

Veteran Liberian, Albert Porte's letter to President Tubman

Veteran Liberian, Albert Porte's letter to President Tubman August 25, 1951, on the use of Liberia's treasury to purchase the first luxury presidential yacht (463-ton vessel with a passenger capacity of thirty-six – which required an international crew, a separate bureau within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and an annual of \$125,000.00). (published in "*Thinking about the Unthinkable things the Democratic Way*", Monrovia 1967 pp. 22-23)

Dear Mr. President:

Ever since I read a copy of the Listener in which you published your message to the Legislature convoking the special session, I have been thinking and trying not to think, and feel urged to let you know some of the thoughts that have been passing through my mind, sincerely hoping and believing that it will be taken in the real democratic spirit, realizing fully, as I know you do, that ultimate success or failure in a democracy rests not only upon the President, but upon each citizen as well.

Liberia is classified among the undeveloped countries of the world. She lacks some of the basic minimum requirements, and needs much more than she can muster at the present time for her internal development. And although this is so, we are undertaking to spend \$150,000 for the purchase of a yacht for the use of the President. In addition to this, it will require a tidy sum for its upkeep. It is my humble opinion that at the present stage of the country's development, this amount could be more profitably used towards real development with more permanent results. Yes, other countries have these things and in time as our country is developed we too will have some of them, but I think we should concentrate upon fundamentals.

Unfortunately, the citizens of this country do not feel free to express themselves upon vital questions affecting them, but sit by and grumble "the people don't mean anything". I am afraid that even in the Legislature there is a great reluctance if not the absence of the free expression of thoughts and opinion, especially where the President is concerned. To tell the truth, it has required a huge effort on my part to have expressed my thought here. So I have no justification in condemning the reluctance in others.

This only bring to face to face with great responsibility weighing so heavily upon the President, which could be lightened if the people felt free to express themselves and their views were taken in the right spirit.

Very sincerely your,

Albert Porte

President Tubman's response to Albert Porte

Dear Mr. Porte.

Your letter of August 25th in which you informed me that you have been worried since you read the copy of the Listener which carried my Special Message to the Legislature and my reference to the purchase of a Yacht for the President of Liberia have been received.

You state in your letter that One Hundred Fifty Thousand Dollars should be utilized for some other more beneficial purpose and not for the purchase of a yacht for the President of Liberia, and that some people are grumbling but that they do not come forward and state their dissatisfaction, even some Member of the Legislature you state.

I appreciate you candor in the matter, but I am in total disagreement with your views expressed and method of thinking on the subject.

I take the liberty to tell you an experience that I had in 1939 at which I was an Associate Justice of the Supreme Court. The Legislature and the Supreme Court were to be opened and for two weeks they could not get a quorum. An American ship came in the Captain name was Mr. Bogden. He knew me personally and therefore agreed to bring me to Monrovia, but refused to take any other Member of the Legislature or Member of the Supreme Court. I pleaded with him to take the other Members but he insisted that he would not.

Finally, he asked me the following question: "Justice Tubman, do you mean to tell me that your Government has no means to by which she can get Members of the Legislature and the Supreme Court to the Seats of the Legislature and the Supreme Court except they are transported there by our ships or some foreign ships?" Although embarrassed, I had to reply in the affirmative. He then asked another question: "If your President desire to

come to Cape Palmas, you mean to tell me that he could not come unless our ship or ships of some other line brought him?" Again, although embarrassed, I had to reply in the affirmative. He then came forth with the last question: "Then Justice Tubman, do you think you should have a President, a Legislature, or a Supreme Court if the Members of these bodies have had to be transported to the seats of the Legislature and the Court by foreign craft?" This question baffled me and I could not answer it.

I narrate this experience of mine to show you the difference in the thinking of civilized people about the type of thing that you are objecting to.

On the other hand, you and the rest of the grumblers, although I do not know who they are but they seem to be known to you, make no contribution or make so little contribution to the resources of the country that you should be ashamed to talk about the public expenditure.

How much taxes have you or any of the grumblers paid into the public treasury from 1944, when I took office and met the net revenues at One Million Dollars, to the present? By recommendation to the Legislature of measures to increase the revenues which they approved, within seven years it is expected that revenues will reach eight to ten million dollars at the end of the year. How much taxes of any kind or financial contribution have you or the grumblers put into the revenue to cause this increase? Have you or any of you contributed towards the Income Tax, the Ticket Tax, the Injury Tax, the Sales Tax or the Profit tax? Have you paid your Real estate Taxes; if so in what amount?

It might interest you to know that I paid Income tax of more than Two Thousand Dollars for the last year alone. Firestone paid nearly Three Million Dollars Income Tax.

The people who pay taxes in the country and would be entitled to interpose objections are those up country, the foreigners and few of your element who really do pay taxes. The grumblers are the set who contribute nothing for the protection, right and benefit of citizenship which they enjoy.

Now you just sit down and forget that it is you and begin to think what financial contribution do you or have you made to your country.

Your spirit appears to me to be anarchical I remember during the last Administration, you were critical and censorious of it. When it comes to the present Administration, you are occasionally censorious and critical of it. I have never known you to compliment any administration, but you always look for what you think to be weak spots in it. I think this is an evil spirit and an evil eye which will not do you or the country any good. Supposed every or most persons had the same spirit, what would happen to the country!

It may be necessary to inform you that in 1949, without consultation with me, the Legislature voted One Hundred Thousand Dollars to purchase a yacht for the President> I did not do so but delay it because I felt the revenue had not reached where I wanted them; now the revenue justify it. I made contacts to get one but found that the One Hundred Thousand Dollars could not purchase it. I therefore requested the additional Fifty Thousand Dollars and the same has been approved, and I will but the yacht.

During the early days when the founding fathers first came here, they had ships which were not owned by Government but by private citizens and companies. That industry was permitted to die out and for more than sixty to seventy years there was not a solitary means of transport from one point to another until recently when I succeeded in procuring two airplanes for Government since private citizens could not do it. And now we have an Airline in the country and the planes land airstrips built by Government.

I will but the yacht without regard to the grumbling of you grumblers. That yacht will be used for the recreation of the President from his onerous duties that have been increased by more than one thousand percent since 1944, and may invite you to accompany me on one of my cruises that you might get a benefit of some rest from your onerous duty as a school teacher and which may possibly broaden your vision.

*Kind regards,
Sincerely yours,*

W. V. S. Tubman

***From Nyanseor's Achieves of Liberian & African History**