

Côte d'Ivoire at 27

by L. Gray Cowan

Since the transformation of sub-Saharan colonial territories into independent nations began in the 1950s, maps of the continent have required many revisions as the names of scores of cities, rivers, lakes, and countries were changed in pursuit of greater African "authenticity." The Gold Coast became Ghana, Northern Rhodesia became Zambia, Southern Rhodesia became Zimbabwe, Upper Volta is now Burkina Faso, and the list goes on and on. When the Ivory Coast finally got around to updating its segment of the continent's western coast in 1986, the procedure used was a formal communication to the United Nations expressing a wish that the country henceforth be cited as Côte d'Ivoire, without English translation, and that its citizenry be referred to as Ivoiriens, without the French distinction between the male and female forms of the adjective. This minor adjustment in nomenclature underscores the fact that President Félix Houphouët-Boigny feels no need to apologize for the mutually beneficial cultural, economic, and political relationship his country has maintained with France since independence (and his accession to the presidency) 27 years ago.

The remarkable development of this small nation (125,000 square miles) since independence in 1960 hinges on two major factors — the political skills and organizational acumen of a president and a continuing close relationship to the former colonial power. President Houphouët-Boigny has been the predominant guiding force in the country's economic growth and his political skills have made the regime one of the most stable in the continent. Opposition has arisen from time to time — on some occasions from students, teachers, and trade unionists resentful of the continuing French presence in the country, and periodically from northern ethnic groups resentful of southern dominance of the government. Houphouët, a master of "political dialogue," has in each instance been able to restore calm without the use of force. Individual opponents

have been allowed a brief place in the sun, and then have been summarily punished by exile or disgrace, only to be rehabilitated after a suitable period so as to limit the buildup of smoldering resentment.

Houphouët's ready acceptance of a close (some would argue smothering) relationship with France as the quid pro quo for both technical and investment support may have made him an object of derision among some of his peers in Africa, but average Ivoiriens, for the most part, accepted the French presence as the contrast between their own living standards and those in neighboring states became more evident. The French legacy is evident in the courts, the administration, and the educational system. A defense pact involving the presence of 500 French soldiers and a number of military advisors is an important element in Ivorian national security. (See "The Enduring French Connection" by J. Coleman Kitchen, Jr. in *CSIS Africa Notes* no. 68, January 26, 1987.)

A Presidentially Crafted Foreign Policy

The country's foreign policy over the past three decades has been as much a reflection of the president's worldview as has the domestic political scene. From the beginning, Houphouët was determined to be reckoned with as a preeminent regional leader in West Africa and a force in the African community as a whole. He refused to join the Mali Federation created by his regional rival, Léopold Sédar Senghor of Senegal, opting instead for membership in a loose French Community. Angered by de Gaulle's decision to allow Mali to become independent within the Community, Houphouët demanded Ivorian independence and left the Community. He meanwhile created the Conseil de l'Entente, which initially included Upper Volta (now Burkina Faso), Niger, and Dahomey (now Benin) but was clearly under Houphouët's leadership. His ultimate goal was the formation of a group of former French colonies that

could bring his views to bear on the Organization of African Unity, created in 1963. When it became clear that more radical African principals such as Ghana's Kwame Nkrumah and Guinea's Sekou Touré exerted greater influence in the shaping of the OAU's charter and orientation, Houphouët systematically began to undermine their positions, absented himself from OAU summits, and even supported rebellious groups in those neighboring countries (including the Biafran uprising in Nigeria) which he considered to be economic or political rivals of Côte d'Ivoire.

On the economic front, Houphouët sought to enhance the leadership role of Côte d'Ivoire through the Communauté Economique de l'Afrique de l'Ouest (CEAO), which came into being in January 1974. The CEAO was to be a union of the CFA franc countries in a common market (naturally, to the advantage of Côte d'Ivoire's nascent industrial sector) and, not incidentally, the president's answer to the formation of the Nigerian-led Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). The CEAO worked fairly well for some years, so long as it had the financial support of Côte d'Ivoire and Senegal. With the decline in this financial support in the less affluent 1980s, the organization fell victim to charges of corruption and political manipulation and since 1985 has been largely ineffectual. A similar fate befell the Conseil de l'Entente with the rejection in 1965 by Ivoiriens of their president's notion of dual nationality for all member

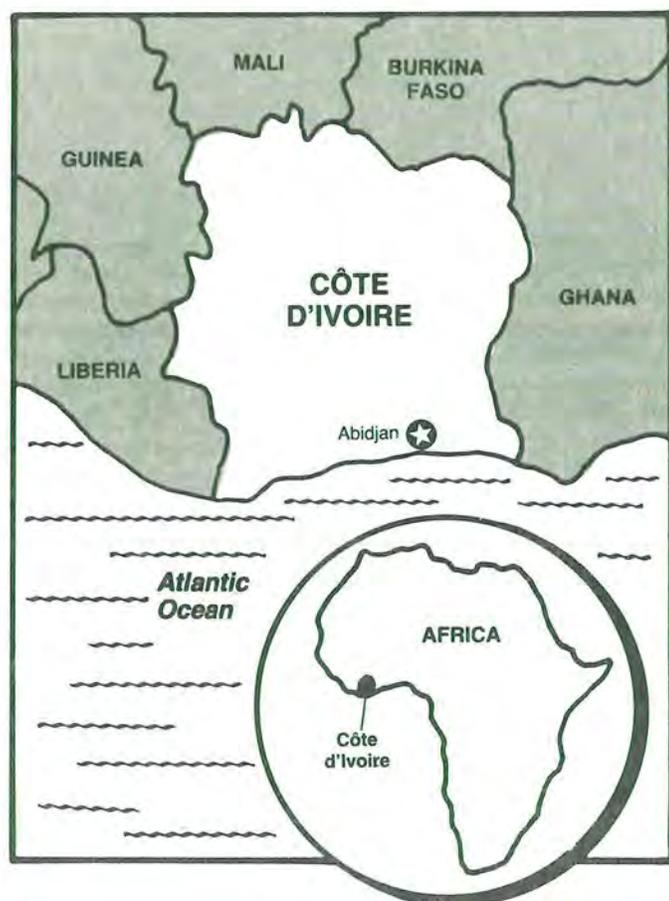
citizens. Although the Entente remains technically in existence, its political utility to Houphouët ended some time ago.

Although Houphouët's role as a continental leader has declined as he has aged and Africa's role on the international political scene has diminished, his opinions as an elder statesman are still listened to (albeit at times with irritation) by other African leaders. He has been particularly at odds with his peers on the issue of South Africa. He continues quiet communication (but not diplomatic relations) with the Botha government, arguing that change cannot be brought about by isolating South Africa from dialogue with the rest of the world. He has been consistently and publicly outspoken against sanctions. In a 1986 interview with the Paris magazine *Le Figaro*, he said: "Nobody in Africa is in favor of sanctions. People talk about them halfheartedly. . . . Of course, apartheid exists everywhere, especially in the Arab countries, where the black minorities are harassed, oppressed, and even persecuted, and in some sub-Saharan countries, where the caste system prevails — what about India?" As for the African National Congress, it is, in Houphouët's view, a Soviet-dominated "destabilizing organization." Asked about the imprisonment of Nelson Mandela in a press conference a few months later, he responded: "Do you know of any other political prisoner who is alive after 20 years?" He dismisses African agitation for sanctions as a waste of effort on the grounds that South Africa is "able to manufacture everything it needs." That he is out of step with the rest of the continent does not appear to concern him — perhaps an indication that he sees his role as a spokesman for Africa waning and is looking more to his place in history.

As an outspoken friend of the West and of France in particular, Houphouët dismisses nonalignment as "playing with words" ("I don't believe in it — that's all"). He restored diplomatic relations with Israel in 1985, ignoring Arab protests. After all, he points out, the United States and Europe deal with Israel and the Arabs have not broken relations with them.

Unlike many new African nations, Côte d'Ivoire has been able to rely on an outside power, France, for its security, perhaps to as great a degree as any other former colony. Internal stability and freedom from outside threat were in the interest of both parties. For France, Côte d'Ivoire's willing agreement to the stationing of French troops in the country permitted reinforcement of the French presence in the continent and provided a base of operations in case of need. For Houphouët, the deal meant reduced reliance on the Ivoirien army for both the maintenance of domestic order and protection against outside threat; it also meant that resources which elsewhere in Africa were used to pay for the armed forces could here be employed to more productive development ends. His own political strength precluded popular objection to the French military presence, while the Ivoirien army benefited from French supplies and training.

It is unlikely that the passing of the Houphouët era will bring substantial changes in foreign policy. The



Le Vieux

Félix Houphouët (Boigny — Baoulé for “irresistible force” — was added in 1946) was born around 1905 in Yamoussoukro, a coffee-growing area north of Abidjan. Educated as a medical assistant (the highest level then available locally) at the School of Medicine and Pharmacy in Dakar, he spent the next 15 years as a respected “bush doctor” and (like his father) a prosperous planter. He became a chief in his home district in 1940.

In 1944, he formed an agricultural union to combat various colonial policies, including the prevalent practice of forced labor. The union later became the Parti Démocratique de la Côte d’Ivoire (PDCI), which has been the governing party since independence in 1960. Elected to a seat in the postwar French Constituent Assembly in 1945, Houphouët sat with a group allied to the French Communist Party. In 1946 he became a member of the French National Assembly, and helped found a new African mass party, the Rassemblement Démocratique Africain (RDA), which included the PDCI as the Ivoirien branch. After political disturbances that led to severe repression of the party by the French administration, Houphouët and the RDA broke with the Communists in 1950 because, he argued, the class struggle had no meaning in an African classless society. Having rejected the far left, he decided to ally instead with the Socialist Party under François Mitterrand, and thereafter held a portfolio in various French cabinets until 1959.

A few months after Ivoirien independence in August 1960, he was elected president by 98 percent of the country’s voters and has remained the dominant figure in domestic politics ever since.

—L.G.C.

benefits of the close relationship with France in almost every area of Ivoirien growth have become better appreciated, especially in light of the recent history of many other African states. No doubt the French ties are at times felt to be a limitation on Ivoirien nationalism, especially by the younger citizenry. But so long as France is sensitive enough to downplay its presence and accept the reality of Côte d’Ivoire as an independent nation, relations are not likely to change radically.

An Imperiled Economic “Miracle”?

Côte d’Ivoire’s international reputation as one of the great success stories of development in post-colonial Africa was richly deserved during the first two decades of independence. Helped by substantial French public aid and private investment, international assistance, and a stable political climate, the gross domestic product rose by 11 percent annually from 1960 to 1970 and by 6 percent to 7 percent annually in the following decade. Even with a 4 percent annual population growth (one of the world’s highest), it was possible to achieve a per capita annual income of over \$1,000,

making Côte d’Ivoire a middle-income country in the spectrum of LDCs.

This record would not have been possible without substantial French help in technical manpower. From the outset, Ivoirien government departments were assisted by *conseillers techniques* and financial and management experts who, it was claimed by their critics, often managed ministers as well as ministries. At lower levels, teachers, technicians, and even volunteers played important roles in the development process, as did French businessmen. In many ways the story of Côte d’Ivoire during this period parallels the history of the United States in the nineteenth century. Without the help of skilled Europeans (immigrants in the U.S. case) development could never have progressed as rapidly. The French population (not counting the military presence) rose to over 50,000, its prosperity in part guaranteed by the favorable exchange rate between the CFA franc and the French currency.

Economic development in Côte d’Ivoire rested from the start on the country’s two major export crops — cocoa (of which it is the world’s largest producer) and coffee (the third largest). Coffee provided the main source of income for half the population and the two crops together accounted for half the country’s export earnings. But concentration on these crops carried with it a dangerous vulnerability to fluctuations in world commodity prices. Cocoa and coffee marketing are controlled by a state agency, the Caisse de Stabilisation et de Soutien des Prix des Productions Agricoles (CSSPPA), which paid producers less than the world price during the middle and late 1970s, years of high prices and bumper crops. This marketing structure provided substantial funds for investment in industry and infrastructure. Aware of the risks of this narrow base, the government undertook to diversify production, placing special emphasis on cotton and palm products. But with the fall in world prices and a disastrous failure of the coffee crop in 1983, the CSSPPA was unable to raise producer prices for four years, with a resulting general deterioration in the economy.

The manufacturing sector expanded rapidly after independence, sparked by the need to replace commodity processing machinery previously imported from Senegal, but began to decline by 1980 despite growing consumer demand from an expanding population. A new investment code drawn up in 1984 provided investment incentives to small and medium-sized local firms. Previous attempts to increase Ivoirien equity in local enterprises had resulted in increased public rather than private ownership. The new state-owned enterprises suffered such substantial losses from mismanagement and corruption that by 1984 the government decided to divest many of them either by liquidation or privatization. (See “Africa Reconsiders Its Parastatals” by L. Gray Cowan in *CSIS Africa Notes* no. 33, September 4, 1984.)

Faced with declining revenues from the CSSPPA and the continuing high costs of an overambitious development program in both the agricultural and industrial sectors, the government was forced into a

sharp retrenchment. Inherent structural weaknesses in the economy came into sharp focus as the ratio of public savings to GNP declined from 6 percent in the late 1970s to 4 percent by the early 1980s. External debt mounted and critical depletion of foreign exchange reserves was combined with a marked reduction in imports and declines in investment and output. The situation was made all the more serious by unprecedented inflation and a 9 percent drop in industrial production. A damaging drought in 1983 resulted in a fall of 13 percent in agricultural crops.

The drastic restrictive measures adopted in 1983 and 1984 were accepted with relatively little protest from the citizenry. The measures invoked included structural reforms to raise production, cuts in capital expenditure and in consumer goods, and reduction of credit facilities. The need for further austerity efforts was alleviated by an International Monetary Fund standby agreement and a fortuitous rise in world coffee and cocoa prices that increased the CSSPPA's profits by 75 percent in 1984. The trade surplus tripled, debt service fell, and the current account deficit dropped some 12 percent in the same year.

Despite these improvements, the government did not relax its efforts, especially in the area of providing greater incentives to agricultural producers. Along with better weather, these resulted in record harvests and an accompanying rise in industrial output in 1985. Inflation fell, real economic growth rose 5 percent within the year, and a budget deficit became a budget surplus of 4 percent. These and other obvious signs of recovery illustrated the effectiveness of the measures rigorously applied by the authorities and served to renew the faith of the international lending community in the ability of the Ivoirien government to manage the economy effectively. But all this only temporarily masked the basic weaknesses of the economy. High debt service obligations and dependence on world basic commodity prices were still formidable obstacles to lasting recovery, as 1986 made amply clear.

The buoyancy resulting from higher prices and successful austerity efforts gave way by mid-1986 to renewed fiscal crisis. Prices for export commodities began to fall precipitously. By the end of the year, cocoa was selling at a price below the CSSPPA-guaranteed producer price and the coffee price was only marginally above the CSSPPA producer price. What in mid-1986 had been expected to be a balanced budget turned into a prospective deficit estimated at \$330 million as the anticipated revenues from the CSSPPA dried up. There was talk of further cuts in capital expenditures and even of new debt rescheduling agreements. Houphouët estimated that the fall in prices would cost the country almost \$2 billion in export earnings. Added to these woes was the continued fall in the U.S. dollar, which added to debt servicing costs (some 40 percent of Côte d'Ivoire's debt is dollar denominated).

In December 1986, the National Assembly approved the 1987 budget with an overall increase of only 2.3 percent, most of which was accounted for by increases in civil service wages (62 percent of the recurrent

Côte d'Ivoire: Some Key Economic Indicators

	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986
Population (midyear, million)	8.4	8.7	9.0	9.3	9.6	9.9
Gross Domestic Product (\$ million) ^a	8434.8	7568.2	6775.8	6565.8	6766.7	9060.0
Gross Domestic Product per capita (\$) ^a	1004.4	871.5	754.6	707.2	704.9	912.7
Real GDP Growth (annual % change)	3.5%	0.2%	-2.5%	-2.0%	4.9%	3.5%
Consumer Prices (average annual % change)	8.8%	7.4%	5.9%	4.3%	1.9%	3.0%
Gross Domestic Consumption as % of GDP	81.2%	79.7%	80.4%	77.6%	77.7%	78.7%
Gross Domestic Investment as % of GDP	25.9%	23.2%	20.6%	10.9%	10.7%	12.0%
Public Sector Revenues as % of GDP	27.5%	27.0%	28.6%	32.9%	35.7%	32.7%
Public Sector Expenditures as % of GDP	38.9%	40.3%	40.1%	35.7%	32.0%	33.2%
Public Sector Balance as % of GDP	-11.3%	-13.3%	-11.5%	-2.8%	3.7%	-0.5%
Exports to U.S. (\$ million)	291.0	303.2	342.7	468.6	558.3	NA
Imports from U.S. (\$ million)	130.3	96.5	60.8	64.5	69.6	NA
Total Exports (\$ million)	2734.4	2347.1	2064.0	2590.4	2798.2	3327.9
Total Imports (\$ million)	2060.1	1789.6	1504.7	1211.9	1335.3	1838.8
Merchandise Trade Balance (\$ million)	674.2	557.5	559.3	1378.5	1462.9	1489.1
Current Account Balance (\$ million)	-1139.7	-1082.0	-925.3	-64.8	69.4	-118.6
Gross External Debt (\$ million)	4928.3	5559.9	5443.5	5244.0	6306.1	6651.3
Gross External Debt Per Capita (\$)	586.8	640.3	606.2	564.8	656.9	670.1
Gross External Debt as % of GDP	58.4%	73.5%	80.3%	79.9%	93.2%	73.4%
Debt Service Paid (\$ million)	816.3	894.7	1190.6	698.9	684.7	737.1
Debt Service as % of Exports	29.9%	38.1%	57.7%	27.0%	24.5%	22.2%
U.S. Bilateral Aid (by U.S. Fiscal Year)						
Economic Assistance (\$ million)	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Military Assistance (\$ million)	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.2	0.1	1.1

a. GDP data are derived and subject to distortion because of exchange rate fluctuations.

SOURCES: IMF documentation

budget) made necessary by the fact that they had been frozen for a four-year period. To maintain balance, the Special Investment Budget was reduced 5.2 percent, with priority given to agricultural production. Even with these delicate adjustments, the short-term outlook remained bleak; the unpalatable alternative was to raise taxes and further reduce domestic consumption. Yet the base for a modern industrial state has been laid and has thrived despite the boom and bust atmosphere of the past three years. Should commodity markets remain reasonably stable long enough for diversification to be carried forward, the "miracle" could be revived.

As the economic situation worsened in the 1980s, the costs of the French connection increased in salience. The estimated \$125 million per year being paid for experts and technical assistants was acceptable in times of growth but became a questionable luxury as the recession deepened. And apart from the budgetary outlay, a generation of younger Ivoirien technocrats had come to feel that their advancement was blocked by the preponderance of French advisors in key managerial positions. This frustration was intensified by the knowledge that the expatriates were customarily paid at least three times more than their Ivoirien counterparts. Beginning in 1985, new restrictions were placed on the

numbers of expatriates on the government payroll, in some cases at the sacrifice of expertise still much needed.

After "Le Vieux"

Houphouët has been returned with an overwhelming majority in every electoral campaign since independence 27 years ago. There has been little meaningful political debate, although severe internal disagreements within the leadership of the ruling Parti Démocratique de la Côte d'Ivoire (PDCI) have surfaced from time to time.

Although the military is largely drawn from ethnic groups (notably the Malinkés and Senoufos) other than Houphouët's Baoulés, it has never posed a serious threat to the regime. One reason is its carefully controlled size (6,100 Army, 690 Navy, 930 Air Force, 1,100 Presidential Guard, 6,700 paramilitary). Another is that the continuous French military presence within the country has left no doubt that France could and would intervene to abort an anti-Houphouët coup attempt.

In view of Houphouët's advancing years (he is at least 81 and possibly older), the central question of Ivoirien politics has for some time been speculation on the succession. As early as 1975, after being elected for his fourth term as head of state, a constitutional amendment was adopted naming the president of the National Assembly to succeed in the event of the incumbent's death or incapacitation. By the election of 1980, however, it had become clear that the heir apparent, Philippe Yacé, was no longer to be considered (possibly because of Houphouët's concern that a clearly designated successor might raise the specter of premature succession). The name of Minister of Economy and Finance Henri Konan-Bédié had been advanced as a likely candidate, but he was removed from his ministry in 1977 and became an advisor to the International Finance Corporation and then president of the National Assembly.

A 1980 revision of the constitution authorized the president to nominate a vice president who would carry out presidential functions in the event of his death or disability. But Houphouët never named a candidate for the position, and in October 1985 another revision of the constitution abolished the office and returned to a modified version of the previous approach to the succession question. As things stand, the president of the National Assembly would serve as interim president, if the necessity should arise, for a period of 45 to 60 days during which time a presidential election would be held without any change in the constitution. The acting president could be a candidate in this election. At a press conference in late 1985, Houphouët took the position that popular opinion had rejected the idea of a vice president, that he had no intention of creating a presidential dynasty, and that in Côte d'Ivoire "everybody is a candidate for president" — by which it was assumed that he meant that Konan-Bédié was not necessarily his choice. In sum, as Houphouët phrased it, he is now "free to choose the profile of the person who would assure continuity."

When or if Houphouët will announce a chosen successor remains as murky today as it was a decade ago. It is difficult to avoid the impression that the stage is quietly being set to establish that he, like Malawi's President H. Kamuzu Banda, remains President-for-Life, or, as one minister aptly put it, is "plugged into eternity."

Given Houphouët's advanced age, the succession issue cannot be put off indefinitely, but it is far from evident what type of person he would consider suitable. He was evidently annoyed at the jockeying for favor that went on when the vice president was the constitutionally designated successor; elimination of the vice presidency put an end to it. The age of potential candidates is obviously a factor; a younger man is needed but whether anyone younger would be considered to have enough experience (or indeed the personal wealth) to assume the presidential role as it has been shaped by Houphouët is doubtful. Ethnic factors will also play a role; Houphouët might not be content to see power shift to someone other than a member of his own Baoulé tribe. In any case, his popular following is such that any candidate, however worthy, would be unlikely to succeed without at least the implicit blessing of "Le Vieux."

Little indication of the way in which the wind is blowing was provided by the appointments to the new cabinet announced in mid-1986. Konan-Bédié was reelected president of the National Assembly in November 1985 and therefore did not receive a ministerial appointment. The usual efforts were made to distribute power among ethnic groups in the interest of national unity. When the names were made public, the PDCI was lauded as a "permanent melting pot in which all ethnic and tribal groups of Côte d'Ivoire combine to form the nation under construction . . . but its work is far from completed." Age was not ignored in the cabinet appointments. Houphouët's concern "to achieve an unbroken evolution between the generations" led to the naming of 10 new, young, university-educated ministers — but also to an increase from five to nine Ministers of State without portfolio whose age and experience are designed "to give precious assistance to young ministers [and thus maintain] the indispensable chain of generations."

Despite this nod to the customary African respect for elders and the fact that a growing number of Ivoiriens have a stake in the present system, it cannot necessarily be presumed that the transition to new leadership will be without some convulsion. There is an element of democracy in the present Ivoirien system, both at the level of local elections and in popular choice for members of the National Assembly. It is symptomatic, however, of underlying dissatisfaction that 546 candidates ran for the 175 seats in the 1985 National Assembly elections; of the incumbents running, slightly less than a third were returned to their seats. But the whole electoral process took place within the framework of the single party system. Scattered efforts have been made through clandestine pamphlets and sub rosa public debate to raise the question of an opposition party but there is no indication that any such

move is contemplated or that it would succeed if it were.

A public contest for leadership after Houphouët's passing could reopen old wounds among interest groups seeking a larger slice of the economic pie and rekindle ethnic frictions with those trying to wrest control from Baoulé hands. If these disputes became serious enough, it is conceivable (despite the safeguards mentioned earlier) that the armed forces might feel it necessary to insert themselves into the power struggle and succeed in doing so, with results that have become only too familiar on other African stages. Economic prosperity is no assured safeguard against military takeover, as the history of Nigeria amply illustrates.

Houphouët has cited the peaceful leadership transitions of Senegal and Cameroon as proof that African states can choose a new head of state without turmoil. But in both these cases the new leader had been known sufficiently far in advance of his taking office to have achieved some degree of popular acceptance. This may possibly be true in the case of the Konan-Bédié candidacy, but past experience suggests that too high a prior visibility may act to reduce his chances in the battle for succession.

It is doubtful whether any single individual can ever replace "Le Vieux." This in turn casts a shadow on the continued viability of the single party. There are some indications of a desire for a greater decentralization of power and for freedom to express variant political opinions. But a multiparty system and freely contested elections are not likely to be the immediate product of leadership change. Enough Ivoiriens are still sufficiently comfortable with the present system that they will be cautious about a revolutionary upset, particularly if it offers the prospect of substantial disruption of current living standards.

L. Gray Cowan's previous contributions to the *CSIS Africa Notes* briefing paper series include "Africa Reconsiders Its Parastatals" (issue no. 33, September 4, 1984), "Benin Joins the Pragmatists" (issue no. 54, February 28, 1986), and "A New Guinea?" (issue no. 59, June 30, 1986).

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