

ERIC MARGOLIS



What's-its-name

The news first came out in the capital, Ouagadougou. Then it flashed along the bush telegraph to Fada N'Gourma, thence to the metropolis of Bobo. The heroic, freedom-loving people of Upper Volta had dealt a staggering blow to the capitalists!

Astute readers of this column may recall that last December I warned of precisely this danger. Socialist Upper Volta — no one seems to know what happened to Lower or Middle Volta — had then signed a major alliance with Stalinist Albania. The Albano-Voltaic axis was aimed at "crushing the imperialist-capitalists."

Cynics snickered. What could little Upper Volta's 6.6 million dirt farmers do against the power of the West? Who's afraid of 2.7 million Albanians locked away in the Tibet of Europe?

Upper Volta struck back last month, inflicting another Pearl Harbor on the sleeping Western powers. What it did was to go and change its name. Exit Upper Volta; enter the new People's Socialist Republic of Bourkina Fasso.

The full damage caused by this dastardly act has yet to be assessed. Preliminary studies show a shattering economic blow to the West and, incidentally, to the East as well. Consider:

Every atlas will have to be changed. New maps, new charts, new indices. Hundreds of old atlases will become obsolete. So will encyclopedias and other reference works. Wall maps and globes will be passe. Replacing them will cost millions. No library or school can afford to be with outdated texts.

The UN will also spend millions to change name plates, file cards, speaking order assignments and committee slots that are based on alphabetical order. Foreign ministries around the world will be thrown into expensive turmoil as they change files, secret dossiers and computer codes. The KGB and CIA will become beehives of agitation.

Handling thorny problem

Airlines will have to change flight guides, schedules, baggage tags and maps. So will freight companies. Post offices around the world will dissolve in confusion over whether to slot mail for Bourkina Fasso under B or F. One may imagine how our own sullen postal workers will greet the news.

How will protocol departments and editors handle this thorny problem? Are the wretched inhabitants of this scabrous land Bourkinians, Fassoians, or Bourkina Fassos? All the man-hours lost on such considerations means money down the tubes.

Tens of millions of dollars and thousands of hours of work are going to be spent on utterly non-productive administrative trivia just because of a few drum-thumping Third World "leaders" who cannot even scratch the name of their country into the sand. Such an outrage must not be allowed.

Suppose other African nations follow this example. I suspect that Benin, Togo and Guinea-Bissau are itching to change their names just to keep up with the neighboring Bourkinos, or is it Fassos? Look at the Central African Republic which became the Central African Empire. After too much bad publicity about cannibalism it changed its name back to the original.

If one nation a year changes its name, the civilized world will be crushed under staggering administrative and printing bills. The fad will spread. Out in the remote Pacific, such ridiculous nations as Vanuatu, Nauru, Kiribati or Tuvalu could all change their monickers overnight. Right now in Guadalcanal there is probably a movement afoot to change the name to the Democratic and Socialist Popular Republic of Vella LaVella.

Nor can we forget the nasty trick that the Chinese played on the capitalist roaders. It took me 30 years to learn some Chinese history and geography. Then the Chinese went and adopted a new phonetic Roman alphabet. True, it reads closer to the original Chinese, but who can recognize anything.

Enough is enough

Peking became Beijing; Canton turned to Guangzhou; Sian became Xi'an; Dairen turned to Luda and Tsingtao became Qingdao. Even the Great Helmsman Himself, Chairman Mao Tse-tung became Mao Zhe Dung. Gen. Chu Teh became Xuh Deh. Who can keep track of this? Next, I suppose, my favorite Chinese restaurant will begin serving Muxh'shu pork.

Enough is enough. The world's leading nations must unite and tell the Third World nations they are stuck with their names. Too bad if Sao Tome does not like its name. Any nation wanting to change its name should be made to pay the resulting bills. Just wait until Sao Tome is presented with a whopping invoice for reprinting all of Outer Mongolia's maps.

Rumor now has it that ex-Upper Volta's ally, Albania, is about to open a second front by claiming all of northern Greece. Not only will this greatly vex the Greeks but it will force the imperialists to reprint all their maps of Greece with red shading and little notes saying, "claimed by Albania." It may be too late to stop this new outrage.

On top of all this, some big chief in Rwanda recently complained that the West didn't pay enough attention to his little corner of Africa. Well, it serves him right. His country used to be called — I think — Ruanda-Urundi. Then they changed the name to Burundi, or was it Ruanda-Burundi, not to be confused with neighboring Burundi which used to be called Urundi, which is inhabited by Tutsi who hate the Hutus, who are related to the Bagandans of Burundi who come from Uganda but now live in Rwanda which was Ruanda before they changed the name to ...

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