

THE SHAMELESS COMPROMISES OF THE ONE-PARTY POLITICAL ELITE
AGAINST THE GHANAIAN ELECTORATE - 2022 BUDGET: BY MARTIN A. B. K.
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On 30th November 2021, the Minority in Parliament knowingly absented itself from the sitting of Parliament to facilitate the Majority in Parliament to purport to rescind the decision of a properly constituted Parliament on 26th November 2021 presided over by the constitutionally elected and recognized Speaker of Parliament, the Rt. Hon. Alban Bagbin, rejecting the 2022 Budget Statement and Economic Policy laid before Parliament by the Government on 17th November 2021.

After the 26th November 2021 rejection of the 2022 Budget any Minority sincerely believing in the cause of the suffering of the Ghanaian public, its opposition to the draconian budget and the reasons proffered for its rejection would not have bargained over the only option left for the Government: the submission of a new 2022 Budget and Economic Policy to Parliament for consideration and approval. Any subsequent consensus building meeting attended by such a sincere Minority on the one hand, and the Majority with its accompanying Minister of Finance on the other hand, would have had only one agenda item: Negotiating common grounds to guide the preparation and submission of a new 2022 Budget to Parliament. The Minority which has now specialized in Orwellian doublespeak deceptions shamelessly compromised and sold out on the rejected 2022 Budget.

It is now a matter of incontrovertible public knowledge that the Minority instead of insisting on the submission by the Government of a new 2022 Budget chose to enter an unholy compromise with the Majority and the Minister of Finance under the smokescreen of consensus building on the morning of 30th November 2021 to absent itself from the actual Parliamentary sitting of 30th November 2021. This compromise by the Minority with the Majority “to stand in it alone” enabled the Majority to do with the parliamentary decision of 26th November 2021 rejecting the 2022 Budget as the Majority pleased. As anticipated, the absence of the Minority emboldened the Majority to “stand in it alone,” rescind the decision to reject the 2022 Budget on 26th November 2021, and to purport to approve the 2022 Budget at the actual parliamentary sitting of 30th November 2021. But the Majority purported to rescind the rejected 2022 Budget under Order 50 of the Standing Orders of Parliament which both the Minority and Majority knew could not be used to rescind the rejected 2022 Budget. The Minority conveniently and as compromised continues to remain silent over this substantive and procedural illegality.

Following a swift and electric public reaction condemning the sell out by the Minority, it attended the parliamentary sitting the next day, 1st December 2021, and unashamedly tried to save face by introducing a motion seeking to rescind the decisions taken at the actual sitting of Parliament on 30th November 2021. The arguments and counter arguments for and against the motion and the resulting appearances of rising tempers, of a heated atmosphere creating seemingly chaotic scenes “when the First Deputy Speaker, Joseph Osei-Owusu, ruled against the new application by the Minority, amidst open interjections and disagreements by MPs on the Minority side” were an orchestrated bi-partisan participation in Nana Akufo-Addo’s democratic-autocratic one-party Kabuki dance ensemble intended to deceive the public of the existence of genuine democratic disagreements.

On 2nd December 2021, the choreographed Kabuki dance performance of acrimony and chaos between the Minority and Majority at the sitting of Parliament on 1st December 2021 was suddenly exposed as a hoax when the Minority Leader announced to the entire world at the 10th Anniversary launch of the Ghana Chamber of Telecommunications in Accra the acceptance by the Minority of a 1% E-Levy. Ghana Web quoted the Minority Leader as announcing this volte-face in the following terms:

“A week ago, it was no no no, we won’t accept e-levy but having listened to officials in government, including the Minister of Finance, I am convinced to accept a departure from my original "no" to accepting a one percent e-levy....“We are not against it but we want it fixed at one percent. We fear for double taxation because we already have the communication services tax.”

The Minority Leader is also reported to have said in the paraphrased words of Ghana News Agency (GNA) that: “Pegging the e-levy at one per cent was a great contribution to fiscal consolidation and would ensure the economy did not collapse going forward, he said.” Any doubting Thomas’s may wish to view and listen to what the Minority Leader said at the launch, which is available on video online, to confirm that it is substantially the same as reported by the media.

Paradoxically, the Chief Executive Officer of the Ghana Chamber of Telecommunications, Dr Kenneth Ashigbey, who was the Minority Leader’s host at the launch was singing from a different hymn sheet of industry stakeholders, the suffering workers and poor Ghanaians when he said in an interview with the GNA that the Chamber was engaging the government to see the best way out of the 1.75 e-levy tax which was a matter of concern to the Chamber. On the issue of widening the tax net, Dr. Ashigbey was reported to have said that merchant payment should be exempted completely from the e-levy.

The determined public opposition (regardless of political party affiliation) to the blatant sell out by the Minority’s secret acceptance of 1% e-levy was swift and electric resulting in the announcement by the Minority Chief Whip hours later in a statement countermanding entirely the compromises announced by the Minority Leader. The Minority Chief Whip stated, amongst other things, that:

“We wish to state unequivocally that no concrete decision or agreement has been reached between government and the NDC Caucus in Parliament on this matter. As we speak, government’s so-called concessions are unknown to us and we have no clear indication that they intend to seriously consider any of the proposals that have come up.... The NDC Caucus in Parliament wishes to assure Ghanaians that it will continue to use every legitimate and lawful channel to resist the 1.75% E-Levy.”

The Orwellian doublespeak from the Minority Chief Whip countermanding the position of the Minority as announced by its leader was unbelievable when juxtaposed against a post by Mr. Okudzeto Ablakwa (the Minority ranking member on the Foreign Affairs Committee) reported on Ghana Web on 2nd December 2021 in which he outlined what he claimed to be

key achievements from the Minority's resistance to the 2022 Budget. Mr. Ablakwa stated the achievements as: "1) Neglect of tidal waves victims addressed as government commits to phase 2 of Blekusu Coastal Protection Project; 2) Agyapa abandoned; 3) No more automatic adjustments of Fees and Charges which covers more than 2,000 items; 4) Benchmarks reviewed; 5) Aker deal amended; 6) Government finally agrees to shift position on 1.75% E-Levy — negotiations continue on this." The post by Mr. Ablakwa reported on Ghana Web is more consistent with the Minority Leader's announced position of the compromises reached with the Minister of Finance and the Majority Leadership in the backstage Judas Iscariot consensus building meetings.

Mr. Ablakwa's post also coheres with the confirmation by Mr. Alexander Afenyo-Markin (the Deputy Majority Leader) that the Minority Caucus is not being frank with the public when it had agreed with government on the newly introduced electronic transaction levy. Mr. Afenyo-Markin's words which are also consistent with the announcement at the launch by the Minority Leader speak for themselves when he said of the Minority denials by its Chief Whip that:

"We know their position, their position is one percent. I am surprised that suddenly they want to steam Haruna Iddrisu or that they want to single him out and sacrifice him. The E-levy was a position by the collective, if they have changed their position I would be surprised. But let Ghanaians know that on the E-levy, the NDC agrees with the NPP that we need that E-levy."

Whilst the Minority was secretly working against the interest of the ordinary Ghanaian from the Government's draconian taxes, including the e-levy, a foundation and founding member of the New Patriotic Party and a distinguished economist, Mr. Kwame Pianim, was cautioning the Government of the indefensibility of its budget policy. Mr. Kwame Pianim was of the considered view that the e-levy "is anti-technology progress and may undermine the significant progress being achieved in financial inclusion for the unbanked."

Mr. Pianim advised the Minister of Finance to arrange with the Bank of Ghana to collect the interest on MoMo wallets that do not benefit the average MoMo user if the government needs money and cautioned the government to "take a step back from the brink, listen creatively to the pain of our people and focus on providing a caring administration and preserving national cohesion and keeping the economy on an even keel in these stormy weathers!" He added that: "This is not the time for jerky manoeuvres." Other patriotic Ghanaians from the Majority party outside Parliament had also spoken on behalf of the suffering Ghanaian against the draconian 2022 Budget earlier.

In the interim, the leadership of the Majority and the Minority had on the same day, 2nd December 2021, without any motion to appoint any Special or Ad Hoc Committee under Order 191 of the Standing Orders of Parliament unilaterally announced the formation of a supposed bi-partisan Committee of ten members from each side to resolve alleged disagreements over the approval or otherwise of the government's 2022 budget statement and economic policy. It is instructive that the motion to appoint the Committee together with its terms of reference may be moved at a formal sitting of Parliament in the coming days or today, 7th December 2021, despite the Committee having reportedly already commenced its work contrary to the Standing Orders.

The shameless compromise of the one-party political elite against the Ghanaian electorate by an equally divided Parliament of 137 members from each side of the House has been ably resisted, disrupted, and thrown into disarray by the alertness of affected stakeholders and We the People outside Parliament. The Minority in Parliament has an obligation based on constitutional ethics and integrity to walk its talk by insisting on the submission of a new 2022 Budget by the Government to Parliament for consideration and approval. Alternatively, it can also now decide that it is in its best economic and financial interest again to opportunistically betray the cause of the overwhelming stakeholders by accepting the Majority's illegal budget approval of 30th November 2021 under the inapplicable Order 50 of the Standing Orders as the baseline for budgetary Committee discussions and allowances.

The extent of the Minority's betrayal and sell out of its conscience and the people of Ghana will be known when it formally accepts in Parliament any amendment(s) to the rejected 2022 Budget based on the illegal rescission and approval of 30th November 2022 contrary to the letter and spirit of Order 50 of the Standing Orders. Even Judas Iscariot repented his betrayal of Christ! Time will tell whether the Minority and the Majority in Parliament will repent the Great Betrayal of the Ghanaian electorate at this solemn and difficult moment of hardship and poverty in our lives.

Patriotic Ghanaians of whatever political persuasion deserve to congratulate themselves for standing up steadfastly against the unholy alliance between the Minority and the Majority to compromise the national interest by inflicting more economic hardship and poverty on We the People. Many thanks to all patriots for their fidelity to defending the 1992 Constitution: "More is thy due than more than all can pay." Let us continue to put Ghana First. Shalom!

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