



CSIS AFRICA NOTES

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Burkina Faso in Transition

by Pierre Englebert

For the observer of African politics, Burkina Faso has exemplified a range of the continent's most troubling economic and political syndromes. Since its independence from France in 1960 as the Republic of Upper Volta, the landlocked West African nation has had five changes of head of state, none via the ballot box (see "Burkina Faso's Domestic Political History in Brief," page 7). The current head of state, Captain Blaise Compaoré, overthrew his predecessor, Captain Thomas Sankara, less than three years ago. He remains engaged in a struggle for political legitimacy and is also seeking to rebuild some of the diplomatic bridges scorched by Sankara. At the same time, the regime is doggedly fighting to keep the economy from slipping into permanent basket-case status. Success in this effort could make Burkina a bellwether for other beleaguered nations on the continent.

The Economic Dimension

The eleventh poorest country in the world by World Bank standards, Burkina suffers from rapid population growth, an inclement climate and desertification, unstable commodity prices, poor communications, a lack of natural and industrial resources, and a structural foreign trade imbalance.

Health and Education. Burkina's population of 8.7 million is expected to reach 12 million by the year 2000, despite a child mortality rate of 205 per thousand and a life expectancy of 47 years in 1985. Diarrhea remains widespread and malaria is endemic. There was only one doctor per 57,000 inhabitants in 1984 and only some 20 percent of Burkinabè have access to safe water.

Burkina's educational situation is as poor as its health care system. No more than 30 percent of children aged 6 to 11 are enrolled in primary school, and only 4 percent of those aged 12 to 17 are in secondary schools. More than 80 percent of adult Burkinabè are estimated to be illiterate, and for each primary school instructor there are 62 pupils.

Agricultural Production. Accounting for 47 percent of GDP in 1985 and still employing 87 percent of the labor force in 1980, agriculture remains the engine of the economy. Despite its importance and the attention it receives from the government and international donors, however, the country's rain-fed agricultural production still periodically fails to feed all Burkinabè. In addition, agricultural producer prices have so far been lower under Compaoré than Sankara.

Cereal (millet, sorghum) output exemplifies Burkina's economic



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dependence upon the weather. After the drought years of 1983 and 1984, cereal production rose in 1986 and 1987, only to fall again in 1988 because of poor rains in the summer of 1987. Timely and abundant rains in 1988 reversed the trend and created the background for the best harvest ever in 1989 (see "Some Key Economic Indicators," page 5). In 1990 Burkina will again experience a modest cereal deficit of 50,000 tons, due to late rains and locust damage in the 1989-1990 agricultural season.

Cotton, the country's main cash crop, is slightly less dependent upon weather, essentially because of the southern location of its plantations. Production nevertheless decreased by 13 percent in the 1987-1988 season and soared to an all-time record 180,000 tons in 1988-1989, decidedly Burkina's best agricultural year since independence. Aside from its vulnerability to weather, cotton cultivation restricts the area under millet and sorghum production, and its shorter fallow period puts environmental pressure on the land. Another variable is that the receipts from cotton are determined by world prices, which have been severely depressed since the mid-1980s (although they improved slightly in 1989).

The production of karité and groundnuts is marginal, and sugar output only covers the domestic market. The potential for increased sugar production is greater, however, and there are plans for further development in the Sourou valley.

Minerals. Burkina has few natural resources apart from its agriculture, but minerals hold some promise.

Gold mining became important in 1984, when the government decided to reopen the Poura gold mine and its some 30,000 kilograms of gold reserves, which had been closed in 1966. Other veins have subsequently been worked in the north and in the Sebba region with North Korean assistance.

Since then, gold mining has had a marked impact on Burkina's growth and export receipts. According to the Economist Intelligence Unit, marketed production in 1987 was 2.6 tons, yielding export revenues of \$38 million. Although no official figures are yet available, production in 1988 and 1989 is believed to be double that of 1987. The windfall from gold mining is expected to last at least until the mid-1990s, at which point new deposits will have to be found if production is to continue at its present pace. (For background, see "Middle Africa's Minerals: From Myth to Reality?" by Craig B. Andrews, *CSIS Africa Notes* no. 95, February 28, 1989.)

Sizable deposits of manganese in Tambao are not yet exploitable because of their inaccessibility and weak world prices.

Transport. Once goods are produced, they must be moved. This represents a major problem given Burkina's limited and often decrepit transport infrastructure. The single-track railroad which links Ouagadougou with Abidjan in Côte d'Ivoire is inefficiently operated, and traffic has been steadily decreasing since 1980. Sankara's project to build a railway to Tambao is still alive, but the track so far reaches only to Kaya, a mere 105 kilometers north of

Ouagadougou. An agreement was reached with China in September 1989 for the financing of the remaining 200 kilometers. There are only 1,300 kilometers of tarred roads, one of which provides access to Togo's border, and thence to the ocean port at Lomé. More roads are under construction with international assistance.

Ouagadougou's airport has recently been upgraded and can now accommodate Boeing 747 cargo aircraft, as does the airport at Bobo-Dioulasso.

Trade and Debt. Gold's contribution to Burkina's exports is badly needed because the country faces a stubborn structural trade deficit. Depressed world cotton prices and adverse exchange rate movements have compounded the situation since 1985. The trade deficit widened in 1988 as the poor agricultural season forced the state to import cereals and cut exports of cotton. The drying up of remittances from expatriate Burkinabè workers in a Côte d'Ivoire now in economic crisis means that unilateral transfers cannot make up for the trade imbalance. The current account has plunged to an officially estimated deficit of \$100 million (see "Some Key Economic Indicators," page 5). Even so, Burkina's foreign reserves remain satisfactory. Reserves in 1988 were equal to almost nine months of imports at the 1987 level. By comparison, neighboring Benin's reserves cover not even one week of imports and Mali's a little more than three weeks.

Burkina's public debt amounted to \$825 million in 1988. Although this represents 43 percent of the country's GDP, its debt service ratio has not been overwhelming and is expected to remain tolerable as gold sales and slightly improved cotton prices help to increase export revenues. In fact, no rescheduling agreement seems critically needed at this point, though the possibility will be

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open to Burkina if it agrees on the details of an adjustment program with the World Bank (see below). The sharp increase in debt from 1985 to 1987 is essentially due to the weakening of the dollar and does not represent a real trend, because only a fraction of the debt is denominated in dollars.

Economic Reform

Despite its many problems, Burkina's economy has been managed with more caution and realism than the economies of some other African countries. Recent macroeconomic indicators attest to a respectable performance: the 1988 5.6 percent growth rate and the low inflation rate of 4 percent in the same year were not particularly remarkable for a country which had deflation with growth in both 1986 and 1987 and an average real GDP growth of 7.9 percent between 1985 and 1988.

Yet some of the inhibiting policies typical of Africa are also found in Burkina. The grain market is controlled by the state. Parastatals are ubiquitous and contribute little to the economy. The investment code is not liberal enough to attract foreign investors stigmatized by Sankara's revolutionary rhetoric, and their fears have not yet been fully alleviated despite the new government's gentler approach.

After years of equivocation, however, a significant step toward economic liberalization was taken on October 20, 1989. An economic memorandum prepared by the World Bank was extensively discussed before the government agreed to make it the basis of an economic revival drive that will aim at a growth rate of 6 percent by 1992 through a structural adjustment program. Adjustment, presented by the government to the people as a preventive measure, is seen as necessary because of the trade and current account deficits and the constant deterioration of public finance. (The budget deficit has now reached between 35 and 60 billion CFA francs when arrears are taken into account.)

The procedures to be followed are the usual World Bank-IMF medicine: balancing the budget, paying debt arrears, and revitalizing trade and enterprises. These are the conditions for receiving additional financing for sectors such as agriculture, education, transport, and health. (See "How the IMF and the World Bank Affect African Decision Making" by Carol Lancaster, *CSIS Africa Notes* no. 97, April 20, 1989.)

The adjustment program will run from 1990 to 1992. This is a relatively short period for such a program and is likely to span only a first phase. Despite the government's formal commitment, no agreement has yet been reached with the World Bank and the IMF regarding the financing of the program. In view of Burkina's past performance, the Bank's projected 6 percent growth rate at the 1992 horizon does not seem unrealistic. With the good 1988-1989 crop year, increased gold exports, and an upsurge in the construction sector, the IMF estimates GDP growth to be around 9.9 percent in 1989. But what is desired by the Bank and Burkina alike is to make GDP growth sustainable and less dependent on agriculture, gold, and



the temporarily favorable construction climate.

The October 1989 decision marks a significant step in economic policy. Sankara had always refused to negotiate with the IMF and the World Bank, and only sectoral projects of a limited scope were undertaken by the Bank during the years he ruled as Burkina's head of state.

It should be noted, however, that the policies followed by the Sankara regime between 1983 and 1986 were in some respects similar to those recommended by the World Bank today. Government expenditures were reduced by squeezing civil servants' salaries; agricultural producer prices were raised; and imports were controlled as much as possible. Because of Sankara's refusal to enter into an agreement with the multilateral institutions, these sometimes harsh policies were not compensated for by inflows of capital.

After coming to power in 1987, Compaoré revoked some of Sankara's austerity measures to gain legitimacy among urban dwellers and civil servants. These policies are the very ones likely to be tightened again if and when a final agreement is reached with the international financial institutions, though probably more modestly and in a more rational manner. Although the social consequences would this time be somewhat mitigated by compensating flows of external financing, there could still be some negative political consequences for Compaoré.

Political Background

Captain Blaise Compaoré came to power in a violent October 1987 coup that resulted in the death of Captain Thomas Sankara, a close friend whom Compaoré had helped bring to power four years earlier.

Sankara was the prototype of the nonconformist, charismatic revolutionary leader. He fought in the 1974-

1975 border war with Mali and returned home a hero. Before he seized power in 1983 at age 33, he had been commander of the Pô commandos, the most efficient unit of the Burkinabè army. He became popular by having his men help local peasants harvest and by forming an orchestra which would play at local gatherings (with Sankara as a guitarist). A born orator, he conversed with his audience rather than addressing it. His speeches, all long and often improvised, were didactic and imaginative, heavily drawing on traditional Burkinabè story-telling.

During the last months of Sankara's rule, increased divisions began to surface within the ruling Conseil National de la Révolution (CNR). Particularly difficult for Compaoré, a member of Sankara's cabinet at the time, were the ban on most trade unions and the jailing of their leaders.

The Burkinabè people were also becoming fed up with Sankara's brand of frenetic revolutionary populism. Sankara's regime put considerable emphasis on "voluntary" (and sometimes not-so-voluntary) mass participation in various development-related activities, often under the guidance of local "Comités de Défense de la Révolution" (CDRs). The diminishing popular support for the CDRs left Sankara without any means to respond to his growing isolation within the CNR. A number of unpopular austerity measures also contributed to Sankara's political difficulties: the price of beer was raised, imports of fruits and vegetables were banned, and the official local cotton costume (Faso dan Fani) was made compulsory attire for civil servants despite its high cost.

Faced with increased marginalization within the CNR, Sankara proposed the creation of a single party embracing all existing political organizations (something he had long opposed). This notion was vehemently opposed by his colleagues in the CNR, who also feared that Sankara intended to create a special military unit under his command. On October 15, a commando unit loyal to Compaoré opened fire on Sankara, killing him and 13 associates. A radio broadcast later in the day announced that the CNR would be replaced by a "Front Populaire" (FP) under Compaoré's leadership, which would undertake a process of "rectification" of the revolution.

Ironically, it was because of Sankara's very charisma that he was killed by the plotters. An imprisoned Sankara would have indeed represented a potential threat to any regime. In an effort to erase any lingering pro-Sankara sentiments, Compaoré's Front Populaire also deemed it necessary to launch a denigration campaign against the slain leader. Thus, Sankara was labeled a "fascist" and a "traitor" who "consorted with bourgeois potentates"; the FP also denied him proper burial until May 1988 and forced his widow into exile in Gabon.

Compaoré's personality is markedly different from Sankara's. Shy, timid, lacking his predecessor's communicative skills, he appears ill at ease as head of state. He too commanded the famous Pô unit and is popular in the army. Whereas Sankara was Spartan and

austere, Compaoré enjoys luxury and is less strict about corruption. A tall and muscular man, Compaoré is often called "le beau Blaise," the handsome Blaise.

In the wake of the coup, Compaoré moved rapidly to muster support and reduce opposition. Union leaders and other key figures were released from prison; fired civil servants were reinstated and their salaries increased. Sankara's austerity measures were canceled and in March 1988 the CDRs were replaced by lower-key organizations known as *Comités Révolutionnaires* (CRs). To this day, the CRs have not succeeded in mobilizing the population, and their membership is sparse.

As for "rectification," a three-day national conference was held in Ouagadougou in January 1988, with 1,500 delegates from the country's 30 provinces. The conference critically appraised the Sankara years, but decided that the new regime should remain within the existing framework of the 1983 revolution.

In practical terms, Compaoré's actions to date indicate a desire to distance himself from the pro-peasant policies of his predecessor in favor of a more conventional urban-based alliance of the military and civil servants.

A De Facto One-Party State

Although the Front Populaire comprises several groupings, civilian and military, its structure resembles that of a single party. In April 1989, the government announced the creation of the *Organisation pour la Démocratie Populaire/Mouvement du Travail* (ODP/MT), which was aimed at rallying all revolutionary tendencies and groups belonging to the FP. Within the FP, the ODP/MT dominates the operating structures.

When the FP held its first congress in March 1990, the ODP/MT and six other political organizations were present. It is likely, however, that most of these organizations were created by the FP to help convey an image of pluralism. One of them, though—the *Mouvement des Démocrates Progressistes*—is the brainchild of Herman Yaméogo, son of Upper Volta's first president. The MDP is essentially powerless (Yaméogo is only under secretary for social affairs), but its presence in the FP hints that the FP's political spectrum may project beyond the radical left. The influence of parties other than the ODP/MT is likely to be circumscribed, however, given the FP's adoption of democratic centralism as its "fundamental principle of organization." It remains to be seen what the role of the ODP/MT and the FP will be under the constitution which the first congress of the FP resolved in March to draft within six months. In his closing speech to the congress, Compaoré was careful not to raise expectations when he stated that the constitution would "clearly define a socialist regime."

Compaoré's Present and Potential Rivals

While popular apathy toward the CRs and other FP structures seems to indicate a general lack of enthusiasm for Compaoré, opposition from outside of the military structures has been limited. Labor unions, the traditional harbingers of popular unrest, are free to operate but still

Burkina Faso: Some Key Economic Indicators

(in \$ millions unless otherwise indicated)

	1985	1986	1987	1988
GDP at market prices (billions of CFA francs)	455.8	455.4	492.3	517.0
Real GDP % change	13.0	10.0	2.1	5.6
CPI % change	6.9	-2.5	-2.7	4.0
Population (millions)	7.9	8.1	8.3	8.5
Exports f.o.b.	70.5	82.6	155.0	148.4
Imports c.i.f.	325.5	403.2	434.4	479.0
Current account	-68.6	-51.9	-54.9	-100.0
Reserves minus gold	139.5	233.5	322.6	320.9
Public external debt disbursed	497.2	615.7	794.0	825.0
Debt service ratio (%)	16.9	8.8	13.3	N.A.
Cereal production (thousands of tons) ^a	1,588.5	1,782.8	1,631.9	2,091.3
Cotton production (thousands of tons) ^a	115.5	169.6	148.8	180.0
Average exchange rate (CFA francs per \$)	449.3	346.3	300.5	298.0

a. Figures are for crop year beginning in calendar year.

SOURCES: Economist Intelligence Unit, Banque Centrale des États de l'Afrique de l'Ouest (BCEAO), World Bank, IMF.

have not recovered from the repression of the Sankara era and have not opposed the FP in an organized manner.

Most key positions in the FP are still held by members of the armed forces. Burkina's poorly equipped army, numbering a mere 8,700, has proven to be more efficient as a political machine than as an instrument of war. Indeed, it is not only the main actor but also the stage of politics in Burkina. Within the current and former military ranks there are two personalities who could challenge Compaoré's domination of the political arena.

Captain Boukary Kaboré. Ever since the 1987 coup, the FP has had to face opposition from an officer loyal to Sankara, Captain Boukary Kaboré. Upon hearing of Sankara's death, Kaboré led a rebellion in Koudougou which was rapidly quelled by troops loyal to Compaoré. Kaboré then fled to Ghana, where he has since continued to oppose the FP and probably still represents its single most important military threat.

In November 1988, the officer who had defeated Kaboré's 1987 rebellion was killed in his sleep by a hand grenade thrown through his bedroom window. Although Kaboré denied from Ghana that his men were involved, charging that the murder was instead an act of political vengeance initiated from within the FP, seven Kaboré supporters were arrested, sentenced to death, and executed in December 1988. Rumors circulated in

January 1989 in Ouagadougou that another five Sankara loyalists had been executed.

On December 25, 1989, the government announced that it had uncovered another coup plot for which responsibility was again put on Kaboré. This time the accused were apparently not executed, probably owing their lives to the January visits of the Pope and France's minister of cooperation and development, Jacques Pelletier. In a December 27 BBC interview in Accra, Kaboré denied having plotted against Compaoré during the two years he had lived in Ghana, because "Ghanaians and Burkinabè people are good neighbors and I do not want to mar that relationship." He added, however, that "Blaise knows that if I was not in Ghana, I would have been plotting against him and there is no way he could have escaped." The latter statement was in line with a comment Kaboré had made in an interview published in the November 6, 1989 edition of the London-based magazine *West Africa*: "Now that I am outside, there is a certain risk going back inside to try to organize [the people]. But I am still observing the situation. I can say that when the situation arises, I can be with [the Burkinabè people] within a day to lead them and fight with them."

It should be kept in mind that Kaboré has never expressed a viable political agenda, except for nostalgia about the Sankara era.

Captain Gilbert Diendéré. A second key personality—this one so far only a potential rival—is 30-year-old Captain Gilbert Diendéré, the rising star of the FP and its secretary for security. Diendéré is also chief of the crack Pô commando garrison (the same position held at various times in their careers by Sankara and Compaoré). He was present at Sankara's killing and is reputedly a close friend of Compaoré.

Diendéré arrested Minister of Economic Promotion (Captain) Henri Zongo and Minister of Popular Defense and Security (Major) Jean-Baptiste Boukary Lingani, executed on September 20, 1989 in an incident marking the most significant indication thus far of dissent within the military. Zongo and Lingani were two of the so-called historic leaders of Sankara's 1983 revolution. As prominent officials of the FP government, they were also an obstacle to Compaoré's economic reforms and to the rise of the ODP/MT. The two were summarily found guilty by a FP military tribunal of having attempted to overthrow Compaoré and interrupt the "rectification" process. Others were arrested and executed with them. The rapidity of the executions and the apparent lack of evidence (apart from ambiguous tape-recorded "confessions" by the two broadcast on radio) point toward the possibility that the two men may have been victims of a frame-up engineered by Diendéré.

The Lingani-Zongo incident may have increased Diendéré's personal leverage over Compaoré. Under Diendéré, as well, the Pô commandos, already of paramount importance, have gained further influence in the regime, although they are believed to remain totally committed to Compaoré.

Rumors of gunshots being fired at Diendéré on October

26, 1989, while he was on the road to Léo, indicate that Diendéré too has serious enemies. Such an attempt on his life, if it did occur, could have come from some member of the regime who felt threatened by him, from Kaboré's men (Léo is on the Ghanaian border), or from some other branch of the military, most likely the Régiment Opérationnel de la Défense et de la Sécurité (RODSE), headed by Captain Tibo Ouédraogo. Ouédraogo, a cousin of the president, is believed to dislike Diendéré.

A Transformed Foreign Policy

The bold, independent, and at times irresponsible foreign policy of Sankara's CNR is only a memory in today's Burkina. The FP has chosen a more modest approach that it considers to be more in line with the country's limited size and influence. The first months after Compaoré's coup were dedicated primarily to improving Burkina's image abroad, especially in the wake of strong international condemnation of Sankara's killing.

Although Burkina has had three foreign ministers in less than three years, the country's foreign policy has moved in a steadily moderate direction, aimed at peaceful coexistence with neighbors and friendly relations with donor countries. The current foreign minister, Prosper Vokouma, was secretary-general of the government before the October 1989 reshuffle and former director for political affairs at the Ministry of External Relations under Sankara.

France's President François Mitterrand, whom Sankara had irritated by refusing to participate in the "neocolonial" Franco-African summits, later grew fonder of Sankara (for background, see "The Enduring French Connection" by J. Coleman Kitchen, *CSIS Africa Notes* no. 68, January 26, 1987). Compaoré's decision to attend the Franco-African summit in December 1988 in Casablanca (the first time a Burkinabè head of state had been present since 1983) further improved relations with Paris. In January 1990, France agreed to support Burkina's economic adjustment program with a package of seven loans and grants totaling 176.4 million French francs. The loans will support projects ranging from the creation of a quarry workshop to aid for economic and financial institutions.

Burkina's links with Libya during the Sankara years contributed to strained relations with the United States. Surprisingly, relations with Libya have warmed up, rather than cooled off, since the death of Sankara. Compaoré has visited Tripoli several times since 1987. Despite continuing instances of Burkinabè rhetoric denouncing U.S. foreign policy as interventionist and "imperialist," however, the recent adoption of a market-minded economic adjustment program may improve Burkina's image in U.S. eyes and lead to better relations.

The most striking foreign policy reversal has been with regard to neighboring countries. Most West African states have welcomed the advent of the FP as a sign of quieter times. (In December 1985, Burkina became involved in a brief war with Mali which it had partly provoked and was on the brink of losing when a cease-fire was reached with Ivorian assistance.)

Under Sankara, Burkina had warm relations with Ghana that included joint military maneuvers, but allegedly tried to foment internal instability in Togo. Now, on the other hand, Burkina has broken off almost all relations with Ghana (not surprising, given Kaboré's presence there) and has taken a more cooperative stance toward Togo; Compaoré has made five official visits to Togo in less than three years and the two countries are now linked thrice weekly by Air Burkina.

Though still independent-minded and led by a regime some of whose members retain a radical outlook, Burkina now ranks as a relatively moderate state on the African and international scene. It is committed to regional organizations such as the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), currently under Burkinabè chairmanship, the Communauté Économique de l'Afrique de l'Ouest (CEAO), and the Franc Zone.

What Next?

A legacy of political instability still permeates Burkinabè society. Chances for the future survival of Compaoré's FP in its current form are slim. Although the exiled Kaboré may not represent a strong alternative to the FP (because the people may not necessarily want to return to the uncertainties of the Sankara era), the unknown extent of his support within the army could prove significant. A more likely source of change may turn out to be divisions within the FP itself.

Economic prospects will partly depend on political developments. Abandonment of revolutionary phraseology—a policy step that could compromise Compaoré's domestic political position—is needed to secure the confidence of domestic and foreign investors essential to long-term growth. The government's courage in facing its deficits before they grew unmanageable is a good sign, but unless the economy becomes more diversified and moves toward regional integration, growth will remain hostage to the fickle rains.

Pierre Englebert is a writer for the Economist Intelligence Unit and a consultant for the World Bank's *World Development Report*. His published works include *La révolution burkinabè* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1987) and contributions to *Africa South of the Sahara*, *Africa Contemporary Record*, and other yearbooks and periodicals. He previously worked for the Population and Human Resources Department of the World Bank and for the Southern Africa Project of the Washington-based Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law. He is a graduate of the Université Libre de Bruxelles in Belgium and holds an M.A. in International Economics and African Studies from the Johns Hopkins University School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS).

Burkina Faso's Domestic Political History in Brief

August 5, 1960. Upper Volta, previously part of French West Africa, is granted independence. Maurice Yaméogo is president, having been elected to that position in December 1959 by the preindependence legislature.

November 7, 1965. Yaméogo's party, the Union Démocratique Voltaïque (UDV), wins 99.97 percent of the votes in a single-list parliamentary election. Subsequently, civil servants and trade unionists apprehensive about possible austerity measures join radical students opposed to the regime's close ties to France in expressing opposition to the government.

January 3, 1966. After street demonstrations in Ouagadougou and the threat of a general strike, the military (acting under considerable popular pressure) deposes Yaméogo and forms a government under Lieutenant Colonel (later General) Sangoulé Lamizana.

June 14, 1970. A referendum approves a new constitution providing for a return to limited political pluralism with an elected parliament and a civilian prime minister but a partly military government and a continuing role for Lamizana as head of state.

December 1970. Multiparty legislative elections. After some squabbling within the UDV, Gérard Ouédraogo, its president, becomes prime minister.

January 1974. The government becomes virtually paralyzed when the prime minister refuses to resign despite a refusal by the parliament to pass any legislation until he does so.

February 8, 1974. President Lamizana announces a new military takeover. The legislature is dissolved and the constitution suspended.

May 1976. Under pressure from the trade unions, Lamizana establishes a commission to draft a new constitution and plan a return to civilian rule.

November 27, 1977. A referendum approves a new constitution limiting the number of parties to three (with selection via election results).

April 30, 1978. Legislative elections take place.

May 14-28, 1978. Lamizana wins the presidential election with 56.2 percent of the vote.

November 25, 1980. Colonel Saye Zerbo overthrows Lamizana in a bloodless military coup after months of labor unrest.

September 13, 1981. Captain Thomas Sankara becomes information minister.

November 1981. The right to strike is suspended.

April 12, 1982. After a number of trade unionists are arrested for defying new governmental procedures intended to control "wildcat" strikes, Sankara resigns.

November 7, 1982. A group of noncommissioned officers overthrows Zerbo. A junta is formed, headed by Surgeon Major Jean-Baptiste Ouédraogo.

January 11, 1983. Sankara, a radical populist with an increasing following, is appointed prime minister.

May 17, 1983. After inviting Libya's Qaddafi to visit Upper Volta, Sankara is dismissed and jailed by Ouédraogo, acting under pressure from the more conservative factions of his regime. Upon hearing of this, Sankara's Pô commandos, led by Captain Blaise Compaoré, rebel and take over the town. Sankara is later released twice by Ouédraogo to negotiate with the rebels and is eventually freed unconditionally.

August 4, 1983. Sankara overthrows Ouédraogo in a military coup and installs a Conseil National de la Révolution (CNR) composed of junior and noncommissioned officers with himself as head of state and Compaoré as minister of state to the presidency. Sankara encourages the formation of so-called *Comités de Défense de la Révolution* (CDRs) at the grass-roots level. Revolutionary "people's tribunals" are set up to try former officials for such offenses as embezzlement.

May 27, 1984. A number of army officers are arrested and accused of plotting a coup. After secret trials in June, seven of the alleged plotters are executed, and five others receive long sentences at hard labor.

August 3, 1984. In what he describes as an act of "decolonization," Sankara changes the country's name to Burkina Faso, a construct devised from a combination of the country's major languages, and translatable loosely as "the land of the men of dignity."

October 15, 1987. After a period of rising divisions within the CNR, Sankara and 13 of his associates are killed in a coup carried out by a commando unit loyal to Compaoré. The CNR is replaced by a Front Populaire (FP) led by Compaoré as head of state.

October 27, 1987. A rebellion at Koudougou led by Captain Boukary Kaboré, an officer loyal to Sankara, is defeated and he flees to Ghana.

December 1988. Seven Kaboré supporters accused of murdering the officer who defeated him at Koudougou are executed.

September 20, 1989. Cabinet members Henri Zongo and Jean-Baptiste Boukary Lingani are accused of plotting against Compaoré and executed.

December 25, 1989. The government announces that it has foiled another coup attempt. According to exiled opposition groups, as many as 50 people are arrested. Apparently none are executed.

March 1-4, 1990. At its first congress, the FP resolves to draft a constitution within six months.

—Pierre Englebert

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