

2021 BUDGET APPROPRIATION BILL - HE WHO PAYS THE PIPER CALLS THE TUNE IN NANA ADDO'S ONE-PARTY KABUKI DANCE ENSEMBLE: BY MARTIN A. B. K. AMIDU

In the wee morning of Saturday, 18th December 2021, the Parliament of Ghana approved the Appropriation Bill, 2021 for GH¢145.4 billion for the consideration and signature of President Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo to become law to govern the Government's planned expenditure for 2022 fiscal year. The rhetoric of the rejected 2022 Budget and the Approved 2022 Budget which had formed the basis of the Nana Akufo-Addo's one-party Kabuki dance ensemble ended successfully in the way the President knows best. He who pays the piper calls the tune!

The Minority caucus has been firmly tied to the apron strings of the Majority caucus in Parliament in such a manner that despite the equally divided parliament excitement that engulfed Ghanaians after the 2020 Parliamentary elections, the President has been able to demonstrate how such a legislature could easily be made an appendage of the executive chariot. The third betrayal which was consummated with the active participation of the Minority in the wee hours of Saturday, 18th December 2021 warrants another award to the President to the high league of democratic-autocratic "Family and Friends" world leaders. But our President is also an innocent looking flower – "beware of Greeks bearing gifts", is the saying.

The doubting Thomas's who did not believe that the consensus building meeting between the equally divided Minority, and Majority was a choreographed compromise that raped and defiled the integrity of the Constitution and the rule of law in enabling the rejected 2022 Budget to be reinstated through a side door on 30th November 2021 as an approved 2022 Budget should tell Ghanaians the foundation upon which the Appropriation Bill, 2021 was approved in a bi-partisan manner in the wee hours of Saturday, 18th December 2021.

Only four days previously, on 13th December 2021 the Minority Leader, Mr. Haruna Iddrisu, in a face-saving manner of his side's betrayal of the trust Ghanaians put in the split parliament told the entire world in writing in letter with reference number OP/DML/020 of even date addressed to the First Deputy Speaker inter alia, that:

"Kindly take note that the NDC Minority Caucus, which I lead and my good self, vehemently disagree with your position on the motion and your conduct in this matter. We take a strong view that your conduct affronts Orders 79, 81, 82 and 90 of our Standing Orders and can no longer be tolerated. In this regards, we are resolved to pursue the matter further with the Right Honourable Speaker upon his return."

This letter was preceded by an irrevocable commitment made to the people of Ghana in an interview granted by the Minority Chief Whip, Alhaji Mubarak Muntaka, to Joy FM in which he was reported to have said that "... the resolve of the Caucus is aimed at safeguarding parliamentary procedure and holding the government accountable". He is quoted to have said that:

"We believe that his (Joseph Osei-Owusu) refusal to admit that motion is very biased. The [standing] order he quoted 13(2) to reject the motion, in our view has no relation completely with the mission that we are demanding, so we are responding officially to him. ... The Minority Leader is signing a letter to remind him that this is very unfair and we believe that he is abusing his office. He is leaving us with no other option than to wait for Mr. Speaker himself to return and then we will exploit that avenue."

The foregoing are the words of two Honourablemen and Leaders of the Minority in an equally divided Parliament which every Ghanaian had every reason to believe were spoken with honour and integrity befitting their respective status and offices. But by the time the Speaker of Parliament was reported to have arrived in the country from his medical trip to Dubai these same two Honourablemen quoted above had led their side of Parliament in the consideration of the estimates for the Ministries, Departments and Agencies, and by 16th December 2021 had started actively participating in the approval by the plenary of Parliament of those estimates. Class FM for instance reported that:

“Ghana’s parliament on Wednesday, 15 December 2021, approved the sum of GHS 921,843,000.00 for the services of the Ministry of Transport and its agencies to carry out their programmes and activities for the 2022 fiscal year ending 31 December 2022.

The house has also approved the annual estimates totalling GHS575,970,000.00 for the services of the Ministry of Railway Development for the year ending 31 December 2022 instead of the required capital expenditure of GHS 2,520,033,185.00

In another development, the house has approved the sum of GHS574,856,000.00 in annual estimates for the services of the Ministry of Environment, Science, Technology and Innovation for the year ending 31 December 2022.”

This conduct of active participation in considering and approving the estimates while deceiving the public of eventually challenging the decision rescinding the rejected 2022 Budget was a clear surrounded of any honour and integrity to be able to challenge the reinstatement of the rejected Budget on 26th November 2021 as the approved 2022 Budget on 30th November 2021.

Ghanaontheglobe.com reported that:

“Information available to Ghanaontheglobe.com indicate that Ghana’s number three as he calls himself arrived in the country on the afternoon of Monday, 13th December, 2021.... Since the Speaker has arrived in the country he will in no time take over his legitimate position and preside over the rest of the meeting.”

The DailyGuide Network on the 14th December 2022 conjectured that he was to arrive that evening.

On 14th December 2021 the Majority Leader called the bluff of the Minority Leadership vowing to wait for the arrival of the Speaker by adopting the conflict style of calling the honour and integrity of the Speaker into question by insinuating that he had approved the Minority’s Motion to rescind the Majority’s 2022 Budget whilst in Dubai. He is quoted by Citi News to have stated in an interview that:

“The First Deputy Speaker is assuming full responsibility for the transaction of business in the Chamber, but my understanding is that the Rt. Hon. Speaker has minuted on the motion [from the Minority] that he has admitted it. If that is the case, then we are in for something dangerous.”

In a typical “he who pays the piper calls the tune” fashion the Majority Leader, who is a Minister of State, had the audacity to equate the Minority to a child who has lost a fight to another child adversary and threatens the adversary by saying that: “when my father comes you will see what he will do to you”. The Majority Leader in an interview granted to Citi Newsroom on the morning of 15th December 2021 made a riposte to the Minority Leadership when he stated that:

“There are colleagues who said they were upset, but they are now together in committees considering estimates. If the budget is rejected, why are you together considering the estimates? How can you come back and say that we should go back and reject the budget?” I think that will be taking us back. We should allow sleeping dogs to lie.”

Who can blame the Majority Leader for being patronizing to the Minority caucus whom he had successfully recruited as the Minister for Parliamentary Affairs on behalf of the executive arm of government since the first and second betrayals? And the Minority’s father, the substantive Speaker of Parliament, eventually arrived from Dubai to be a Daniel come to judgment or so we all thought. Whatever date of arrival one chose, the Speaker of Parliament was at least in Ghana on the night of 14th December 2021. Parliament continued with its normal business without the public hearing or seeing the Speaker Presiding in Parliament.

On the morning of 16th December 2021 before Parliament convened Mr. Kwasi Parker Wilson, the parliamentary correspondent for Joy FM interviewed Mr. Murtala Mohammed from the Minority side, and Mr. Egyapa Mercer, from the Majority side which is published online under the title: 2022 Budget Controversy: Minority mounts pressure on Speaker to reverse approval of the budget (16-12-21) Joy TV.” The Minority represented by Murtala Mohammed told the interviewer, amongst other things, that he expected “the Speaker to do nothing else than to reverse the decisions Hon. Osei Owusu had taken.” Mr. Egyapa Mercer for the Majority told the interviewer that the Speaker could not reverse the decision approving the 2022 budget “as the matter is mute... He has no power to overturn it....”

After a long wait, the Speaker finally entered the Chamber of Parliament and decided to make a statement on the 2022 budget challenges as the topic of his official communication. The Speaker found everything unconstitutional, and contrary to the Standing Orders of Parliament and conventions of Parliament with the conduct and decisions taken in his unavoidable absence by the First Deputy Speaker of Parliament. He took issues with “Quorum for the conduct of business and quorum for voting in Parliament” during his absence abroad; “Deputy Speaker being counted for purposes of Quorum;” and “Letter presented by the Minister responsible for Finance on concessions and modifications to the 2022 Budget Statement”. The logic of the Speaker’s official communication on the substantive matter of whether the 2022 rejected Budget and Statement of Economic Policy was ever or could ever have been rescinded on 30th November 2021 was that any such purported act of rescission of the rejected 2022 Budget was unconstitutional, against the Standing Orders of Parliament, parliamentary conventions, and illegal. With the Speaker’s declaration of nullity of whatever took place after the 26th November 2021 rejection of the 2022 Budget one expected the consequential order for a new 2022 Budget to be submitted to the House by the Minister of Finance for consideration and approval or for the Minister for Finance to submit for consideration and approval estimates for the three months period beginning January 2022 and ending on 31st March 2022 while a new 2022 Budget was prepared and presented to Parliament.

In a typical Orwellian doublespeak fashion, (which has characterized the behaviour of the Minority caucus in Parliament which put his name forward for Speaker after his retirement

from Parliament), the Speaker made a serious admission, and followed it up with the most dishonourable non sequitur to his audience:

“Members, I am aware of a letter originating from the Minister for Finance which letter purports to make some concessions and modifications to the 2022 Budget Statement and Economic Policy of Government.

The legal basis of the laying of such a letter and what actions Parliament may take as a result leaves a lot to be desired.

I have however held discussions with the Leadership of the House to find a path that is faithful to law, respects our rules and processes and ensures the governance of the country does not grind to a halt.” (Emphasis supplied)

The Speaker failed or refused to tell the listening public what secret discussions took place with the Leadership of the House and how after the Speaker’s own declarations of nullity the House could “find a path that is faithful to the law, respects our rules and processes and ensures the governance of the country does not grind to a halt” when the Constitution provides an avenue of preventing governance of the country grinding to a halt in the first three months of the next fiscal year. Despite the Speaker’s non sequitur in logical and practical argumentation, one gave him the benefit of the doubt as he laid out the agreed steps with the Leadership of the House: –

- “1. The Minister responsible for Finance comes before the House with an amended statement of the Budget with the said modifications and concessions.
2. These modifications and concessions will then be adopted by the House and the revised document with the estimates will stand committed to the various Committees of Parliament.
3. I am aware the Committees have begun consideration of the estimates. It would thus be their responsibility to reconcile the revised estimates with what they have hitherto considered and submit a report for the consideration of the House.”

We the People were waiting to see how the Speaker was going to ensure the implementation of the announced agreement after the secret discussion with the Leadership of the House and how the reconciliation of “the revised estimates with what they have hitherto considered and submitted a report for consideration of the House” was going to be done to convert the on-going unconstitutional process to be faithful to the law. Meanwhile, the Minority and the Majority expedited their approval of the estimates of the remaining Ministries, Departments and Agencies with steam on the 16th and 17th December 2021. The Appropriation Bill, 2021 which is supposed to be the culmination of the processes on an approved 2022 Budget was passed by Parliament in the wee hours of Saturday, 18th December 2021. The Minority Leader and the Minority Chief Whip never redeemed the promises they made to the public on 13th December 2021 on their honour to put their motion before the Speaker for a decision. The Minority preferred another Judas Iscariot consensus building meeting behind closed doors to finalize the third betrayal of Ghanaians who continue to financially sustain their presence in Parliament

The Minister for Finance and the Government side called the bluff of the Speaker by refusing to “come before the House with an amended statement of the Budget with the said modifications and concessions” let alone for those “modifications and concessions be adopted by the House to be committed to the various committees of Parliament.” Indeed, with

the passage of the Appropriation Bill, 2021, in the wee hours of Saturday, 18th December 2021 the various committees of Parliament on the budget appeared to have completed their work on the 2022 Approved Budget dated 30th November 2021. The Speaker, contrary to his solemn pledge to the people of Ghana has presided over a weak House and can not avoid the tag as an errand boy of the Executive arm of government who woefully failed "...in ensuring the ultimate best interest of the Ghanaian people are served."

The Speaker together with the Minority caucus in Parliament were reported to have been active players in the first and second betrayals of the Ghanaian people in the ministerial nominees' approval process at the inception of this Parliament. I raised the matter with senior members of the opposition outside Parliament, whether the Speaker did not play tricks with Ghanaians when he presided over the rejection of the 2022 Budget and immediately left for medical treatment abroad at cost to the taxpayer so that the Minority and the Majority could have their secret consensus building meeting on 30th November 2021 with the Minority agreeing to be absent from the sitting of the House to enable the rejected Budget to be rescinded and approved. The assurances I received were of fidelity to the people of Ghana.

I have served under the democratic-autocratic President Nana Akufo-Addo, and I know first-hand how the President's Family and Friends' government manoeuvres at whatever cost to the public purse to ensure the actualization of their de facto one-party democratic autocracy despite the 1992 Constitution. Ghanaians who doubted that the innocent looking flower President could establish a one-party government upon the pretence of running a democratic government have experienced how Mr. Innocent Looking Flower managed to recruit an equally divided parliament for a first, second and third betrayal of the people of Ghana as proof of the determination of the Family and Friends Government not to brook opposition to the looting machine. He who pays the piper calls the tune!

The only regrettable and disgraceful aspect of the Minority's compromises and betrayals, for me personally, is the fact that its Leadership is composed of men who are descendants of the brave and honest people of the highest integrity from the former Northern Territories of the British Protectorate of the Gold Coast who voted to become part of the Independent State of Ghana at the 1956 plebiscite. Mr. Speaker where has that honour and integrity gone to, to the extent that Mr. Sammy Gyamfi, a Communications Officer of the NDC, Mrs. Zita Benson, a former NDC Minister of Tourism, and Mr. Ras Mubarak, a former NDC MP for Kumbungu, amongst others, could accuse the party's leadership in Parliament of betrayal? The words of Mr. Sammy Gyamfi on Thursday, 4th March 2021 after the first betrayal are pungent and no lessons appear to have been learnt from them:

"Comrades, the betrayal we have suffered in the hands of the Speaker of Parliament, Rt. Hon. Alban Bagbin, the leadership of our Parliamentary group, particularly Hon. Haruna Idrissu and Hon. Muntaka Mubarak, and dozens of our own MPs, is what strengthens me to work hard for the great NDC to regain power. They brazenly defied the leadership of the party and betrayed the collective good for their selfish interest. And we, must not let them succeed in their parochial quest to destroy the NDC, the party that has done so much for them and all of us. The shame they have brought on the party will forever hang like an albatross around their necks."

I know that investigations into the double salary scandal can be revisited by Mr. Innocent Looking Flower at anytime and I also know that the parliamentary bribery scandal that led one member of parliament to tender a reluctant apology to the House does not lend credibility to the Minority side. But Mr. Speaker, how does one reconcile what you said at Koforidua as

a Member of Parliament on 10th March 2014 on bribery in parliament and the following declaration by you as the then Second Deputy Speaker of Parliament on your Starr FM interview on the Starr Chat show with Bola Ray on that Wednesday night, with the approval of the Appropriation Bill 2021 under your watch in breach of the agreements you set forth on 16th December 2021:

"When people invest in you and you are given office, of course that is one of the reasons why I said His Excellency will have it tough fighting corruption..., because he fought the first world war [Election 2008], second world war [Election 2012] and third world war [2016], sponsored by people."

"Is he saying that those people are Father Christmas, no. As a country we have to look at this... we should all admit we are all corrupt, its a fact, because of the system." (These quotes are taken from Daily Graphic publication of 21st June 2017 as was monitored by Graphic Online's Seth J. Bokpe.)

Ghanaians deserve to be treated with integrity and decorum by its elected representatives and unelected officers under the 1992 Constitution with transparency and accountability in such important matters as the Budget which will affect their daily lives for the next year. But the Nana Akufo-Addo Kabuki dance ensemble is not done with its public deception because today, 20th December 2021, the Minister for Finance may yet submit an "...amended statement of the Budget with the said modifications and concessions" to be "...then adopted by the House and the revised document with the estimates will stand committed to the various Committees of Parliament" as agreed with the Speaker on 16th December 2021. Ghanaians will for the first time see how the stable door is shut after the horse has bolted but with the horse still delusionally imagined to be in the stable. The Minority has shamefully reduced the 2022 Budget to a fight against E-levy and today's dance in parliament will center also on fooling the Ghanaian public on E-levy with the Minority's cover-up show. A Judas Iscariot will always remain a Judas Iscariot, E-levy, or no E-levy.

The first working day of the week leading to the Christmas holidays is today 20th December 2021. Ghana's Budget harvesting season for Members of Parliament starts in November of every year and ends in December. The parliamentary committees of the various estimates have finished their work and have seen to the approval of the estimates except the E-Levy dance. The most important components of the Budget harvest season which both sides of the House cherish most are the consequential allowances and entitlements of whatever nature for the Members of Parliament which they have already earned, rejected, or approved Budget. The people of Ghana can go blackberrying for all members of the one-party Kabuki dance ensemble of both sides of parliament care.

The 1992 Constitution enjoins all patriotic Ghanaians, regardless of political party affiliation, to defend it against all comprador bourgeoisies and the national political elite in all arms of the government seeking to abuse and derail the constitutional and democratic processes mandated by the Constitution. The defence of the Constitution from all political persuasions during the 2022 Budget betrayal by the one-party political elite against We the People is clear testimony of our ability to put Ghana First. Patriots shall win against the compradors and political elite by continuing to put Ghana First.

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