

# People power at work

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First there was Serbia, where the masses ousted Milosevic following his obvious defeat at the polls, then in the Ivory Coast, the same electoral process gave rise to mass demonstrations, forcing the dictator General Guii.

Unfortunately, just as with Serbia, the limits of spontaneous mass revolt rapidly became clear, only with far more tragic consequences.

No sooner than Guii was off the scene, the two main opposition parties began a vicious struggle for power. They dragged behind them their supporters in what very soon took on an ethnic character and menaces to throw the country into a civil war between the muslim Dioula community in the North, where Alassane Ouattara of the RPR gets his support, and the mainly Christian community in the South, which provides much of the support of Laurent Gbagboís FPI

Gbago has claimed victory at the polls. However, his opponents point to the undemocratic nature of the presidential election - only five potential candidates out of 19 were allowed to stand. For the most part, candidates, including Ouatarra, were excluded due to new laws which put into question their nationality.

Stirring up ethnic divisions has been the response of political and military leaders in the Ivory Coast for some time. Henri Bedie, (leader of the PDCI which had ruled the country for thirty years) who was ousted by General Guii a year ago, was the first to raise questions about the nationality of Ouatarra, his most important political rival.

By focusing attention to both communities who are not considered '100% Ivorien' and to the large number of immigrants (mainly from neighbouring Burkina Faso) who have provided cheap labour for many years in the the Ivory Coast, Bedie hoped to ride the storm menacing his regime.

Just as for many semi-colonies, the Ivory Coast has felt the full effects of globalisation. In the 1990ís, first there was France, under pressure from the FMI and the World Bank, devalued the Franc CFA, the main currency throughout francophone Africa.

Then cocoa and coffee prices, previously protected by the state institution, the CAISTAB, were made open to the fluctuations of the market, which had devastating effects of millions of peasant farmers - and on the economy as a whole.

Non payment public servants salaries sparked strikes across the country in 1999.

It was against this background of economic crisis, that the ethnic dimension was able to become so explosive. With the tightening of the labour marker immigrants could easily be used as scapegoats to deflect attention from the real causes of more and more economic hardship.

The FPI, despite its socialist pretensions, has gone along with the increasingly xenophobic atmosphere in

the Ivory Coast. The results of which we see today - the burning of mosques and churches in Abidjan and the cold blooded murder of young men.

Ethnic division is not a fatality in the Ivory Coast - over 60 ethnic groups have lived together since independence without leading to ethnic conflict. Workers in the Ivory Coast have to build on this and point the way to a political alternative if the Ivory Coast is to avoid the fate of neighbouring countries such as Sierra Leone.

But this means breaking from the FPI and building a new party which can unify all the exploited and oppressed, regardless of their religion or origin and with a programme capable of solving the burning democratic and economic issue which risk to paralyse the country.

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