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May 1968 in Senegal,

Senghor and the trade unionist movement

Abstract

In May 1968, Senegal was the site of a large event which seriously threatened the regime of the new independent state. As the youth of the world who shook Prague, Kent State University, Columbia, Chicago, Paris and other cities, the Dakar's youth dynamic protest mobilized against the regime locally so-called "neocolonial" and the continuation of the French presence. Debated and controversial because of his alleged links to the global social movement, May-68 in Senegal expressed, first, specific claims and, second, reflected an ideological dilemma. It also reflected the feelings of the youth protest which echoed the current global social movement of the 1960s.

The University of Dakar, considered a "French university in Africa", was the home from which spouts out the crisis and its related ideas. The "18th French university" was a melting place which gathered students originated from France, Senegal and almost all African French speaking countries. It was the place where temporarily defeated political parties of the opposition -banned or illegal- could unroll their propaganda and undertake activities through their youth movements. Thus, the Democratic Union of the Students of Senegal -UDES- which led the strike was directed by Mbaye Diack member of the MEPAI, the youth movement of the African Party for the Independence -PAI- the radical opponent party prohibited.

Consequently, President Senghor who managed to "pacify" the political space, dominated by his state-party, the Senegalese Progressive Union -UPS-, perceived the events of May 1968 in Senegal as a direct threat to his personal regime. The threat seemed much larger, referred to the newly independent African countries confronted with internal disorders, like the overthrow of President Nkrumah in Ghana or the Nigerian civil war in Biafra. Therefore, President Senghor considered the University of Dakar as a new space of distrust and/or subversion, which should be taken under control for the survival of his power.

The text discusses in outlines various questions : (i) how the connection between students, workers and other social and political actors could durably install Senegal in a crisis in a global context of revolution during the "1968 Spring"; (ii) the specificity of Senegal in the global May-68 movement focusing on the confrontation between the young demonstrators - often leftists- and the so-called neocolonial regime "subordinated" to France (iii); how President Leopold Sedar Senghor crystallized around his person all the claims and faced the wave of protests that put into question his hegemony and shook his regime; (iv) and finally the lessons from the crisis of May-68 for the future of the country of Senegal. It is therefore a question of reading again May-68 in Senegal, in the light of new sources and new issues and, thus, opening new perspectives. /