their foreign collaborators without any eyebrows raised. The posture of the President and his Family and Friends when it comes to mismanaging the wealth of this nation for and with their foreign collaborators

reminds one of what Craig Murray, a former Deputy British High Commissioner to Ghana wrote about the IMF on 27 June 2015 in an article - "IMF and US set to ruin Ghana". He said, inter alia, that:

“Indeed in thirty years close experience the net result of all IMF activity in Africa is to channel economic resources to westerners – and not to ordinary western people, but to the wealthiest corporations and especially to western bankers.”

Dr. Cassiel Ato Forson, the Ranking Member of the Finance Committee of Parliament in a riposte to the Minister for Finance’s categorical statement doubts that the government can conclude an acceptable programme with the IMF before the 2023 budget is considered and approved by Parliament. In his own words:

“I doubt in the next six weeks we are going to have a programme. That will be a magic of a lifetime. It will mean we are just going to be yes men and accept everything they say.”

Dr. Ato Forson, is one person who fought tenaciously against the imposition of the draconian E-Levy on Ghanaians and was immediately targeted for his unbending views when he could have sold his conscience like some of his other colleagues. Indeed, if Dr. Ato Forson is listening and watching, then he must have read the lips of President Akufo-Addo through his cousin, the Hon. Ken Ofori-Atta, the Minister for Finance who has given notice that the suffering of Ghanaians occasioned by the mismanagement of our economy by their Family and Friends government provides them the opportunity to use the IMF negotiations as means of carrying through all the diabolical policies that enables them to build annuities abroad with the resources of this country.

The E-Levy, for instance, is to be reviewed and targeted at ensuring that a lot of Ghanaians pay the levy even under the present unbearable economic mess the President has created for the ordinary person in the street. And listen to the angels from this Government who are talking about indiscipline, corruption, and leakages when they say in relation to the E-Levy and the on-going IMF negotiations that:

“Such exercises form part of an ongoing drive to ensure we take significant steps forward in remedying long-standing challenges with domestic revenue mobilization, indiscipline, corruption, and leakages.... Towards this therefore we are looking at areas around the E-Levy to ensure its efficient implementation.”

Ghanaians deserve an explanation as to why Tanzanian Government is able to manage its economy by abolishing the levies imposed on digital transactions on its citizens with effect from 1 October 2022 while the Government of Ghana which boasts of more natural resources is still determined to behaving like a vampire sucking the economic blood of its citizens (See BBC Africa, 20 September 2022). Is Tanzania on a different planet where the effects of Covid -19 pandemic and the crisis in Ukraine are absent? We need to know!

This is a Government that is brazenly violating the laws of Ghana by not paying revenues accruing from the nation's oil fields into the Petroleum Holding Fund (PHF) as confirmed in the 2022 semi-annual report on petroleum receipts by the Public Interest and Accountability Committee (PIAC). This is a government that is so indiscipline and corrupt that it transfers revenues accruing from about 944,164 bbls of crude lifting in the Jubilee and TEN fields amounting to One Hundred Million United States dollars (USD100million) to a company established in a safe haven without any authorization from parliament in flagrant violation of

the laws of Ghana. This is stealing from the public purse, pure and simple. I agree with former President Mahama that the stolen money (USD1000 million) must be returned to the proper public account but that does not mean that the offence which has already been committed cannot be prosecuted at the appropriate opportunity.

This is a Government that has not ensured that Capital Gains Tax was assessed and collected by the Ghana Revenue Authority (GRA) under the watch of the Minister of Finance, the President's cousin, and right hand man, in the sale of the 7% interest by Anadarko in the Jubilee and TEN fields in 2021.

This is a Government which is suspected of giving away the natural gas patrimony of Ghanaians to Genser, an American Company, at no cost to the detriment of the public purse of USD1.5billion monetary loss to the state. Thanks to Bright Simmons and his vigilant colleagues who have brought this matter to the public domain. At page 17 of an analysis by Bright Simons one reads the cautious statement that:

‘The point must be stressed that no one is accusing Genser of wrongdoing. At worst, it is guilty of “excessively effective” lobbying and shrewd negotiation. But it is a private business seeking to maximise the welfare of its corporate backers who are taking a risk worth - \$500 million so one can understand...’

But has the Office of the Special Prosecutor (OSP) not now criminalized influence peddling and lobbying activities as forming part of corruption and corruption-related offences under Ghanaian law? Ghanaians cannot soon forget that the OSP made adverse findings against Ghanaian citizens and retrieved One Million Ghana Cedis (GHs1million) into its Assets Recovery and Preservation Account for influence peddling, lobbying, potential corruption, and similar new corruption offences in the alleged OSP Labianca Report. Or is there one law for Ghanaians and another law for foreign owned companies operating in Ghana, particularly when the ““excessively effective” lobbying and shrewd negotiation’ involves a whopping USD1.5billion loss to the public purse? May be the OSP is waiting for a petition on Genser!

The Government is already lame duck. It has less than two years to manage the affairs of this country to honestly turn our fortunes around. It is, therefore, hurriedly making all efforts to raise Five Hundred Million United States dollars (USD500Million) by forward felling our patrimony of oil reserves to a collaborating company of the Family and Friends from international capital. The amount is to be raised and spent by this same corrupt government while giving away our oil at a fixed price of \$65 per barrel no matter future appreciations in the market price of oil. Ghanaians will have to pay in next year's budget for all these inequities of this Government as part of the IMF negotiated package.

In the background, we have heard the National Democratic Congress (NDC), Minority in Parliament telling Ghanaians again that they will not allow our natural resources to be shared between the comprador government and its international capitalist collaborators to the detriment of the suffering masses of Ghanaians. We have heard such apparently solemn commitments and pronouncements before. We heard them when this Government was vetting its Ministers at the beginning of its second term last year. We heard solemn commitments and pronouncements on the E-levy during last year's budget presentation and eventual approval. In each of these cases we witnessed the vile compromises in which the aspirations of the ordinary man were sold to the Government.

I have just read the Minority Leader changing or rationalizing the reasons assigned for the Minority in Parliament's past shameful and distasteful conduct. When asked about the minority's complicity in giving Ghana incompetent Ministers (who are now visiting poverty and economic sufferings on Ghanaians) he responded that:

“That's true. I'm not sure that it is my duty to give the president competent ministers as minority opposition leader. That is not my primary duty.... We approved them and we approved them based on law. The Minority have gotten a lot of flak particularly my person on this approval and disapproval of ministers.”

We still remember the shameful manner the E-Levy was negotiated behind the back of the cries and wailings of Ghanaians also based on the law as the Minority Leader is now rationalizing. More importantly, Ghanaians are being told by the Minority Leadership in Parliament that its duty is to issue the party whip as a directive to its members to stand against a particular policy and nothing more. The NDC Members of Parliament are at liberty to go against the party whip.

These are confessions of the bare facts and the circumstances of Ghana's constitutional democracy today in which citizens are expected to rely as a people on the recent solemn promises and assurances that have been pouring in about the determination of the NDC in parliament to stand with the suffering mass of the people when the individual stomachs of our members of parliament matters more than the electorate that voted them to put Ghana First in Parliament.

“Forewarned is forearmed” and “history does not repeat itself but it rhymes.” This is why it is important for patriots and crusading civil society organizations to insist and demand transparency and accountability from the Government in the manner the negotiation with the IMF is being undertaken now. The failure of Ghanaian patriots and civil society to speak up now will lead to grand extortion and corruption when the budget comes to be debated and approved both inside and outside parliament. We saw how dual Ghanaians citizens living abroad were flown into Ghana as experts and given the platform to justify the E-Levy only to return to their comfortable bases abroad. We saw how against all odds the government bought its way to have its policies approved last year.

This year, the International Monetary Fund is to be the excuse for Ghanaians being asked to tighten their belts while the political elite loosen theirs and feed fat on our sweat. We should not wait for the IMF to be used by the authors of our economic hardships to blackmail the nation and ram an austerity budget down our throats without any consultation for our inputs into and acceptance of the proposals. We have a duty to ask for transparency and accountability now. The 1992 Constitution gives us the right to do so and put Ghana First.

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