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CONGO DISASTER

COLIN LEGUM

Congo Disaster

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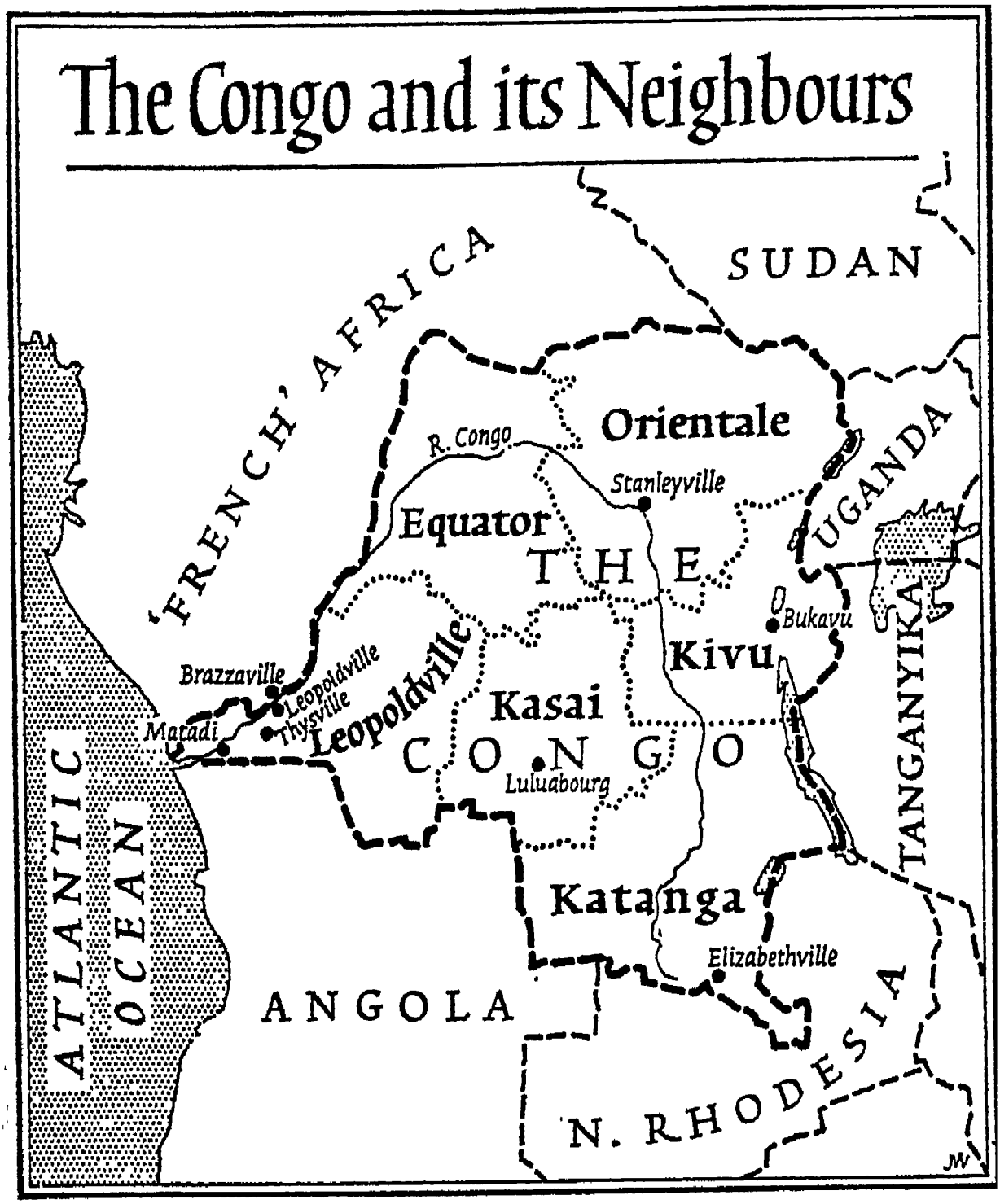

The Congo and its Neighbours
SUDAN
'FRENCH' AFRICA
Orientale
R. Congo
Stanleyville
Equator
THE
UGANDA
Bukavu
Kivu
Brazzaville
Leopoldville
Thysville
Leopoldville
Matadi
Kasai
CONGO
Luluabourg
TANGANYIKA
Katanga
Elizabethville
ATLANTIC OCEAN
ANGOLA
N. RHODESIA
JW

INTRODUCTION

I STARTED this book in the late summer of 1960 to provide a background to the Congo crisis. But events have outstripped me. Already since completing the bulk of the book at the end of September the balance of forces within the Congo, Africa, and the United Nations has changed substantially. We are now faced with a new situation. While these changes do not invalidate my analysis of earlier developments, there is clearly a need to bring the last few chapters up to date. For technical reasons this must be done in the Introduction. What follows is in a sense a Stop Press, and should perhaps be read at the end of the book rather than at the beginning.

RIVALS FOR POWER

The sudden collapse of the Belgians' authoritarian power produced a vacuum which has alternately sucked and expelled various internal and external forces. In the first phase (July to September) the central power was tenuously held by a coalition between the unitarian forces of Patrice Lumumba and the federalist forces of Joseph Kasavubu, while the regional power of Katanga – the economic heart of the Congo – was held by Moïse Tshombe and the Belgians. Soviet intervention on the side of the Lumumbaists hastened the inevitable split in the coalition; this precipitated the expulsion of the Russians, and brought the first phase to an end with the vacuum still unfilled.

The second phase (last week of September to middle of November) saw a stalemate between the political contenders which opened the way for Col. Mobutu, Chief of the Congo National Army (formerly the Force Publique), to suspend parliament until the end of the year, and to rule through a '*collège d'universitaires*', later renamed the Council of Commissioners-General. Col. Mobutu acted at first as an agent of Kasavubu, but soon renounced him and at once followed Lumumba's example in alternately declaring war on, and cooperating with, the UN in the Congo. Gradually Mobutu won the support of the Belgians and of the Western Powers. This second phase ended with the

deposed Prime Minister Lumumba under house arrest, with most of his supporters under UN protection, and with an uneasy struggle for power going on within the Army.

Col. Mobutu and his Commissioners-General do not figure in my assessment of leaders up to the end of September. Mobutu has been described as the 'Hamlet of the Congo'. He is intelligent and sophisticated, but constantly torn by personal conflicts. He was never a soldier, having been a clerk in the Paymaster's Section of the Force Publique. He is sensitive to criticism, and sees the UN as the paternalist successor to the Belgians. He is nevertheless willing to work with the Belgians – but strictly on his own terms. He has appointed perhaps a dozen Belgian officers and technicians as his advisors. So far, he has not succeeded in getting undivided control over the Army, nor has he yet managed to turn it into a reliable and disciplined force.

The President of his Commissioners-General is Justin Bomboka, who was Foreign Minister in Lumumba's Government (see Chapter 10). His two chief deputies are Albert Ndele, who has had post-graduate training in Public Administration, and who was Chef de Cabinet to Lumumba's Minister of Finance; and Kandolo, who was Lumumba's own Chef de Cabinet.

The third phase opened at the end of November, with President Kasavubu taking the initiative for the federalists, with the help of the Western Powers and of a substantial group of the Afro-Asian bloc. His ascendancy was marked by his right to be seated in the UN General Assembly. Relations with Col. Mobutu and the Commissioners-General again became friendly. Together they opened the offensive against the Lumumbaists by forcibly ejecting Ghana's Chargé d'Affaires, Mr Nathaniel Welbeck, in an action that led to armed conflict between the Congo National Army and the UN Forces, and by expelling other unfriendly diplomats. Encouraged by these new developments the Belgians began rapidly to return to the Congo.

The two camps – the unitarians and the federalists – are facing each other suspiciously in the next round of the struggle for power. There are two possible outcomes of this third phase: reconciliation on the basis of a federal constitution, or the introduction of the cold war through the invocation by both camps of the aid of their external allies.

THE ROLE OF THE BELGIANS

I have written sharply about the role of the Belgians in the Congo. This is not for lack of sympathy or understanding. There are Belgians who have written much more harshly than I have about their own Government's failures and about the grasping nature of Belgian financial interests which, even now, continue to behave as if their patron saint were King Leopold II.

Belgian liberals, especially at the University of Louvanium in the Congo, believe that unless Belgium agrees to work within the framework of the United Nations last July's disaster might recur with even more appalling consequences. For even though Tshombe, Kasavubu, and Col. Mobutu may be willing to work with, and to use, the Belgians, they will never again be willing to be controlled or unduly influenced by them. Unless the Belgians are capable of learning this lesson from their recent bitter experiences, they could still end up as did the Dutch in Indonesia – expropriated and unwanted. No real friend of Belgium will encourage her to continue in the policies defended by the present Government.

THE ROLE OF THE WEST

Alas for my faith in the Western leaders' genuine understanding of their best interests in Africa. While they protest their belief in Africa's development as a genuinely non-committed continent, their behaviour in the Congo is inconsistent with this aim. When, at the end of September, I was writing the chapter 'Power Politics in the Congo', I could say: 'There is no other recent example when the West played so passive a role in international affairs as it did in the Congo.'

This has since changed. The Americans now openly side with the Kasavubu camp. It may be that the federalists are right about the best kind of constitution for the Congo (personally I believe they are), but this is no justification for actively taking sides in the Congo's internal politics. Western partisanship can only weaken Kasavubu's position in the present struggle; the danger of this attitude is that it will push the Lumumbaists into the anti-Western camp and divide the West from important countries in

Africa and Asia. This is not likely to help Kasavubu, the Congolese, or the West.

The switch in Western policy came in October, when it was thought that Col. Mobutu and his Commissioners-General might be able to underpin Kasavubu, and thus provide a stable alternative to Lumumba who, it was felt, could not be relied upon to follow democratic paths either at home or abroad. Although the Western view of Lumumba is strongly supported by many African and Asian States, this does not make the error of intervention any less dangerous.

THE ROLE OF THE AFRICAN STATES

The balance within the group of African independent states changed entirely as a result of the admission of Nigeria and the French Community states to the UN in October. Until then the so-called 'militant' African states (Ghana, Guinea, and the UAR) held the initiative. They could count on the general support of the 'moderates' like Liberia, Ethiopia, and the Sudan; only Tunisia was refusing to toe the 'party line' over the Congo. But the doubling of the African membership of the UN gave the 'moderates' a commanding position; for the first time the Accra-Conakry-Cairo axis was no longer able to exercise an undisputed initiative. These divisions were projected into the Congo, with the 'militants' still determinedly supporting both Lumumba as Prime Minister and Kasavubu as President; while the 'moderates' upheld Kasavubu's authority alone.

The original nucleus of the African Group (minus Tunisia) never recognized the legality of Col. Mobutu's administration or Commissioners-General, not even after Kasavubu had confirmed them in office. Their Ambassadors, therefore, continued to treat with Lumumba. They went further, considering it their duty to give him active support while he was under house arrest. The point at which diplomacy ends and politics begins is hard to define. However, so long as Col. Mobutu and President Kasavubu were too weak to exercise any effective initiative, this game could be played merrily. It ended with the tragic showdown of force that compelled Ghana's representative to leave the country. Thus the divisions within the Congo have caused the explosion of the

'tensions' among the independent African States to which I refer briefly in Chapter 14. The consequences of this schism in the continental politics of Pan-Africanism remain to be seen. This part of the story is still only at its beginning.

THE ROLE OF THE UNITED NATIONS

The situation in the Congo has often been described in the past six months as chaotic or even anarchic. This is a loose and misleading description. There are some areas where lawlessness abounds, but these are the exceptions. What is remarkable about the Congo – not only about the towns, but even about the remote rural areas – is the extent to which comparatively normal life is still possible. Telephones work; cables are despatched; luxury hotels are still luxurious; the grass is still cut in the avenues of Leopoldville; trains and river boats run; internal air services operate; the ports still work. After an alarming decline, exports are beginning to show a healthy rise; the large foreign-owned plantations have hardly been affected; and most factories still work.

Of course conditions are not normal – security is constantly threatened, arbitrary arrests take place, and, worst of all, the courts no longer function. But abnormality is not necessarily synonymous with either chaos or anarchy. Apart from southern Kasai and northern Katanga, the situation has not declined into the conditions one has known in recent years in Kenya, the southern Sudan, Ashanti, the Cameroons, or Cyprus.

It is necessary to get this position into focus to appreciate the importance of the role played by the UN organization in the Congo. If there is neither chaos nor anarchy today, it is solely due to the UN operations. If the Belgians are now able to return in large numbers it is because of the security provided by the UN forces. If the Congo has, so far, avoided being swept into the arena of an armed conflict between rival foreign Powers it is owing to the UN presence. These successes overshadow all its weaknesses and failures.

In my last chapter I have described what I consider to be the mistakes made by the UN. I am not sure that any of these mistakes could have been avoided at the time. Nevertheless, they must be

examined if one is to consider the basis of future UN policy in the Congo, and if similar interventions by the UN in other parts of the world are to benefit from the experience gained in the Congo.

Since I wrote the last chapter of this book, Mr Hammarskjöld has himself voiced two of the criticisms which I make. In a letter he addressed to Mr Tshombe on 8 October, he listed three factors that endanger the future of the Congo – the confused and disquieting situation which still prevails at Leopoldville; the continued presence of a considerable number of Belgian nationals; and the unresolved constitutional conflict, threatening the unity of the Congo 'which is symbolized by the name Katanga'.

'Among these factors,' he wrote, 'I regard the last two as of crucial importance, even from the standpoint of the first: that is to say, if we could fully circumscribe the Belgian factor and eliminate it, and if we could lay the groundwork for a reconciliation between Katanga and the rest of the Territory of the Republic of the Congo, the situation at Leopoldville might very well be rectified. The way towards a pacification of the country would thus be opened.'

Recognition of these two dangers leaves only one of my major criticisms unanswered: the failure to take timely action to disarm the Force Publique. In the changed circumstances this has become much harder, perhaps even impossible, unless the Army itself splits – in which case to disarm it would become imperative. But from my discussions with leading members of the UN in the Congo it is clear that they now fully realize how differently things might have worked out had the Force Publique been disarmed when to do so would still have been comparatively easy.

But criticisms about the UN operations – and there is no lack of critics – become insignificant when set, as they should be, against the prophylactic role of the UN. It remains the one strong, firm, encouraging factor in the Congo situation. If it collapses much more than the peace of the Congo would be lost.

LEOPOLDVILLE
1 December 1960

Chapter 1

PROPHET OF DISASTER

'Feel considerably in doubt about the future.'

An entry made in Joseph Conrad's Notebooks
in Matidi, 13 June 1890

THE disaster that twice overtook the Belgians in the Congo – at the turn of the present century, and again in 1960 – cannot be explained only in terms of more recent events. The roots of the Congo's tragedy go deep; they belong, perhaps, more to the past than to the present. 'Time future contained in time past' is the poet's contribution towards understanding social forces. Seventy years ago Joseph Conrad foreshadowed disaster in the Congo. His imagination and insight helped him to understand the tensions of the Congolese as well as of the Belgians, and made it possible for him to penetrate into the reality of King Leopold's Congo.

Conrad had gone to Africa as a young man in 1890, and had learned navigation on the little-known Congo river. He was appalled by what he saw. His impressions, scribbled in pencil in two black penny notebooks, were later woven into his two tales of the Congo – 'An Outpost of Progress' and 'Heart of Darkness'. Of the latter – the more important of the two stories – he wrote: 'It is experience pushed a little (and only a little) beyond the actual facts of the case.'

The Congo of Conrad's day no longer exists; only the memory of it. Unfortunately, memory is not a passive force. If the older generation of British workers still acts under the impulse of unemployment in the 1930s, how much less surprising is it to find suspicions of the past still acting as a powerful factor in the Congo, with its large, isolated peasant communities and their untrained political leaders. The past is often the only measurement they have to guide them in new and unfamiliar situations.

Going up the river Conrad knew and described so well is still like travelling back to the earliest beginnings of the world, when

vegetation rioted on the earth and big trees were kings. There is still the vast, ominous stillness that does not in the least resemble a peace. For Conrad 'it was the stillness of an implacable force brooding over an inscrutable intention. It looked at you with a vengeful aspect.' This threat of vengeance was overwhelming. In 'An Outpost of Progress' the two 'agents of civilization', Carlier and Kayerts, finally succumbed to their fear of 'things vague, uncontrollable, and repulsive.' Their outpost disintegrated; they left a village 'mourning for those they had lost by the witchcraft of white men, who had brought wicked people into the country. The wicked people had gone, but fear remained. *Fear always remains.*'

In 'Heart of Darkness' Conrad describes the death of one of the agents of King Leopold's commercial enterprise. Kurtz was a legend among the Company's agents because of his devotion to its interests and his success in collecting ivory. His methods were barbaric; but those who knew the truth dared not speak for fear of offending the Company. Did Conrad have King Leopold in mind when he described the schizophrenic Kurtz? Although students of Conrad seem never to have considered this possibility the evidence for it is strong. The report Kurtz wrote for the imaginary 'International Society for the Suppression of Savage Customs'* begins with the argument that 'we whites, from the point of development we arrived at, must necessarily appear to them [the savages] in the nature of supernatural beings – we approach them with the might of a deity. . . . By the simple exercise of our will we can exercise a power for good practically unbounded.' Commenting on this report Conrad says: 'It gave me the notion of an exotic Immensity ruled by an august Benevolence.'

It is easy to see Leopold, clad in his augustan Benevolence, dedicating himself to the interests of the exotic Immensity of Congolese as he stood before a distinguished international audience in 1876: 'The slave trade, which still exists over a large part of the African continent, is a plague spot that every friend

* Compare this title with the 'International Association for the Exploration and Civilization of Central Africa' launched by King Leopold fourteen years before Conrad went to the Congo. Leopold was entrusted by Europe with the task of suppressing slavery and rooting out barbarism.

of civilization would desire to see disappear. The horror of that traffic, the thousands of victims massacred each year . . . the still greater number of perfectly innocent beings who, brutally reduced to captivity, are condemned *en masse* to forced labour . . . makes our epoch blush. . . .'

This was the King who soon afterwards was himself to introduce forced labour on a scale unknown in modern times until the advent of Hitler. Under his rule thousands of victims were to be massacred every year. Until international opinion became so scandalized that it compelled the Belgian nation to act against their King, he made an 'epoch blush' for his crimes. All this still belonged to the future, but Conrad had already got the smell of what was happening. He describes Kurtz's trading post, ringed by poles on each of which was a shrunken head. One of Kurtz's admirers explained: 'These heads were the heads of rebels.' To which Conrad's narrator replies: 'Rebels! What would be the next definition I was to hear? There had been enemies, criminals, workers – and these were rebels. Those rebellious heads looked very subdued to me on their sticks.'

Kurtz's credo, like his royal employer's, was a simple one. 'You show them [the natives] you have in you something that is really profitable, and then there will be no limits to the recognition of your ability. Of course you must take care of the motives – right motives – always.' Kurtz dies screaming: 'The Horror! The Horror!' Leopold, so far as one knows, died more peacefully.

Joseph Conrad was haunted by his closeness to the Congolese. 'You know, that was the worst of it – this suspicion of their not being inhuman. It would come slowly to one. They howled, and leaped, and spun, and made horrible faces; but what thrilled you was just the thought of their humanity – like yours – the thought of your remote kinship with this wild and passionate uproar.'

Chapter 2

RIVALS FOR THE CONGO

> '*The exploration of Africa had given rise to the desire to absorb it. The old view that Africa was a continent of no value had been shaken, and was on the eve of passing away.*'
>
> DEMETRIUS C. BOULGER. *The Congo State*

THE Congo's threat to world peace in 1960 was not the first time it has produced an international crisis. The discovery of the importance of the Congo river, through H. M. Stanley's explorations in 1874, precipitated a crisis that threatened to upset the 'balance of power' in Europe. It led directly to Europe's decision ten years later to draw up rules governing the 'carve-up' of Africa; only in this way was it possible to prevent the nineteenth-century scramble for colonies leading to war.

Stanley had returned from his journey in the Congo with high ambitions for its development. 'This river is, and will be, the grand highway of commerce in West Central Africa,' he wrote in a dispatch to the *Daily Telegraph* in 1876. 'I feel convinced that the question of this mighty waterway will become a political one in time.' It did, though not in the way Stanley had imagined it would. But the moment of his return was unpropitious. Britain was distracted by other problems, and Gladstone's Liberal Administration was in no mood for further involvements in Africa just then. This attitude quickly changed when other nations became interested in Stanley's offer. Although Britain did not want the Congo for herself – the potential wealth of Katanga had not yet been discovered – she wanted to ensure that its control would pass into the right hands; that freedom of commerce would be guaranteed; and that slavery would be vigorously combated. Her favourite for the Congo was Portugal. But France and Germany had other ideas, and the King of the Belgians had ambitions of his own.

Poor Stanley – all his life he had longed for nothing more than

to win recognition in his mother country – found his gift of the Congo spurned when he laid it at the feet of Britain. He was widely denounced for his quixoticism. 'In 1878', he wrote, 'that word was flung in my teeth several times especially by Manchester men ... a Manchester editor, or a Manchester merchant, almost invariably taunted me with being a "dreamer", a "quixotic journalist", or a mere "penny-a-liner".'

But if Britain had no use for the 'penny-a-liner' the King of the Belgians did. He had already tried to ensnare the tired explorer at Marseille on his way back to London after his gruelling 999-day trek across Africa. After his rebuff in London and Manchester (where he had hoped to interest the merchants in the commercial possibilities of the great Congo basin) Stanley went to Brussels. There he met with something more than the polite formality with which Queen Victoria had received him.

THE KING TAKES A HAND

Leopold II was a remarkable monarch. He loved pleasure and money with an equally ferocious appetite. He was handsome, with a fine, bold beard; his cynical, worldly charm bore with dignity his other title – the King of Maxim's. But there was much more to Leopold than this life of pleasure-seeking. He had vast ambitions, for himself as well as for his country. Tiny Belgium was too confining for his great energies, and he found the cautious ambitions of his people oppressively restrictive. He soared above and beyond them, like an eagle trying to escape from its gilded cage. In 1860, freshly back from a voyage to the East, he had tried to widen the Belgians' horizons. 'I claim for Belgium her share of the sea.' Stanley's discoveries showed him the way to make good this claim.

In 1876 he summoned a conference in Brussels to which he invited representatives from Europe and America to launch what came to be known as the International African Association. There he spoke as a humanitarian, and as one interested in geographic exploration for the sake of science. 'To open to civilization the only part of the globe where it has not yet penetrated, to pierce the darkness shrouding entire populations, that is, if I may venture to say so, a crusade worthy of this century of

progress. . . .' But from beneath his affable altruism there peeped just the hint of a financier presiding over a board meeting. 'Among those who have most closely studied Africa, a good many have been led to think that there would be advantage to the common object they pursued if they could be brought together for the purpose of conference with the object of regulating the march, combining the efforts, deriving some profit from all circumstances, and from all resources, and finally, in order to avoid doing the same work twice over.'

But lest anybody should think the King had any personal ambitions for Belgium he carefully assured the conference: 'No, gentlemen: if Belgium is small, she is happy and satisfied with her lot.'

The game thus set, Leopold began to play his cards with winning skill. He attracted to his royal patronage a large body of distinguished and disinterested explorers, geographers, and diplomats. One of these was the American Ambassador in Brussels at the time, Mr Sanford, who shortly came to play an extraordinary role in getting United States backing for Leopold's venture.

The International African Society spawned a separate venture, the Comité d'Études du Haut Congo, to realize the ambitions of Stanley to build a railway from the point where the cataracts in the Lower Congo make the river unnavigable to a point below the present Leopoldville. The International African Association adopted its own flag, two gold stars on a blue background, and sent Stanley to negotiate treaties with African rulers in the Congo to open the way for peaceful commerce and occupation, and to set in hand arrangements for building the railway line to which Leopold had pledged a part of his own private fortune. With Stanley thus engaged, Leopold developed a Public Relations campaign which would have done credit to modern practitioners of this art. He set to work his distinguished volunteers, whose advocacy was so successful that the Great Powers began to grow restless.

Portugal had always fancied her own pretensions to the Congo, and in 1881 Britain signed a treaty recognizing Portuguese rights to a limited part of the territory. This treaty produced an immediate reaction in both Britain and Germany. The Chambers of

Commerce of Manchester and Glasgow attacked it on the grounds of its restrictions on legitimate trade, and found a champion in the House of Commons in the redoubtable John Bright. The Liverpool African Associates, supported by the Baptist missionary associations, attacked the treaty because they feared the Portuguese would not stamp out slavery, while the cause of Protestantism would be hindered. In Germany, the Chambers of Commerce moved with their counterparts in Britain, and Holland soon followed suit. Meanwhile, France had dispatched de Brazza to the north bank of the Congo to discover suitable points on which to plant the tricolour. By 1882 the European Powers were rapidly moving towards conflict.

At this critical moment two unrelated events developed in Leopold's favour. The President of the United States decided to recognize the validity of the flag of the International African Association, even though it was flown by a purely private commercial association and not by a sovereign state. The spadework for this surprising decision had been skilfully done by Sanford who had resigned as the U.S. Ambassador to Brussels to become associated with Leopold's enterprise. America's decision, 'taken in the interests of commercial freedom', came as a blow to Britain. She found it convenient to disentangle herself from her treaty with Portugal which, in any event, had been rejected by the Cortes.

The second development was the initiative taken by Prince von Bismarck, Chancellor of Germany. His interest was to prevent any of Germany's large European competitors gaining a foothold in the Congo. France, too, was engaged. Neither wished to see Britain, or her ally Portugal, entrenched in the Congo.

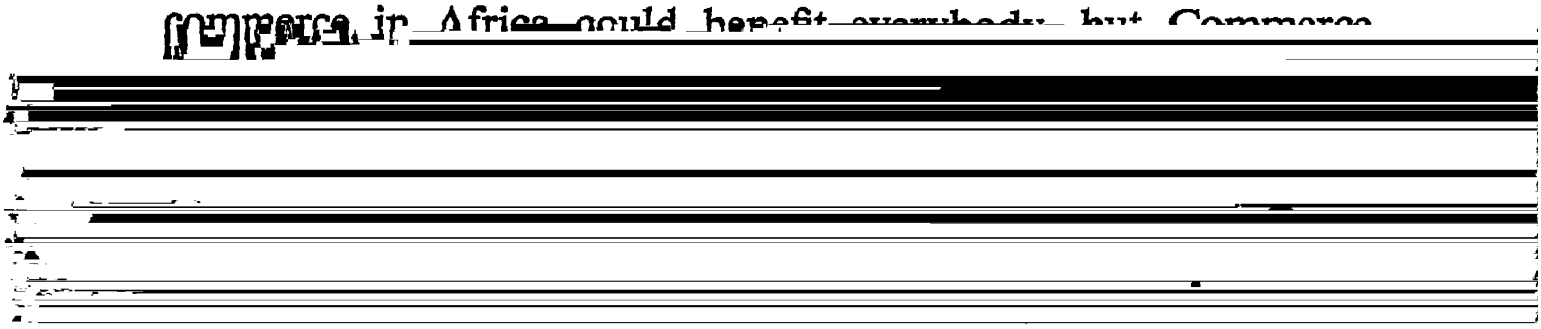
Bismarck had no difficulty in persuading France to the idea of a conference in Berlin to settle the future of the Congo on the lines of the decisions of the Vienna Congress on the freedom of navigation on international waterways. This would also enable them to raise the question of the Niger over which Britain had by then largely gained control. Together, Germany and France pressed their invitation on Britain to come to Berlin; Lord Granville equivocated – yes to the conference, no to the inclusion of the Niger. Faced with Granville's careful reluctance, Bismarck

turned to the United States, having first extended Germany's recognition to the flag of the International African Association. America at once accepted the idea of the Berlin Conference, leaving Britain with no alternative but to accept too.

EUROPE'S MAGNA CARTA IN AFRICA

The Berlin Conference, which met on 15 November 1884 and continued until 26 February 1885, was one of the landmarks in the relations between Europe and Africa. What had started as an attempt to settle the limited question of the Congo ended up in a general agreement between the European Powers to recognize each other's rights in Africa. This became the Magna Carta of the colonial powers in Africa.

Fourteen nations* came to the conference, including all the principal rivals in the 'scramble for Africa'. The tone was set by Bismarck in his opening address. Experience in the Far East, he said, had shown that the best results could be obtained by 'restraining commerce within legitimate competition'. Regulated commerce in Africa could benefit everybody but Commerce



must be linked to Civilization. 'All the Governments invited here', declared Bismarck, 'share the desire to associate the natives of Africa with civilization, by opening up the interior of that continent to commerce, by furnishing the natives with the means of instruction, by encouraging missions and enterprises so that useful knowledge may be disseminated, and by paving the way to the suppression of slavery, and especially of the slave trade among the blacks. . . .' It was left to the British representative to remind the conference that 'the natives are not represented at this conference, and that, nevertheless, the decision of this body will be of the gravest importance to them.' But Britain was treated with suspicion, and found herself more or less isolated in the company of the Continental Powers. Portugal alone was loyal, within the limits of her own interests. America was committed to a line different from Britain's.

It is remarkable that any agreement should have been possible

in this welter of rivalries. By December 1884 it looked as if the conference would end in failure. Britain was determinedly resisting efforts to include her territories on the east coast of Africa and the Niger river in the terms of the agreement; France was pushing her claims for territorial rights on the north bank of the Congo; Portugal was determined to hang on to what she had carved out for herself around the mouth of the Congo; Germany was skilfully manoeuvring the lesser of her rivals against the greater. The Belgian representatives were pushing for recognition of the International African Association as the sovereign owner of clearly defined borders within the Congo, and to render it immune from attack by other powers through recognition of its status as a neutral.

Stanley, called in as a technical adviser to the U.S. delegation (although he was already an employee of the Belgian King), found himself out of his depth in this European wilderness. Everything appeared so simple to him; why all the fuss? 'If the conference breaks up before the question between us [the International African Association] and France is settled we are ruined,' he wrote to tell Mr James F. Hutton in Massachusetts. 'The declaration that we are an independent state only makes the bait more tempting for France on one side, and Portugal on the other. We should be like a moth, only created for one day's sunshine and then oblivion. . . . We do not want war because whoever will win the natives will suffer through the struggle. Why should the natives suffer? What have they done?'

THE ROLE OF AMERICA

One of the many curious aspects of the Berlin conference was the role played in it by the United States. What was she doing there at all? And why should her official representative be associated with two of King Leopold's agents? Mr H. S. Sanford (whom we

Ambassador in Berlin, John A. Kasson, the direction of policy was firmly in Sanford's hands. The official records of the U.S. Congress leave no doubt at all on this point. It is an extraordinary fact that at an international conference of such a nature America's policy should have been directed largely, if not wholly, by an American who was the agent of a foreign King.

Not unnaturally, the Senate and Congress showed increasing interest in the American role at the Berlin Conference. But although the President was vigorously assailed, his policy of intervention in Africa was allowed to continue until the final stage. Having played a prominent part in the negotiations, the United States declined to sign the final Agreement. It did, however, ratify the Brussels Act of 1890 which was the sequel to the Berlin Act.

Perry Belmont was one of the Congressmen who vigorously pursued the President. 'Did not the question of the Congo turn out at Berlin to be a "European broil"? Was it not from the beginning obviously such?' Arguing that participation in the conference was a departure from the Monroe Doctrine of non-intervention, he charged: 'What was desired or sought, as we now clearly see, by assembling the Conference at Berlin, was the persuasion or moral coercion either to recognize or define the jurisdiction in Africa of the International African Association, or of France, or of Portugal, or of some other power, or to reconcile the rivalries and conflicting claims of each and all, in order that the rights of the aboriginal and uncivilized tribes may be subordinated or respected; slavery and slave labour be destroyed and prevented; facilities afforded in Africa for Christian missionaries of all nations and tongues; fair and equal access to the Congo region and just treatment therein for all traders provided; a limit to all charges and taxes on foreign trade, and all offensive monopolies excluded. Certainly all those are beneficent and desirable objects. But at least for us in the United States they were and are, when to be worked out in Berlin for Africa, *European* objects.'

America's desire to uphold the principle of freedom of commerce would have been a natural answer to the President's critics; but her spokesmen at the Berlin Conference, supported by the State Department, chose to defend their position on much

wider grounds. Mr Kasson's opening statement at the Berlin Conference throws considerable light on the success of the methods developed by Leopold and by his team of distinguished associates.

The American case was hung on Stanley, an American by accident and an Englishman by preference, who, at the end of his life, sat without distinction as a Tory M.P. on the back benches of Westminster. Mr Kasson skilfully deployed Stanley's American citizenship to justify American intervention. 'It is to be observed that from the time he left the eastern coast of Africa opposite Zanzibar, during his travels to and beyond the upper waters of the Nile as far as the watershed of the Congo, and along the entire course of that great river while slowly descending towards the sea, and until he saw an ocean steamer lying in the Lower Congo, he found nowhere the presence of civilized authority, no jurisdiction claimed by any representative of white men save his own over his retainers, no dominant flag or fortress of a civilized power, and no sovereignty exercised or claimed except that of the indigenous tribes. His discoveries aroused the attention of all nations. It was evident that very soon that country would be exposed to the dangerous rivalries of conflicting nationalities. There was even danger of its being so appropriated as to exclude it from free intercourse with a large part of the civilized world. It was the earnest desire of the Government of the United States that these discoveries should be utilized for the civilization of the native races, and for the abolition of the slave trade and that early action should be taken to avoid international conflicts likely to arise from national rivalry in the acquisition of special privileges in the vast region so suddenly exposed to commercial enterprises. If that country could be neutralized against aggression, with equal privileges for all, such an arrangement ought, in the opinion of my Government, to secure general satisfaction.'

In a revealing dispatch to the U.S. Secretary of State on 14 January 1885, Sanford describes how the Berlin Conference was facilitated by America's recognition of the flag of the International African Association of the Congo as that of a friendly government. This recognition, he added, assured the existence of the Association 'menaced by the pretensions and greed of European powers, and secured to the United States (and the world as

well) freedom of commerce and equal rights, and also the abolition of the slave trade in a region of about a million square miles, the richest portion of Africa.'

He went on to explain: 'With regard to the "objects or purposes" for which our Government is represented at the Conference, I will only speak now of those which "led up" to the invitation to participate in it. In the first place, an American citizen, Mr Stanley, had discovered this region, and theoretically certain rights may be assumed to have inured thereby to the United States; another citizen (myself) had been engaged from the very inception of the work, as a member of the executive committee of the International Association, in building up in this barbarous region this future state and securing certain rights to his country therein; and the Government of the United States had formally recognized its sovereignty, and thereby acquired rights and privileges for its citizens over a great portion of Central Africa.'

Speaking of his own role and of his motives he said: 'It does not become me to speak of my part in the transaction, save to say that active participation, from its inception, with the African International Association, had impressed me, as it progressed, with the importance to our commerce and manufactures, to our races of African descent,* and to civilization, if this vast region which the munificence of King Leopold was opening to civilizing influences could be made free to our merchants and missionaries, and especially to the enterprise of our coloured citizens. The dangers, too, to our citizens there engaged in this work, Mr Stanley and his assistants, who were liable to be treated, in default of a recognized flag, as pirates, was another reason that *influenced me in making representations both to the association and to the President (of the U.S.A.) which resulted in this recognition*'.

THE BERLIN TREATY

In the end the conference achieved a successful compromise. It guaranteed freedom of trade in the Congo Basin; guaranteed

* Throughout his lobbying Sanford had made a special point of stressing the interests of American Negroes in the Congo, although he never tried to define what their interests might be.

freedom of navigation on the Congo river, as well as on the Niger; agreed on militant action against the slave trade; and adopted a declaration introducing into international relations uniform rules about future occupation on the coasts of Africa. This Magna Carta of the colonial powers was the unexpected offshoot of Stanley's exploits in the Congo.

The Declaration lays down with deceptive simplicity that 'any power which henceforth *takes possession* of a tract of land on the coasts of the African continent, outside of its present possessions, *shall acquire it*, as well as the power which assumes a protectorate there, shall accompany the respective act with a notification thereof, addressed to the other signatory powers of the present Act, in order to enable them, if need be, to make good any claims of their own'.

In plain terms this means that any European power which, by treaty or by conquest, picked out a choice bit of Africa's coast would be recognized as its lawful ruler, provided no other power had already laid claims to it.

The conference's decisions provided a framework within which King Leopold could develop a Free State in the Congo. The King had done a magnificent job of selling his ideas; he was greatly helped by the smallness of Belgium which made her a safe buffer between the rivals for the Congo. Bismarck, in particular, took up Leopold's cause. In his concluding address he expressed the prevailing sentiment about 'the noble efforts of His Majesty the King of the Belgians, the founder of a work which is today recognized by all the Powers, and which by its consolidation may render precious service to the cause of humanity'.

Alas for these noble sentiments, the choice by Europe and America of Leopold, as their agent of civilization in Africa, soon turned into shameful disaster.

Chapter 3

LEOPOLD'S KINGDOM

> *'The wealth of a sovereign consists in public property; it alone can constitute in his eyes an enviable treasure, which he should endeavour constantly to increase.'*
>
> KING LEOPOLD II

THE Congo Free State was established in 1885. It succeeded the Congo International Association founded in 1883 as an offshoot of the International African Association. Leopold found himself entrusted personally with a domain covering more than 900,000 square miles, almost the size of Europe.

Although the Belgians rejoiced in their King's triumph they were in no mood to claim the Congo as a possession of Belgium. If the King wanted to shoulder the responsibilities, financial and otherwise, he was welcome to do so. All he could expect from the Belgians was their good wishes, coupled with the anticipation that if things went unexpectedly well they would share in the benefits. 'May the Congo, gentlemen, from this day forth, offer to our superabundant activity, to our industries, more and more confined, outlets by which we shall know how to profit,' exclaimed the Minister of Finance in a speech asking the Belgian Chamber to ratify the decisions of Berlin. 'May the enterprising spirit of the King encourage our countrymen to seek, even at a distance, new sources of greatness and prosperity for our dear country.' And the King, in his characteristic reply, underlined his own responsibilities: 'I have confidence in success, and I wish that Belgium, *without it costing her anything*, should find in these vast territories, freed from all tax of admission, new elements of development and prosperity.' But the King had much more difficulty persuading the Belgians of the wisdom of his next proposal: that he should wear two crowns – one for Belgium and the other for the Congo. After a fierce controversy, the Chamber and the Senate decided: 'His Majesty Leopold II, King of the Belgians, is authorized to be chief of the State founded in Africa

by the International Association of the Congo. The Union between Belgium and the new State of the Congo shall be *exclusively personal.*'

THE RAVAGED LAND

When Leopold embarked on his 'civilizing mission' in the Congo in 1885, the people were in a pitiable condition. Hunger had contributed towards producing a state of cannibalism on a scale unknown in other parts of the continent. No country had suffered more from slavery. One officially quoted Belgian figure put the total loss at 30 millions, more than twice the present population. At the height of slavery 50,000 men, women, and children were taken annually from the Congo to the New World; the numbers going out by the Arab slave routes were much higher. Tipoo Tip, the King of Arab slavers, was firmly entrenched in the eastern Congo, and his slave raids continued in blissful disregard of the European conventions decreeing its abolition.

Vast areas of the country had become entirely depopulated; insecurity, fear, and suspicion were the rulers, except in remote areas unpenetrated by the slavers and by their African collaborators. Here and there one still came across a tranquil part of the country with glimpses of what life was like when the celebrated art of the Congo craftsmen flourished, and when village life was normal. Leo Frobenius, German explorer and humanist, visited Kasai-Sankuru at the turn of the century. 'In some villages, the main streets were lined on both sides with palm trees. Each hut was adorned in a different style, a clever, delightful mingling of wood-carving and matting. The men carried chiselled weapons in bronze and brass. They were clad in multi-coloured stuffs of silk and fibre. Each object, pipe, spoon, or bowl was a work of art, comparable in its perfect beauty to the creations of the romanesque period in Europe. I have never heard of any northern people who could rival these primitive folk in their dignity, exquisite politeness, and grace.'*

The Congo had never been a political entity; it was a gigantic geographical sprawl from the Atlantic ocean over the vast Congo Basin to the foothills of the Mountains of the Moon.

* *Kulturgeschichte Afrikas*, Zürich, 1933.

Hundreds of tribes, subdivided into a thousand or more clans, survived in more or less suspicious isolation. Few of the powerful tribes of earlier times had survived the depredations of slavery. The once great Kingdom of the Bakongo – the only remarkable nation-state known to have existed in that part of the world – had long before crumbled into decadence. (The attempt to recreate the past greatness of the Bakongo is one of the factors that many years later was to contribute to the downfall of Belgian rule.)

RUM AND CRINGLETS

How does a King in Europe, who has never set eyes on Tropical Africa, set about organizing a modern state there? The starting-point was easy enough; the concept was Stanley's. It was to build a railway line to the sea, providing a continuous line of communications for more than a thousand miles into the interior and to establish trading-posts along the river's entire length. The immediate objective was ivory and rubber. To get the land to establish trading-posts it was necessary to enter into treaties with the chiefs. Stanley quickly signed more than a hundred treaties; their terms were simple, and the rights they conferred not very costly. The treaties provided for absolute cession and abandonment to the Congo International Association of areas of land belonging to chiefs. They surrendered any right to levy tolls, or dispose of the natural resources in their territories; they ceded the right to cultivate unoccupied lands, to exploit the forests, to fell trees, and to gather all natural products; finally, they obliged the chiefs to furnish labour, and to join forces against 'all intruders of no matter what colour'.

The treaty of Palla Balla gives a general idea of the payment made for these rights: one coat of red cloth with gold facing, one red cap, one white tunic, one piece of white caft, one piece of red points, one dozen boxes of liqueurs, four demijohns of rum, two boxes of gin, 128 bottles of gin (Hollands), twenty pieces of red handkerchieves, forty cringlets, and forty red cotton caps.

LORD OF THE FORESTS

Leopold quickly discovered that the enterprise was more costly

than even his considerable private fortune could bear. In the early stages of development he had committed £1,200,000 of his own money. He naturally became anxious for larger and quicker returns. One of his first acts in July 1885 was to make himself owner of all the unoccupied lands in the Congo, thus acquiring by a stroke of the pen personal properties the size of Poland. These lands he parcelled out to private concessionaires who were given monopoly rights to the collection of rubber, ivory, palm oil, and other natural products. Later he went further. In a secret decree he laid claims for the State (that is, for himself) to all the natural products on the vacant lands. This meant that the concessionaires were compelled to pay twice: once for their concession, and a second levy for collecting what was on the land. It also deprived the natives of their right to gather natural wealth from the forests, and confined them to their own demarcated lands. These decrees stretched treaties like that of Palla Balla far beyond their original intentions. Naturally, the chiefs and natives cried out against these decisions; but these protests were treated as rebellion, and were forcibly put down.

Still the rewards were not what Leopold had expected or demanded. As the unchallenged sovereign authority he was free to command any changes that might suit his policies and his pocket. One of his great British admirers wrote in 1898,* 'the Congo is governed by a simple and swift-dealing autocracy'. The autocrat decreed that Africans could sell their products only to the King's agents; this was only one short step away from imposing a system of forced labour on the country, which came next. The overriding consideration was more rubber and more ivory; more, at lower prices. Accordingly the price of these products was officially reduced. Again there were protests, and again law and order was imposed.

An order was issued by a high official in the King's employ to all agents of the Company. 'I have the honour to inform you that from 1 January 1899 you must succeed in furnishing four thousand kilos of rubber every month. To effect this I give you *carte blanche*. You have therefore two months in which to work your people. Employ gentleness first, and if they persist in not

* Demetrius C. Boulger. *The Congo State, or the Growth of Civilization in Central Africa.* London, 1898.

accepting the imposition of the state, employ force of arms.' The agents did not have to wait for such explicit orders. Joseph Conrad's Kurtz had operated along these lines long before he had permission to do so. Did Leopold know what was happening in the Congo? His instructions to his agents make it clear that he not only knew, but approved. His attitude (two years before the instructions quoted above was issued) was that civilization could not be bought cheaply. 'Placed in front of primitive savagery . . . they [the Association's agents] have to bring them [the savages] gradually to submission. It is necessary for them to subject the population to new laws, of which the most imperious and the most salutary is assuredly that of labour.'

In a letter addressed to his agents when their methods were being fiercely criticized in 1897, the King reminded them at the same time that the native population was the base of the region's true wealth. But, while that must always be kept in mind, results 'cannot be achieved by words alone, however philanthropic their sound may be.' The King, though opposed to unnecessary force, upheld its use 'in view of the necessary domination by civilization'. He went on: 'Wars that are not indispensable ruin the regions in which they take place. Our agents are not ignorant of this. The day that their effective superiority is established, it will be profoundly repugnant to them to abuse it. . . . Animated by a pure sentiment of patriotism, scarcely sparing their own blood, they [the agents] will be all the more careful of the blood of the natives, who will see in them the all-powerful protectors of their lives and property, the benevolent instructors of whom they have a great need.'

But the flood of international protest was beginning to rise so that even Belgium could no longer stop her ears to the truth of what was being done in her name. The Belgians had had their first shock over Stanley's relations with Tippoo Tip, the Arab slave leader and an old acquaintance with whom he had had previous financial dealings. Leopold had gained considerable support for his enterprise by his dedicated promise to abolish slavery. Yet one of Stanley's first actions was to appoint the leader of the slavers as a governor of the Association. His excuse was that they were not yet ready to face an attack on their young enterprise by the powerful Tippoo Tip. The best

thing was to cooperate with him until the time came to destroy him.

Cardinal Lavigerie, the ardent abolitionist, was among the first to arouse the Belgians to the monstrosity of this arrangement. Where was the campaign promised to destroy the slavers? Criticism swelled into public protests in Brussels; and the conscience of the Belgian people found expression in the Congo Reform Association.

When Leopold finally ordered the Force Publique to attack the Arab slavers, it took three years to break their power. A latter-day Belgian historian* suggests that the King's campaign against Tippoo Tip was not wholly inspired by anti-slavery sentiments, but had a great deal to do with the economic threat of the Arab traders to his monopoly system in the Congo.

BRITAIN TAKES A HAND

The methods authorized and vigorously defended by King Leopold grew to be an international scandal. In Belgium, the Socialist leader, Émile van der Velde, and Catholic journalists, led the attack on their King. German and American missionaries reported misdeeds they had witnessed. But it was in Britain that the protest was greatest. The Congo Reform Association – under the scourging leadership of E. D. Morel, the author of *Red Rubber* which exposed Leopold's methods – led the nation to protest. In 1903 the House of Commons agreed, without a division, to consult with the signatories of the Berlin Treaty 'that measures may be taken to abate the evils in that state [the Congo Free State]'.

A British White Paper, based largely on the reports of Roger Casement and of other British consuls in the Congo, documented the horrors in the Congo. Vice-consul Mitchell, reporting in 1906, wrote: 'I am not aware of any civilized State in which conscription is applied to "works of public utility" . . . Those "paid workmen" are the conscripts! They are hunted in the forests by soldiers, and are brought in bound by the neck like criminals.' Another consul, W. G. Thesiger, wrote two years later: 'There

* R. P. P. Ceulemans: *La Question arabe et le Congo (1883–1892)*. Brussels, 1960.

are continual police raids carried on [in the Ituri district] with the greatest energy, in which native villages are destroyed and such prisoners as can be taken sent in chains to work on the *Railway des Grands Lacs*.'

In a book* describing conditions in fifteen rubber and copal factories, a German doctor, W. Doerpinghaus, wrote of 'a well-organized system of compulsory labour, for the maintenance of which the agents employ, with the tacit toleration of the management, every means which brutality and coarseness have ever invented. . . . The history of modern civilized nations has scarcely ever had anything to equal such shameful deeds as the agents in the Belgian Congo have rendered themselves guilty of. That the Company is aware of the doings of its agents, tolerates them, and encourages them, I can produce flagrant proof . . . I must add that the natives of the region in question are harmless, and only rise to attack when driven to extremities. I frequently travelled for days without escort. There is therefore not the slightest excuse for the murders and atrocities. . . .'

Official reports to the British Foreign Office, supported with photographic evidence, confirmed the practice of Leopold's agents in cutting off the hand or foot of a labourer who did not fulfil his quotas. Nor are official Belgian sources lacking in details of the measures taken to compel the increasingly rebellious population to work for Leopold's enterprises. The assistant of the Attorney-General in Stanleyville, writing to his chief in 1905, said: 'If these works [the railways] are to be executed, arbitrary measures must be resorted to. The men are taken by force and brought to the works, where they are kept, under fear of the lash and prison.' But he was writing not in protest but to secure legal sanction for these methods.

Decrees authorizing the forcible recruiting of labourers were issued under the general Conscript Law. Article 6 provided for labourers to be subject to military discipline and punishment. This included the 'chain gang', and flogging from four to fifty lashes; the flogging, however, not to exceed twenty-five strokes a day. The British Foreign Secretary, Lord Lansdowne, described this system as 'bondage under the most barbarous and inhuman conditions, and maintained for mercenary motives of the most

* *Deutschlands Rechte und Pflichten gegenüber dem belgischen Kongo.*

selfish character'. British official and unofficial opinion joined together in demanding that the Belgian Government should relieve their King of his 'exclusively personal' rule over the Congo.

'But,' Morel wrote in 1909, 'the Congo enterprise remained throughout personal and not national in complexion. Sections of the upper and middle class secured handsome returns; contractors did a flourishing business for a time; much wealth accrued to Antwerp in particular. Never was wealth so demonstrably the produce of systematized evil-doing. There were none of the intermediate stages which confuse issues and defy detection by the difficulty of tracing cause and effect. In this case cause and effect were separated only by the extortion of the raw material from the natives accompanied by wholesale massacre and by every species of bestial outrage which diseased minds could invent, the unloading of that raw material upon the Antwerp quays, and the disposal of it on the market. . . . The Belgian people thus became *de facto* although not *de jure* identified with a system of colonial government recalling, but surpassing, the worst example of medieval history. To a people wholly ignorant of the problems incidental to the government of coloured races, the African was represented as a brute beast with no rights in his soil, in his labour, or in his person. And this pestilent doctrine was popularized by a mechanism of financial, political, and Press corruption which for comprehensiveness has seldom been equalled, and which bit deep into the national life of Belgium. It was a double wrong; upon the people of the Congo, and upon the people of Belgium.'*

The United States and Turkey, alone among all the nations who had been present at the Berlin conference, sided with Britain in demanding action from the Belgian Parliament. But the international campaign of the Congo Reform Association, together with the rising criticisms inside Belgium, and a series of revolts in the Congo, compelled the King to hold an official inquiry into the affairs of the Congo in 1904. Two years later its findings were published confirming the existence of widespread abuses, and making proposals for reforms. It also recorded its 'admiration for the signs of advancing civilization' which it had observed.

* E. D. Morel. *Africa and the Peace of Europe.* London, 1909.

Finally, the Belgians were compelled to act against their King. He now began to bargain with his parliament over the terms under which he would relinquish his private Kingdom. He wished to retain as his own domain an area of 155 square miles in Africa, a life interest in property on the Riviera, owned by the Fondation de la Couronne, a villa at Ostend, land at Laeken, a £2 million payment, which he undertook to use for the benefit of the Congo, and annuities to members of the Royal Family. The Belgian Parliament, reluctant to burden itself with this Congo, was unwilling to accept the conditions imposed by Leopold. In the end these terms were rejected, and, after a four-month debate, the Belgian Parliament took over the Congo from their King on 20 August 1908.

But all was not yet well. Belgium at first showed considerable timidity in making a clean break with the past. She continued to operate the Conscript Law as in the days of Leopold. A year after the new dispensation, the Rev. W. M. Morrison of the American Mission in Kasai wrote to the London *Times* giving an eye-witness account of the system that had been denounced by Earl Grey as 'veiled slavery': 'During the month of June a raid was made near Luebo by a State officer. Men and women, boys and girls were taken by force; villages were pillaged; two were burnt; women were raped; chiefs tied up and taken away. . . . Now, the question is, how long will all this keep up? How long can the native races stand this drain? I am sorry to say that so far I can see no material change in the situation under the so-called Belgian regime.'

Morel was back on the warpath with the Congo Reform Association demanding from Britain and America that the Belgian action of annexation should not be recognized until civilized laws had replaced those of Leopold's system. It was not until 1913 that the Congo Reform Association felt satisfied that its main work was accomplished, and that it could wind up its affairs.

THE KING'S LEGACY

It is impossible to say what profits came to Leopold from his Kingdom in the Congo. By 1908 the stock value of his personal

estate stood at something like 60 million Belgian francs; but this left out of account his interests in the other companies he had established with the concessionaires. He was ruthless, rapacious, and relentless; there is little one can say in his favour. The Congo was a pitiful land when he took it over; it was more pitiful when he had done with it. Although slavery had finally been put down, forced labour, autocracy, and harsher poverty were put in its place. Roger Casement estimated that the Congo's population had declined by three million under Leopold's regime. If the Congolese no longer hid themselves out of sight of the slavers, they now hid out of fear of the Company's agents. Nearly twenty years later Unilever's representative, L. H. Moseley, reported that several districts he had visited were deserted. Although the population near Lusanga was plentiful they 'prefer for safety to keep away from the *highways of the white man* until sure of security'.

Here was his worst crime; Leopold had replaced the natives' fear of the slaver with a fear of the white man. It is one of the embedded roots in the Congo's disaster. It would be convenient to ignore it, and to pretend that, with the passing of Leopold, his terrible errors passed with him. And indeed Leopold's admirers persist to this day.

POSTCRIPT, 1960

Addressing the Congolese delegates at the conclusion of the Round Table Conference, where they had gained their independence, in February 1960, King Baudouin said: 'More than ever, our thoughts return to King Leopold II, who founded the Congo State some eighty years ago. . . . An exceptional and admirable factor is that my great-great-uncle did not achieve this union through conquest, but essentially by peaceful methods, through a series of treaties signed by the King and the tribal chieftains. Thanks to these treaties, the Belgians were able to establish safety, peace, and all the other prerequisites of prosperity in the heart of Central Africa.'

And a few months later the Belgian Prime Minister, M. Gaston Eyskens, opening the Economic Round Table conference in Brussels, declared: 'You must understand that Belgium has

taken to heart the task which was undertaken by our King, Leopold II, and pursued for more than eighty years – against considerable odds – through the work and the courage of a great many of our people. We want to believe that you will not imperil this work, and that you will consider it to be one of the bases of your progress as a free nation.'

Chapter 4

'BLUE CHIP' COLONY

'Is there a finer relationship than that which exists between father and child?'

M. PIERRE WIGNY, Belgian Foreign Minister

No enterprise in Africa was more heavily praised or more confidently pursued than the Belgian development of the Congo. It is not many years since a British Colonial Secretary (Lord Chandos) paused to wonder if the Belgians had not perhaps produced the key to successful colonial policy. Even the usually critical Americans mostly withheld their censure. The Congo was the 'blue chip' colony.

Its disaster, so little expected and seldom foretold, produced the incomprehension usually reserved for the news of the failure of an old and safe partnership in the City. It is impossible to believe that the solid burghers of Brussels have been guilty of a gigantic fraud. Nor, indeed, have they – unless it is a fraud to delude themselves. For the Belgians, like almost everybody else, were completely taken in by *Inforcongo*, perhaps the most brilliant – and in some ways the most intelligent – propaganda machine ever created. This Information Service of the Congo encouraged the Belgians to believe – and they honestly, if uncritically, did believe – that their colonization of the Congo was a cause for national pride, and that the Africans loved and honoured them for their civilizing mission. Nobody knows how much was spent on *Inforcongo*. It must have been considerable. But its success was not because of the money spent on it. It had a good story to tell, of solid economic achievement and of steady social development. It had a consistent policy in which it believed – benevolent paternalism. Its tone was positive, unfailingly courteous, severely practical and high-minded, like the man who inspired it, Pierre Ryckmans, for long the Congo's almost legendary Governor-General. 'Rule in order to serve . . . this is the sole excuse for conquest. It is also its complete justification.'

Ryckmans was a stern and just patriarch. Service in the Congo was his life-work, as it was to his son, whose liberal administration won him respect and friendship. When the Belgians hurriedly evacuated Thysville early in August 1960, young Ryckmans returned because he felt his place was with the people he was called upon to serve. They took him prisoner, and a few days later they shot him.

The Belgians were never so aware of their empire as at the moment of losing it. They tried to repudiate it when the Congo fell into their lap; they largely ignored it when they had it, leaving its affairs in the hands of a small coterie of special interests; and they lost it in the end because there was no informed opinion, other than that produced by *Inforcongo*. The Belgians stolidly relied on the men-at-the-top and the men-on-the-spot. In the seventy-five years of their association with the Congo they roused themselves perhaps three or four times on critical aspects of policy.

THE NOBLE IDEA

The law of 18 October 1908, by which Belgium finally assumed control over the Congo, laid down that the interests of the African population were to have absolute priority. The Congo Administration was given a considerable autonomy. Complete separation was established between the finances of Belgium and the Congo. The spirit of the new relationship was that everything had to be done *by* the fortunate Belgians *for* the unfortunate Congolese. In his pastoral letter Cardinal Mercier pointedly expressed the terms of the relationship: 'We should look on colonization as a collective act of charity which, in some circumstances, highly developed nations have to extend to less fortunate races.' That was the attitude in 1908; fifty years later it was precisely the same.

In 1958, M. Pierre Wigny, a former Minister of Colonies and now Foreign Minister, wrote: 'The traditional policy followed by Belgium could be summed up in the word "paternalism". This word is discredited nowadays. Nevertheless, it still connotes a noble idea . . . When the Belgians came into Africa the natives had to be taught everything. They knew nothing of writing or building . . . They had no idea of what a nation was, or a state, or

even a slightly developed political organization. They had literally to learn to work . . .'*

The new Government of the Congo was a complete bureaucracy run by a Governor-General, the virtual ruler of the country; such limitations as were set to his powers were reserved for the final authority of the King of the Belgians and of the Belgian Government. Later he was assisted by purely nominated advisory councillors; at first only whites, but later blacks as well. Until 1957, when a limited form of local government was introduced, there were no elections of any kind – a restriction imposed equally on whites and blacks.

The Administration, too, was a purely Belgian affair; at the time of independence only one African had risen to a high position in the civil service – M. Jean Bolikango. He was one of the senior officers in *Inforcongo*, where it was useful to have a prominent black propagandist. (Later he was to make a bitter denunciation of the role he was expected to play in this propaganda work.) Africanization, which was a feature of British and French colonialism, was not dreamed of in the Congo.

The Belgian view was that what the African needed was work, money in his pocket, food in his belly, education, religion, welfare and health services, peasant agricultural reforms, and technical training. Until 1956 very few Belgians of standing thought of challenging this concept of the welfare state in the Congo. The muddles and nasty messes into which British and French colonial policies periodically landed themselves were smugly cited as proof of the invincibility of the Belgian method. 'The Congo is preoccupied above all with practical ends, and is suspicious of the abstract ideologies which elsewhere in Africa have produced disastrous results.'†

There was pride in Belgian achievement; and the achievement

* M. Wigny apparently overlooked the Bakongo Kingdom. The intricate nature of the political organizations of tribes like the Bakongo and the Lunda, though admittedly not modern, hardly show a lack of knowledge of social mechanism and organization. As for work, true the Congolese had to learn to work in a white economy; but their craftsmanship which fills the Royal Palace at Tervuren in Belgium was not achieved without some effort or knowledge of the use of tools.

† Ivan Denis. The Belgian Congo. Brussels, 1959.

was a proud one. *Inforcongo* flooded the Congo, Belgium, and the world with glossy accounts of its practical contribution towards uplifting the African. Gross national production rose from £240 million in 1950 to £400 million in 1955; native contribution to the national production rose from 46 per cent of the national income in 1950 to 53 per cent in 1955; the primary schools taught half the child population; nearly 1,400 merchant ships ploughed through some 8,700 miles of navigable waterways; more than 9,000 freight-cars travelled over more than 3,107 miles of railroads, not to mention 800,000 bicycles, nearly 60,000 motor vehicles (with the use of 87,000 miles of roads); 40 airports centralized 20,500 miles of internal airways; the index of sleeping-sickness contamination dropped from 1·2 per cent in 1930 to 0·025 per cent in 1957; over 2,700 hospital units were staffed by 8,000 personnel; the increase in population rose from 6·5 per cent to 12·8 per cent between 1931 and 1953; native consumption – an important sign of widening prosperity – rose from an index of 100 in 1950 to 176 in 1957.

The Belgians had high ambitions for even greater economic development. Their sights were fixed on creating an African equivalent of the Ruhr in the Lower Congo. Only twenty-five miles from the estuary port of Matadi on the Atlantic, the river forms a loop round the Inga plateau. It drops more than a hundred metres in a series of rapids over a distance of only ten miles, and has a flow of 40,000 cubic metres per second, four times greater than Niagara's. When harnessed the river could produce 30 million kilowatts, equivalent to one-fifth of the total electricity capacity of the United States, and three times that of Britain. More important, the cost of electricity would be much lower than the world's lowest price achieved by the Tennessee Valley Authority. The development of this vast cheap hydro-electric energy in a country so richly endowed with raw materials would transform not only the Congo but a large part of the continent as well. The Belgians recognized that they could not develop this African Ruhr from their own resources, and were planning an international effort to bring the Inga project to fruition. Preparatory work was started in 1958 on the first stage, which was expected to take eight years and to cost nearly £110 million.

Who would deny the importance of these achievements? They stand as a monument to the contribution of Belgian skill and enterprise in Africa. What this impressive superstructure lacked, however, was a foundation on which to rest. The Belgian view had always been that economic development and education are the foundation for political independence. It is a popular view, shared by the present rulers of Central Africa and South Africa. But it is a false belief; no enterprise – economic, educational, or religious – can stand unless it is embedded in solid political foundations, which imply government by consent. On this crucial point Belgian policy (like that of the Portuguese) differed from British and French practice in Africa.

THE KATANGA SCANDAL

The Congo's history as a modern economic state begins with the opening up of the mining wealth of the Katanga province in 1911; before that time the emphasis had been on the trade provided by the wealth of the plantations. The discovery of Katanga's wealth completely changed the attitude of the Belgians to their unwelcome colony.

Katanga seems to have been born to controversy; its modern story begins with conflict and bloodshed. Until 1890 this vast south-eastern province of the Congo, the size of Britain, was ruled with great effectiveness and political skill by its King, M'Siri. He was feared by the slavers. He traded with the Arabs in the east and with the Portuguese in the west. Although always anxious to extend his trade, he resisted efforts by white explorers and geologists to stay in his territory. Only one white man, the Scottish missionary Arnot, won his favour. In the end M'Siri was destroyed by the rivalry of two of the shrewdest financiers in Africa's history – Cecil Rhodes and Leopold II.

Although Katanga fell within the territorial limits set by the Berlin conference, Rhodes was not to be easily deterred. Having planted the flag of his Company in Northern Rhodesia he was anxious to lay his hands on the reputed mineral wealth of Katanga. To forestall him, Leopold first floated the Katanga Company, and then dispatched four expeditions to subdue M'Siri. Shortly before he was killed M'Siri sent a message to Cecil Rhodes to

come and negotiate a treaty with him; but the messenger mistakenly delivered his note to one of Leopold's agents. Seventy years later history almost repeated itself when agents of Katanga sought the intervention of the latter-day Rhodes, Sir Roy Welensky, with a similar appeal for treaty relationship; but the Belgians forestalled this move too.

Alas for Leopold, it was not until after his death that the true riches of Katanga were revealed. It was called a 'geological scandal' because of the variety and quantity of minerals buried in the relatively small area. This 'scandalously' rich province produces something like 8 per cent of the world's copper, 60 per cent of the West's uranium, 73 per cent of the world's cobalt, 80 per cent of its industrial diamonds, as well as important quantities of gold, zinc, cadmium, manganese, columbium, and tantulum. Its mineral resources appear inexhaustible. Although Katanga holds only 12 per cent of the total population, it contributes 60 per cent of the Congo revenue. It is the economic heart of the country; without it the Congo would be as miserably poor as any of its neighbours. It is obviously worth holding on to.

Katanga's mining wealth is produced by large monopoly companies such as the Union Minière du Haut Katanga (mainly copper and uranium) and Forminière (diamonds). The Union Minière's stock value stood as high as £700 million before the troubles came to the Congo. It contributed almost half of all the country's taxes. But the Union Minière is not entirely its own master. It forms part of the gigantic complex of financial companies erected by the Belgians in the Congo.

The Belgian financial empire formed a State within a State, both within Belgium and within the Congo. It is as though Wall Street or the City of London could, almost at will, wag the tail of the Capitol or of Westminster. In this empire of giants, the biggest is the Société Générale de Belgique; its finger is to be found in most profitable pies – banks, industry, cotton, sugar, pharmacy, motor-cars, beer, railroads, insurance, and Sabena airways. It controls the Compagnie Congolèse du Commerce et de l'Industrie which in its turn controls the Comité Spécial du Katanga (C.S.K.). Remarkably enough it was C.S.K. which granted all mining concessions until independence – a function which in every other country is the prerogative of a Government Depart-

ment. Two-thirds of the shares of C.S.K. are owned by the Belgian Government, and C.S.K. itself owned 25 per cent of the fabulous Union Minière; the rest was owned by Belgian, British, and American shareholders. C.S.K. has now been wound up; its quarter holding of the Union Minière is being distributed in roughly the proportion of 19 per cent to the Société Générale, 20·5 per cent to British and American interests, and 22·5 per cent to the Congo Government.

The other four monopolies are the Société de Bruxelles pour la Finance et l'Industrie, which also controls the Banque de Bruxelles; the Société Commerciale et Minière du Congo; Huilever, a subsidiary of Unilever; and the Banque Empain.

THE TRINITY OF POWER

Although the Belgian Parliament assumed final responsibility for the affairs of the Congo, it seldom intervened – at least not until after the Second World War. Constitutionally power devolved on the Governor-General but in practice the Congo was ruled by a trinity – the Administration, Big Business, and the Church.

The Roman Catholic Church exerted a predominant influence in the social and educational life of the Congo. In religion as in finance, the monopoly idea was in high favour. Since all education was in the hands of the missions until 1946, you either accepted a Christian education or had nothing. Even the choice of religions was made difficult, because the Catholics enjoyed a twenty-year monopoly of all education subsidies from the State from 1925.

The trinity was in basic agreement on education. Its priority was to concentrate on primary education. More than 1,300,000 children a year went to primary schools. Secondary education came only much later, and in small quantities. As against about a million children in Catholic primary schools, there were fewer than 5,000 in secondary schools, and only slightly more – about 6,000 – in vocational training schools.

If the intention was not to keep the native back, its purpose was to allow him to develop at what the Belgians adjudged to be 'his own pace' There was no question of higher education. The

first two university colleges were established in the Congo only in 1956. But although there were no local universities, the trinity's policy was that no Congolese students should go overseas for further studies; a few were allowed to go to the safe seminaries of Rome. The Congo was taken into the first half of the twentieth century tied to a policy that kept all but an inconsiderable fraction of its people to a knowledge of the three Rs and to vocational training. 'In short,' a Belgian apologist wrote,* 'education of the natives is being pushed as fast in the Congo as funds, the native's ability to absorb, *and a care not to upset a delicate social balance by going too fast, will allow.*'

Not too fast! That, in time, was to become the epitaph of the Belgian rule in Africa; the guiding, restraining, parental hand on the shoulder of the child: 'Not too fast, son.'

As late as 1958 Belgian authorities were saying: '*At the end of thirty years* the Belgian system will also produce an *élite* with university training, but unlike the French colonies, the Belgian Congo will have a broad base of literate persons for them to lead.'† In 1960, this was to be but poor consolation for those called upon to lead the first independent government; there were then *less than twelve graduates in the whole of the Congo.*

THE RACE FACTOR

Belgian law in the Congo guaranteed equality between the races; race discrimination was punishable; the colour bar was proscribed. But there was no social equality; segregation was the rule, not the exception; discrimination was practised officially, and its practice was always defended on moral principles. Nevertheless the Belgians denied the existence of racial practices. Just how wide a discrepancy there was between this denial and the reality was savagely exposed by a Belgian Parliamentary Commission that came to the Congo after the start of the troubles in 1959.

Racial discrimination was implicit in the official policy of paternalism; it postulated the doctrine of superiors and inferiors. Superior equalled white; inferior equalled black. This equation

* Eric Cypres.
† *ibid.*

in square one conditioned all race attitudes. The Belgians tried to change the equation by adopting a merit system; an inferior who had achieved certain distinctions in education, religion, employment, or public service could qualify for the status of a superior. He was called an *évolué*; one who had evolved towards being a civilized person. The *évolué* was entitled to all the privileges of the whites, who qualified automatically. The system by which this integration was to take place was called *immatriculation*; the absorption of blacks into the society of the *élite*. The only trouble with this system was that it wouldn't work. The majority of the 100,000 whites in the Congo refused to absorb the *évolués*; and most of the *évolués* did not, in any case, wish to be absorbed. It was a stubborn deadlock that broke the hearts of many sincere authorities. But it never discouraged the young King Baudouin in his patient efforts to shame the whites and to inspire the blacks. He ostentatiously shook hands with Congolese in public, a thing that was seldom done, except by missionaries. He became the godfather of a black baby. Yet at the same time he never missed an opportunity to recall the inspiring leadership of his great-great-uncle, Leopold II.

As in South Africa, Central Africa, and Kenya, blacks and whites lived apart in their own townships; the one community in small houses and huts, the other in large comfortable homes set in large gardens, or in dazzling modern flats. They went to school in separate schools. Desegregated education was given a tentative try-out in 1946; it didn't get very far. Another effort was made in 1957. 'The aim is that the schools should generate the atmosphere of mutual comprehension which will become the solid base on which the inter-racial society of the Belgian Congo will grow.'

The whites, obviously, had all the good jobs; but even on the lower rungs the difference between wages was enormous. Although measures were taken to outlaw the colour bar in ships, trains, places of entertainment, and hotels, the impact remained slight. The majority of the *colons* treated the Africans, *évolués* or otherwise, as inferiors. This was particularly marked in relations between the *petit blancs* and the Congolese in their places of work. It was a source of constant embarrassment and concern to the top Administration and to the Church leadership; their concern

was fully justified by what has since happened. The majority of the *petit blancs* were Flemings; they suffered worst in the riots of 1959, and again when the Force Publique ran amok in August 1960. 'Are you a Fleming?' became a general cry among the rebellious soldiers and their camp-followers.

Chapter 5

THE REVOLT OF THE ÉLITE

> '*Despite the phenomenon of only one European for 140 Africans, the white man has always led the pace of the Congo's evolution in all its aspects. From the start, he has dominated the native masses. His material, cultural, and moral superiority enabled him to impose his will on the native population without much difficulty. But with the growth of the local* élite, *he has lost some of the prestige, which was based on factors of racial supremacy. This is a natural and logical phenomenon.*'
>
> INFORCONGO, 1958

In the twelve brief years between 1946 and 1958 the Belgians began to lose what had appeared to be an impregnable position. At any time during that period it had still been possible for them to take the initiative to reverse the drift to defeat; but they ignored the warnings from their own camp, and indignantly repudiated the 'interference' of outsiders like Mr Chester Bowles, a former U.S. Ambassador, who had written with great prescience in 1955: 'The danger lies not so much in the possibility that the Belgians will not compromise eventually with the force of nationalism, but that when they do they will find the Africans almost totally inexperienced in handling the responsibilities which they are certain to demand and eventually to get.'

Three important changes occurred in those twelve years: the break-up of the trinity, the Establishment on which power rested in the Congo; a change of political direction in Brussels; mounting international pressures, responding to developments in other parts of Africa. These pressures found expression in a revolt of the *élite* which led to the final crisis in 1959.

Long before the avalanche hit them, the Belgians had begun to recognize the need to take account of increasing pressures from other parts of Africa, as well as from their own missionary-trained *évolués*, the emancipated, Westernized middle-class. But

they completely misjudged the speed of events, and the extent to which it was necessary to make concessions.

Decisions taken in Brussels were blocked in Leopoldville; and decisions taken in Leopoldville were resisted by the *colons*. Looking back over the twelve years after the end of the war, a Belgian parliamentary commission found that the Congo authorities had been tardy and lacking in decision; they also discovered serious weaknesses in the Administration. The efficient machine had begun to run down under the pressure of trying to tailor paternalism to the cut of nationalism.

Until the election of a Liberal-Socialist, in the place of a Catholic, Government in Belgium in 1954, the Establishment in the Congo could rely on getting its own way. But this pattern then began to change; there was a direct conflict between the two Governments over mission education, and particularly with the Catholics. The new Colonial Minister, M. Buissert, was a hustler, impatient of religious monopolies. Having appointed a commission to examine education in the Congo, he was determined to implement their recommendations, which had been severely critical of Catholic methods. They had proposed an extension of lay schools (the few which were started in 1946 had proved extremely popular), as well as drastic cuts in subsidies to mission education. These new policies produced a bitter religio-political conflict in Belgium and the Congo, into which the *évolués* were dragged, first by the Church and later by the secularists. The *évolués* responded eagerly to this appeal for their support. They found themselves in an entirely new situation. Nobody had thought of canvassing their support before this issue came up. Large numbers sided with the Colonial Secretary who suddenly found himself something of a popular hero among the Congolese. This, too, was new. The export of Belgian party divisions to the Congo was severely deprecated by the Governor-General, but joyfully hailed by the *évolués*. It provided them with an opportunity to express veiled nationalist sentiments in terms of anti-clericalism. These developments properly alarmed the Catholic hierarchy.

Elsewhere in Africa, Catholics had already begun to harmonize the Church with the new nationalist forces. A number of Jesuits and liberal Catholics had been pressing for similar changes in the

Congo. This tendency rapidly gained ground after 1954; within two years Catholic presses in the Congo were beginning to publish nationalist tracts. The break-up of the trinity in effect destroyed the *status quo*.

Big Business, too had begun to re-evaluate its role; partly in response to the experiences of the big mining companies in the Central African Federation, and partly in the light of the experience of large companies in those African countries that had gained their independence with the consent of the colonial powers. Though they were by no means agreed, an influential section of Big Business favoured a liberal approach. The small businessmen in the Congo continued, like the *colons* in Algeria, to put their undivided faith in strong government.

THE UNSAFE MIDDLE CLASS

The creation of an African middle class was a central feature of Belgian policy; an *élite* of *évolués*, it was believed, would become the ally of the rulers in maintaining stability and in pursuing reforms in a slow and orderly fashion. This respectable idea was not peculiar to the Belgians. It has long been in the forefront of the thinking of Lord Malvern and Sir Roy Welensky in Central Africa, and of Michael Blundell in Kenya. It says something for their political intelligence that the Afrikaner nationalists in South Africa were never deluded by such ideas. The concept of a solid African middle class, with its bourgeois vested interests in the *status quo*, is clearly not without its attractions. Its weakness lies in the failure to learn from history that revolutions are not made by hungry peasants and by slum-dwellers but by the middle classes and the skilled workers. All African and Asian nationalist movements are led by middle-class elements; this development finally occurred in the Congo too.

The revolt of the *élite* began in an obscure fashion through the formation of what might be likened to old boys' clubs. Because political associations were prohibited in the Congo, the educated Congolese invariably turned to ADAPES (Association des Anciens Élèves des Pères de Scheut) which had been formed with official approval in 1925. Its activities were decently demure and unexciting until after the Second World War, when its membership

significantly shot up to 15,000. Its activities, too, were widened to include study circles.

At the same time the number and size of old boys' associations such as Marist Brothers (UNELMA), the Christian Schools (ASANEF), and the schools of the Jesuit Fathers, increased. These associations formed circles of the *évolués* which spread down to small villages. The Belgian authorities and the Church looked with pride on these developments.

Gradually, the tidily-dressed and ambitious clerks and other salary-earners in the Administration and in commerce formed themselves into a nation-wide association of employees, APIC (Association du Personnel Indigène du Congo Belge et du Ruanda-Urundi). This harmless-looking body was formed in 1946. It offered a forum for employees to talk about their wages and conditions, their lack of opportunities, and their experiences at the hands of unsympathetic white supervisors – discussions that led on to questions of ideology such as equal pay for equal work, and the colour bar. The names of practically all the present Congolese leaders appear as officers in these 'harmless' associations.

The Socialists also began to launch study groups, while the Christian leaders sponsored circles devoted to the study of 'social questions'. The best-known of these was UNISCO (Union des Intérêts Sociaux Congolais), whose members were mainly secondary-school pupils. Their first chairman was the highly respectable senior clerk of the Governor-General. Among the most prominent officers of UNISCO and ADAPES was Joseph Kasavubu, then a treasury official, later to become the first President of the Congo Republic. His militant tribal and nationalist consciousness was revealed in one of his earliest addresses to UNISCO in 1946 – equal pay for equal work, Congolese association with the Administration, an urban charter, abolition of the colour bar in all public places. Equally symptomatic of his thinking was his demand of 'Congo for the Congolese', and of the 'Lower Congo for the Bakongo'. This latter demand foreshadowed the formation of the Abako party nearly ten years later.

The formation of tribal associations was the third stage in the development of the Congolese political movement. It flowed directly from the old boys' associations, the employees', Christ-

ian, and socialist associations. As in South Africa, the Belgian authorities fostered tribal development in the rural areas, which was carried over when tribesmen came into the urban centres. The Lower Congo – with Leopoldville as its throbbing capital – lies in the Bakongo territory. The Bakongo did not take easily to Belgian rule. They were, at first, slow to send their children to schools; they were against Christianity, and in reaction had created their own tribal religio-political movement which later grew into the Kibanguism* which caused the authorities great trouble until it was finally put down with great severity.

Unlike the Bakongo, the Bangala tribes from the Upper Congo took quickly to Western association. They established themselves in force in Leopoldville; by the time the Bakongo arrived as urban dwellers, the *élite* of Leopoldville were largely Bangala who greatly outnumbered the Bakongo. The Bakongo reacted by creating the Abako party, to re-assert their influence in the Lower Congo. This naturally produced tribal rivalry. Under Kasavubu's dynamic leadership, Abako forged rapidly ahead. Progress for the Liboke-lya Bangala was much more difficult; they were divided into eight separate tribal units, and they lacked the powerful negative, emotional factors to act as a spur.

In 1957, when the Belgians introduced a limited experiment in democratic elections for the major urban councils, the Bakongo's unity and superior organization enabled them to flatten the Bangala in Leopoldville, securing 62 per cent of the total vote. Thus Kasavubu became the mayor of Dendale in Leopoldville, a platform he used with great skill and determination to champion the cause of Abako.

WIND OF CHANGE

But the turning-point in the Congo came well before 1957. The period between 1946 and 1950 had produced the fabric of social and political organizations; between 1950 and 1955 the circles of the *élite* began to voice demands for social, economic, and political reforms. During this decade the Congolese were slowly asserting their right to express political opinions. By early 1955 the Congo was beginning to show signs of discomfort. The

* See page 69.

évolués – uneasily poised between the white society and their own illiterates – were pushing with more tenacity and less caution towards open political activities; the *colons* were becoming increasingly critical of their voicelessness in the Congo; the Belgian authorities were trying to find a new system to meet these changing social relationships.

The Governor-General, M. Petillon, publicly aired his views about the need for 'decolonization'. But what did it mean? The Belgians set up a study group to plan the next stage. Typically, they selected only Belgians, and they made their study in Brussels. In the end events overtook their deliberations. Meanwhile, support had grown for the concept of a Belgo-Congolese Community. It envisaged the permanent association of the Congolese with the Belgians: equal members within a single community. Just as the Flemings and the Walloons had joined together, so, too, the Congolese must be integrated into a wider community. In this way the Congo would find its eventual independence within the wider Belgo-Congolese Community. In its essence the idea bears a strong similarity to the French policy for Algeria. Its distinguishing feature is that while the French insist that the Algerians *are* French, the Belgians recognize the separateness of the Congolese.

There was no lack of ideas, or even of new thinking. The air was thick with promises of change. *Inforcongo* blazed away about the great new future that was opening up; it spoke as if decisions about this future had already been taken. But this was precisely what was lacking. There was a political vacuum, and the Belgians could not make up their minds how to fill it. It was into this situation that Professor A. J. J. van Bilsen hurled his bombshell in 1955. Its effects were instantaneous and permanent.

Van Bilsen, a forty-six-year-old professor at the University Institute for Overseas Territories in Antwerp, has been interested in Africa all his life. He had taken a law doctorate at the Roman Catholic University of Louvain with a view to entering the colonial service. But the outbreak of war diverted his activities into the Belgian freedom and underground struggle, so that he first set foot in the Congo in 1946. He quickly established wide contacts with both Africans and Belgians, and developed an unconventional attitude towards Belgium's proper role in the

Congo. But before expressing any opinions he visited South Africa and other parts of the continent. On his return to the Congo in 1954 he formulated his views in a document entitled 'A Thirty Year Plan for the Political Emancipation of Belgian Africa'. He criticized Belgium for allowing the Congo to be governed with virtually no parliamentary control, and he attacked the unbalanced growth of industrialization on the basis of the American pattern rooted in social paternalism. He contrasted the failure of the Belgian Administration in not training a single African doctor, veterinarian, or engineer with the success of the missions in producing hundreds of priests and a Bishop. 'The Church thus shows', he commented acidly, 'that in the backward countries it is a more dynamic and progressive force than the State.'

But he went much further. 'The colonial imperialism of the past half century is gone forever.' Nor did he lament its passing. Provided the Belgians set about purposefully creating fully democratic and economically viable independent states in the Congo, and in the neighbouring trusteeship territory of Ruanda-Urundi, over a period of thirty years, he felt Belgium's heritage in Africa could be a proud one.

Van Bilsen's timing was absolutely right. In Belgium the Socialist Party was at long last beginning to find its true voice in colonial affairs. The Roman Catholic Church, led by brilliant thinkers like Father van 't Wing, was becoming increasingly aware of the need to put itself on the side of the growing African national consciousness. Both the Socialists and the Roman Catholic hierarchy in the Congo reacted well to van Bilsen's ideas. The Congolese were enthusiastic; it lent them sanction to talk openly about independence. The first major political manifesto of Congo nationalism appeared in the middle of 1956. A group of *évolués*, writing in *Conscience Africaine* (a Catholic-sponsored publication), for the first time spoke openly of political independence for the Congo. 'The colour of one's skin', they said, 'offers no single privilege.' They warned that the concept of a 'Belgian-Congolese Community' was deeply suspect in African minds. But, they quickly added, there was no hostility towards Belgium provided it undertook sincerely and unequivocally to cooperate in achieving Congo's independence within thirty years.

Abako was the next to take up the challenge. The authorship of the *Conscience Africaine* manifesto was largely Bangala; they had gained an initial advantage over the Bakongo by putting themselves in the vanguard of the demand for freedom. Joseph Kasavubu, speaking at a public meeting in August 1956, criticized the *Conscience Africaine* group as being unwilling to forge the political instrument necessary to implement their ideas. 'Our patience', he exclaimed, 'is exhausted. . . . When the hour comes, a nation will not wait.' To recapture the initiative he rejected the proposal that the Congolese should wait for thirty years. But his private views at that time were different. He was open to reasonable negotiations. The Belgians, however, made the mistake of ignoring this demand.

But while the Congo was marking time Africa was not; everywhere along a continental front Pan-Africanism was making gains, and there was no way of preventing the Congolese from knowing about them. Three widely different events can be singled out as the main contributory factors to the 1959 débâcle: General de Gaulle's launching of the French Community; the Brussels World Fair; and the first All-African People's Conference in Accra.

In August 1958, de Gaulle arrived in Brazzaville, on the opposite bank of the Congo to Leopoldville, and gave the French Congolese a choice between membership of the French community as an autonomous republic, or complete independence. The *évolués* in Leopoldville cheered de Gaulle. Two days after his speech, an influential group of *évolués* addressed a respectful but firm memorandum to the Governor-General of the Congo in which they boldly criticized the Government for its failure to include Africans on the study group. 'We fear', they wrote, 'that without the cooperation of the Congolese the study group will produce a unilateral attitude, inspired by conservatism rooted in a spirit of colonialism, which would seriously upset the Africans.' They firmly stated their demand for eventual complete independence.

The leader of this group was Patrice Lumumba, soon to become the Congo's first Prime Minister. Lumumba first appeared in public as chairman of the 'Liberal Friends Circle' in Stanleyville, where he was prominent in *évolué* affairs. Later he was a

moving spirit in the *évolué* circles of Leopoldville. Lumumba's group immediately followed up their *démarche* on the Governor-General by creating a new political movement, the Mouvement National Congolais (MNC). It was to become the forerunner of a mushroom growth of smaller parties and movements between the end of 1958 and the beginning of 1959. MNC's aim was to prepare 'the masses and the *élite* to take control of public affairs'; to speed the process of democratization; to implement the Declaration of Human Rights; and, by peaceful negotiation, to do everything possible to free the Congo from colonialism.

In contradistinction to Abako, MNC sought to combat all forms of regional separatism, and to create unity in the higher interests of the Congo as a whole. The drift of Abako towards regional separatism of the Lower Congo continued. Its old opponents, the Bangala, formed a new group, the Union Progressiste Congolaise (UPCO) which pursued the moderate aim of achieving internal autonomy within a Belgian-Congolese Community (rather similar to the idea of the French Community). Like the MNC, UPCO set itself fiercely against attempts to divide the country on tribal or regional lines.

It was during this time that scores of prominent Congolese leaders were invited by the Belgian Government to attend the World Fair in Brussels. There, for the first time, leaders from all parts of the country found themselves in close and continuous association with each other. Previously many of them had never known each other, and knew little or nothing of each other's ideas. One result of this fortuitous gathering was the gradual development of a new political movement, the Mouvement pour le Progrès National Congolais (MPNC).

Although the MPNC was not formally launched until after the Leopoldville riots in the following year its seeding-time was during the critical last few months of 1958. Its leaders were *évolués* studying at the missions in Belgium (a recent innovation), and leaders of *élite* circles in places like Stanleyville, Coquilhatville, Bukavu, Luluabourg, Elizabethville, and Kilo-Moto, as well as Leopoldville. Neither the Abako nor the MNC leaders were associated with it, but the Bangala leaders, always anxious to extend their alliances, were among its most prominent supporters. When it was finally launched the MPNC fully endorsed

the Government declaration of policy issued after the Leopoldville riots. It did not commit itself firmly either to complete independence or to internal autonomy. It emphasized the importance of economic and social development, and of national unity. Disunity, it said, would result in 'the return to the stagnation of our races, and to our ancestral poverty'. A weak national movement would end in disintegration and a return to tribal wars. Much of the manifesto was couched in the kind of language that finds a great deal of favour with settlers and colonial regimes, causing the movement to be described as 'moderate'.

Finally, there was the third factor which preceded the Leopoldville upheaval – the All-African People's Conference in Accra on 5 December 1958. The Belgian authorities put no obstacles in the way of the Abako and the MNC leaders who had been invited to attend the conference. But Kasavubu failed to make the trip because his inoculation certificates were not in order; this accident left the way open for Patrice Lumumba and his MNC colleagues to speak for the Congo. They returned to Leopoldville on 28 December, where they addressed an enthusiastic mass meeting. Inspired by Accra's spirit of African solidarity, Lumumba made a full-blooded nationalist speech; he committed the MNC to full support for Accra's decision in favour of immediate independence for all African countries. (The thirty-year programme towards independence was no longer an aim.)

Six days later riots occurred in Leopoldville. Their immediate cause was a march by 30,000 unemployed workers in the city. The Abako leaders were arrested and their movement proscribed. No action was taken against the MNC or other parties. In the twinkling of an eye the long-delayed reforms for the Congo were announced by the King of the Belgians.

Chapter 6

THE YEAR OF DECISION

*'Kavumenti, the big talker, beats his chest and swells his lungs – Boasts of riches, boasts of power tells tall tales that none believe – Kavumenti, empty windbag, lying tongue and charlatan! Hearken now and hear the war cry! Hear the war cry loud and strong!'**

1959 opened ominously with the riots in Leopoldville which took the Belgians by surprise; but their rule remained apparently firmly established. The year closed in gloom and dissension; Belgian rule was no longer assured, but the nationalists were still divided and unsure of themselves. Patrice Lumumba was in prison in Stanleyville.

No colonial power in history was destroyed more quickly, and by such a rabble: there was not even a coherent nationalist movement which could command nation-wide support. But there was rebellion; a rebellion of the mind that rejected paternalism and all it stood for. The children were children no longer.

The Belgians never really understood that it takes two to maintain a true paternalist relationship. When things go wrong between father and son, the parent must be capable either of tyranny or of changing his attitude; in either case the relationship changes. When it came to the test the Belgians had no stomach for tyranny. They tried but failed to change their attitude; and they ended up muddled, defensive, resentful, and ineffectual.

The riots in Leopoldville had been fierce, and they had been fiercely repressed by the Force Publique under their white officers. The same Force Publique was to turn just a year later on the same officers and their families, and to maltreat them with equal impartiality. But the riots had been nothing untoward as riots go in Africa. The total number killed was forty-nine; only one half the number shot at Sharpeville in South Africa in the

* A Watutsi song recorded by Father Kagamane and translated by John L. Brown.

following year. It was the mood of the rioters more than anything else that upset the Belgians. For the first time hatred of whites came into the open; missionary property, mainly schools, was specially chosen for destruction.

BELGIAN AWAKENING

The brain behind the riots was Joseph Kasavubu's. Moving between the rural stronghold of the Bakongo along the reaches of the Lower Congo, and their urban concentration in Leopoldville, the Abako leader was emerging as the undisputed leader of his tribe; 'King Kasa' soon became a popular salutation. Lumumba was working in Orientale, his home province, to provide a solid base for his national movement. The glory (and the Belgians' disapproval) came to Kasavubu.

Although the riots assumed a political complexion, their causes were primarily economic. The 'blue chip' colony had fallen into financial troubles from 1956 with the decline in the world price of copper and primary commodities. In 1957 the usual budget surplus dropped to a £5 million deficit; by 1958 the deficit had more than trebled, and the outlook was worse for 1959. Unemployment mounted in the large cities, especially in Leopoldville. Demands for action were met by Government denials that the situation was in any way alarming. It was only after the trouble that the serious extent of the Congo's economic decline was admitted. Meanwhile, the social discontent of the unemployed masses in Leopoldville provided Abako with easy material to stir things up; and that is just what the riots succeeded in doing.

Kasavubu and his chief lieutenants were arrested and flown to Belgium, but they were not imprisoned nor were they put on trial. The Belgians sensibly recognized that political trials would only exacerbate the racial feelings inflamed by the riots; they sought to reason with, and to influence, Kasavubu and his colleagues.

If the Belgians had been tardy and indecisive before the riots, they showed less caution when faced with the aftermath. Within a fortnight the King broadcast his now ironically famous speech. Its implications, though heavily tinged with paternalism, were

revolutionary. 'The object of our presence in the Dark Continent was thus defined by Leopold II: to open these backward countries to European civilization, to call their peoples to emancipation, liberty, and progress, after having saved them from slavery, disease, and poverty. In continuance of these noble aims, our firm resolve today is to lead, *without fatal evasions but without imprudent haste*, the Congolese peoples to independence in prosperity and peace.' Unfortunately for the intentions of the King, the evasions were fatal, and the haste was imprudent. Less than a year later he himself was compelled to extol the wisdom and statesmanship of granting immediate independence to the Congo.

Despite their mistakes, the Belgians at last got down to making reforms. The long-delayed recommendations of the study group were brought to light: these called for the setting up of restricted Boards of Advisers to the Governor-General and Provincial Governments, which would ultimately become the Council of Ministers, and the creation of a General Council and a Legislative Council as the first stage towards a House of Representatives and a Senate. But the immediate emphasis was on local and provincial government. For the first time elections were promised on a nation-wide basis to secure representative bodies in the lower tiers of government.

In seven months, from January to August, forty Acts and Ordinances containing discriminatory regulations were abolished or changed. The social colour bar was officially pronounced dead; however it still remained very much alive in the European towns. More important, the Congo was given its charter of freedom; for the first time freedom of assembly, of the Press, and of speech was recognized.

The riots had one other important consequence. They finally punctured the propaganda of *Inforcongo*, and awakened the Belgian people to the reality of their responsibilities in the Congo. Like old Rip van Winkle, the Socialist leader of the Belgian parliament, M. Collard, confessed that the people had been stupefied by the events in the Congo. 'January 1959 was the end of an era. But, nevertheless, the Belgians have not yet grasped the importance of these happenings', he told Parliament. 'They are not deeply stirred as yet. As a matter of fact, up to January 1959,

the Congo was chiefly a matter concerning financial groups and the administration. Today the Congo is the affair of the Belgian people.'

JUDGE AND JURY

The Belgian Parliament, for the first time too, dispatched an all-party parliamentary commission to discover what had gone wrong in the Congo. Their report was scathing and perceptive; its 100 pages provides a complete exposure of *Inforcongo*. At last the enemy was laid low.

The commission indicted the Congo Government for incompetence, inefficient administration, and indecisiveness. Among the political causes for the riots its report lists the rise of nationalist movements, religious friction, foreign influence (such as the Accra conference), and inadequate news services. Among the social causes it cites human relations between whites and blacks, urban overcrowding resulting from rural migration, unemployment caused by the recession, insufficient schools for children and young people, labour conditions, and the influence exerted by the trade unions.

But the most valuable part of the commission's report is its chapter on race relations. Here is a warning for the multi-racial societies in Africa that continue to delude themselves still, as the Belgians had done for so long, that the Africans really wish for nothing more than to be guided by the whites; that they desire only the continuation of white leadership, and respect its policies; that the daily grievances and feelings of humiliation can be safely contained within a system of repressive law and disciplined order.

The commission defined three stages in the evolution of a colony under white rule. The first phase follows on the period of occupation and pacification: the presence of the white man is accepted without discussion; he gives the orders and is obeyed; the rulers accept that they know the wishes of the natives. In the second phase, the white man's sense of responsibility for the black man grows weaker. 'Blacks are increasingly looked upon as workers with no personality of their own; they must be educated and instructed, though chiefly to increase the value of their labour; they are turned into skilled workers and clerks. At this time the whites in the larger centres have no other relations with

the blacks than is necessary for their employment. The blacks make no complaints; they submit themselves without opposition to the privileges enjoyed by the whites. But, gradually, as they become more efficient in their work, their intellectual vision rises and they begin to see things in a different light.' The third phase comes with the declaration of human rights and the emancipation of colonies. Things grow more difficult. 'The whites are bound to a society in which the colour of one's skin plays an important role; on the other hand, the black *évolués* seek the immediate eradication of all colour bars.'

The commission moves on from this incisive analysis to consider the effects of deteriorating human relations. The whites become divided in their attitudes to the new situation; some become aware of the need for a new relationship; many remain indifferent; others poison relations by their words and actions. The *petit blancs*, the less-privileged among the whites, feel threatened by the rise of the *évolués* claiming their lower-paid jobs; they assume an attitude of superiority unsoftened by psychological insights. Moreover, it is this group which is in closest contact with the blacks in their daily lives.

On the other hand, the *évolués* – who become the political leaders – are not always ready to bring about any improvement in human relations either. They screw up their grievances. The absence of genuine social mixing leads them to doubt the sincerity of the authorities' intentions. 'The individual feelings of vengeance and of grievance are progressively increased; daily the dissatisfaction rises and is exploited by black leaders in whose interests it is to spread hate against the Europeans. At the first opportunity the hatred explodes.'

That was the lesson of the Leopoldville riots. But an even more important lesson learned by the commission was summed up in a single sentence: '*In a country where the white man is both judge and jury, it is human that the black man should begin to feel that he can get no justice because he is black.*'

PLOTS AND INTRIGUES

The Belgians' prompt reaction to the riots, and their acutely honest attempts to draw the right lessons, successfully restored

the initiative that had slipped from their fingers. But they now had to contend with new forces called into play by the events of the first few months of 1959. African politicians were now in an assertive mood, competing with each other for influence and leadership. The *colons* were alarmed by the prospect of a 'sell-out'. In Brussels a right-wing lobby began to react through intrigues in the Palace and in the Chamber of Representatives.

The man entrusted to push through the New Deal was M. Maurice van Hemelrijck, who had become Minister of the Belgian Congo a few months before the Leopoldville riots. He is an exceptional politician, tough, skilled, and independent-minded. His reputation stood high because of his successful handling of the religious conflict over education in Belgium. He had few illusions about what needed to be done. In the Congo he talked to Africans, to administrators, to businessmen, and to the *colons*. 'I keep repeating the word *independence* on purpose, even though it may have unpleasant associations for some people. We must not be afraid of words; we must be far more wary of complexes, rancour, trouble, hypocrisy, and bluster.' The Africans cheered him; the *colons* attacked him, and he had to be protected from them by the Force Publique. The administration was wary; and the businessmen were divided.

It soon became obvious that it was easier to define the Congo's new policy than to implement it. The Governor-General had to be replaced, and right-wing pressures mollified. Congolese leaders again became suspicious; they were particularly wary of the idea of the Belgian-Congolese Community which M. van Hemelrijck kept stressing. Astute politician that he is, the Minister had realized by the middle of 1959 that, far from slowing down the pace of reform, the need was to speed it up. Only in this way could the moderate Congolese leaders be assured of electoral victory. He had also concluded that law and order in a deteriorating situation could be successfully reimposed only with the support of Congolese leaders. Once convinced of the importance of granting a wide measure of responsibility in the central legislature, the Minister moved swiftly towards its realization. But he failed to carry his colleagues with him.

The right-wing lobby in Brussels, with its anxious interest in 'not going too fast', intensified its pressures and intrigues, and

M. van Hemelrijck was compelled to resign in September. He was succeeded by M. A. E. de Schrijver, a politician experienced in Congolese affairs, and one, so it was thought, who would move with less impetuosity than his predecessor. As so often happens, in the end he moved even faster; the disasters foreseen by M. van Hemelrijck if attempts were made to slow down reforms became reality. For while the *colons* and the right-wing business interests rejoiced in his downfall, the Congolese interpreted it as a Belgian 'evasion'; for them it was a sign that Belgium was getting ready to retreat from its promises. They intensified their demands and moved their targets forwards towards immediate and complete independence.

M. van Hemelrijck was to say later to the Catholic Flemish Club at Lier: 'The drama was that those who thought I was busy losing the Congo were themselves contributing most towards the result.' He denounced the freemasons and certain financial interests who had set themselves up to work actively against him, and he went on to make these interesting disclosures: 'I proposed immediate elections to establish a constitution with an African Government, with the proviso that the Congo need not become a unitary state but could become a federation. I came up against the opposition of former Ministers of the Colonies. Behind my back somebody was sent to the Congo to take the pulse of the people there. My dismissal provoked concern among the blacks. My successor, the best and experienced of statesmen, was also of the opinion that my policy went too far. Since then, however, the most advanced opinion in the Congo has imposed its will. The extremists have come into power in place of the former leaders.'

The Belgians never recovered from the mistake of M. van Hemelrijck's dismissal. The tardy, the fearful, and the conservative-minded had a brief, inglorious victory. The temporary initiative was finally lost in September 1959, and the 'drama of the Congo' moved swiftly to its fateful climax.

Chapter 7

THE BIRTH OF POLITICS

> *'If we could have counted at this moment on proper organizations at a provincial level, the political solutions for the Congo would have been greatly facilitated. Indeed, it is a political mistake that has been made in the past.'*
>
> M. EYSKENS, Prime Minister of Belgium (January, 1960)

RIGHT from the beginning Congo politics foreshadowed the polarization between what might be called 'tribal nationalism' and 'Pan-African nationalism'; the former insists on a single tribe as the centre of growth, while the latter seeks to achieve a national unity transcending tribal loyalties.

Abako, the first party formed in 1956, is rooted as is implied by its full name – the Association of the Bakongo for the Unification, Conservation and Expansion of Likongo (their language) – in the 800,000 Bakongo tribesmen living in the Lower Congo. At the opposite pole is the Mouvement National Congolais (MNC), founded by Patrice Lumumba in 1958. It eschewed tribalism from the start, concentrating on a unifying Congolese nationalism. Tribal nationalism found its natural expression in federalism, Pan-African nationalism in unitarianism. This struggle is the crux of Congo politics; it divides those who wish for a strong unitary state from those wanting a federal system of largely autonomous provincial governments based on primary tribal alliances.

This conflict is a phenomenon of modern Africa. It is crystallized in what happened in Ghana and Nigeria. In Ghana, Dr Kwame Nkrumah triumphed in his demand for centralized government; to achieve it he had to overcome the federalist demands of the Ashanti, the tribal chiefs in the Northern Territories, and the Ewe nationalists in Togoland. In Nigeria, the nationalist demands of Dr Nnamde Azikiwe were defeated by the insistence of Chief Awolowo and of the Muslim Emirs that

Nigeria should become a federation of its three major regions. It was a feature, too, of the Sudan in the first year of its independence. A similar struggle is being waged between the nationalists of Uganda and their traditional rulers.

Centralism versus federalism has bedevilled politics in the Old World for centuries. It may do the same in Africa. So far, experience shows that it is easier for the unitarians to win in small countries like Ghana than in larger countries like Nigeria. The Congo has much more in common with the latter than the former. Theoretically, therefore, the advantage in politics should have been with the federalists in the Congo; but it was the unitarians, in fact, who made most of the running. They were still ahead when independence came. Only then were they checked; whether temporarily or otherwise still remains to be seen.

PEOPLES AND REGIONS

It will be easier to follow the growth of political movements and ideas if some explanation is made of the natural ethnic and physical conditions of the Congo. The country covers an area of 900,000 square miles with a population at independence of 13,500,000 Africans and 113,000 whites, of whom 89 per cent were Belgians. The Congolese are divided into seventy major ethnic groups, each of which is subdivided into hundreds of tribes and clans. More than 400 dialects are in active use. Apart from French, known mainly to the urban-dwellers, there is no *lingua franca*, although Kiswahili is widely spoken in the eastern parts, and Lingala in the west.

Nearly one-quarter of the Congolese are now urbanized; the two largest centres are Leopoldville with 350,000, and Elizabethville with 200,000 inhabitants. The effects, if not necessarily the intention, of Belgian policy has been to develop separate tribal governments based on district councils. The practice, if not the theory, of this policy bears a striking resemblance to Dr Verwoerd's ideas of Bantustans in South Africa. Tribal loyalties have been fostered in the Congo, and have remained strong even when the rural dwellers migrate to the towns.

The country is divided into six administrative provinces. There are many different tribes in each province; usually they dwell

together in sections comprising their traditional lands. Each province is distinguished by the presence within it of one or two dominant tribes. Each of the provinces has developed its own characteristics which are only partly explained historically.

Katanga is the area of mining and industrial development, lying on the south-eastern frontier with Northern Rhodesia. Elizabethville is only a short distance from the towns of the Rhodesian Copperbelt, and there is a measure of political affinity between the whites of Katanga and those of Rhodesia. The Congolese population is 1,650,000, with a white population at independence of 33,500. As an industrial magnet it attracted workers from all parts of the Congo. One effect of this immigration was that the indigenous people of Katanga, the Luvale, felt themselves numerically threatened by outsiders. There is also a strong concentration of Baluba, partly incomers from Kasai, and partly established in a region of their own. This tribe is also strong in neighbouring Kasai.

Equator – a remote and comparatively undeveloped area lying well outside the mainstream of economic and political development, with Coquilhatville as capital – has a population of 1,800,000 Congolese, and fewer than 7,000 whites at independence.

Orientale revolves mainly around its expanding and lively capital, Stanleyville (Patrice Lumumba's home ground). It has a Congolese population of 2,500,000 and, up to independence, an expanding white population of 16,500.

Kivu, the scenically splendid and temperate region, is in a minor sense the 'White Highlands' of the Congo. Officially encouragement was given at one time to white settlement there. But its white population stood at only 14,000 at independence, while its Congolese population, organized into a number of powerful Chiefdoms, totalled 2,260,000.

Kasai, plumb in the middle of the Congo, is the home of the Lulua, a proud and self-conscious tribe who cling tenaciously to their traditional life of hunting and farming; they cared little in the past for education or Christianity, and even less for working for whites. Their conservatism gave an opening to the ambitious Baluba tribe to play an increasingly important role in the expanding economy of the province; a fact deeply resented by

the Lulua on the eve of independence. The Congolese population totals 2,345,000; the white population was 9,000 at independence.

Leopoldville province includes the region of the Lower Congo, the home of the Bakongo, the most sophisticated of Congolese tribes. It also includes the Kwango-Kwilo peoples, who are even more numerous than the Bakongo. The rapid growth of the city of Leopoldville attracted large numbers of immigrants from the Upper Congo. The Congolese population is 3,200,000, and there were 33,600 whites at independence.

MUSHROOM GROWTH OF PARTIES

The growth of political parties when they came strongly reflected these provincial and tribal divisions. After the long drought of colonial paternalism, the 1959 Charter granting freedom of speech, press, and association produced a splurge of parties. They sprang up everywhere; nobody was going to be left out of the new opportunity to stake a claim in the promised political Kingdom; everybody was ready to serve some special interest of his own.

There were those who supported Lumumba's idea of a national movement; they formed branches of their own, not necessarily recognizing the authority of MNC. There were tribal parties, and federations of parties of the smaller tribes. There were provincial regional parties. There were federations of inter-provincial parties. There were parties to 'defend the rights of the peasants and other rural dwellers'. There was a Labour Party and a Liberal Party. There were parties to defend 'the ancient customs and traditions of the Chiefs and their peoples'. There were interracial parties, such as the Rassemblement Congolais in Katanga, which sought 'to maintain the higher ideals of European civilization'. And there were parties initiated and fostered by settlers and by the Administration – an example of the former was Moise Tshombe's Conakat Party, and of the latter, the Parti National du Progrès (PNP).

This vivid array of parties changed pattern with bewildering speed. They renamed themselves, altered their objects, and made and broke alliances. They threw up new leaders continuously.

Many lost their identities completely by forming wider associations. Finally they boiled themselves down from literally hundreds of parties to a reasonable thirty or so. Broadly speaking they supported four tendencies: separatist regionalism (as exemplified by Kasavubu's Abako in the Lower Congo); federalism (support for six autonomous states within a central framework, as Tshombe's Conakat); immediate and unconditional independence (demanded by Lumumba's MNC); independence within the framework outlined by the Belgian Government.

None of the parties was against Europeans as such, but they were practically all against European domination. A 1959 survey by Dr George Brausch* found that 'the new political parties were a reaction against the paternalism of European political parties ... and thus the basic tendency of these nationalist movements is opposition to European domination. Nevertheless, most of the nationalist movements have European counsellors, even the extremist [*sic*] MNC, Abako, and the People's Party – and all admit Europeans to membership.'

This survey emphasized a vital point which, even in 1959, the Administration refused to come to terms with: the universality with which the idea of European domination had been rejected. Constitutional reforms that did not hold out the prospect of representative government could not possibly succeed. This spirit had been recognized by M. van Hemelrijck, and it still found a faint echo in the policy outlined in October 1959 by the new Congo Minister, M. de Schrijver. 'Belgium desires that in 1960 the Congo shall have its own government, borough and urban councils.'

But Belgium's desires were being scantly regarded by the Congolese, who had begun to assert their own desires. Many – though by no means all – were strongly dissatisfied with the timetable produced by Belgium: communal and territorial elections in December 1959; indirect elections for the Provincial Councils in March 1960; indirect elections for a Central Government in September 1960. Nobody spoke then about the immutable right of 'one man, one vote'. But many objected violently to the continuation of indirect elections, leaving the right of the

* Director of the Solvay Katanga Centre of Social Research at Elizabethville.

people's choice to the primary elections of local government. The 'independence-now' parties were making the running, with the moderate parties trying to put on the brake, strongly assisted by the Administration. But a different kind of threat, not mentioned publicly at the time by any official quarter, was building up in the Lower Congo.

KASA'S KINGDOM

Kasavubu's plans to create a single tribal authority owing its allegiance to Abako had made considerable progress. His personal authority, though not yet decisive, was enormous. We now know from official sources how critical the position was that faced the Administration in the Lower Congo in 1959; the extent of the deterioration was hidden at the time. Abako's passive resistance campaign, dismissed as 'intimidation', had, in fact become a popular movement. Refusal to pay taxes was widespread. Accused and plaintiffs refused to answer summonses to appear in the native traditional courts; tribal judges, too, stayed away. The Abako operated its own system of courts. All administrative measures dealing with land and health were ignored.

The Administration had clearly begun to lose its grip on the situation; worse than that, Abako was succeeding in setting up its independent, parallel administration. In the competition for allegiance between the two, Abako was winning. It was not only the administrators who were worried; businessmen in the Lower Congo were beginning to feel the pressure. Some joined the Abako as members; many more subscribed to it. Among the missions – both Catholic and Protestant – there was strong support for Abako, and competition for influence. The Jesuits, in particular, supported Kasavubu. The Protestants supported his chief lieutenant, Daniel Kanza. But there was a third religious influence, nascent rather than active – Kibanguism.

Simon Kibangu was a Protestant teacher, who had set himself up in 1921 as the Messiah. With his twelve Apostles he taught a tribal religion opposed both to Christianity and to the Europeans. His movement spread rapidly among the Bakongo, and it was put down only after many years of turbulence. Although there had been many Christian breakaway sects in the Congo, none

had flourished so strongly as Kibangu's. It was finally crushed with great severity. Kibangu, given a life sentence, died a repentant Roman Catholic in 1956. But his belated conversion and death did not spell the end of Kibanguism. Its religious teachings had political undertones that became dominant in Abako's teaching. Although its leaders did not share the anti-white racialism of many of Abako's supporters (Kasavubu and Kanza both remain staunchly attached to their Christian faith), they nevertheless had to take account of the influence of Kibanguism. Kasavubu managed, without the reproach of the Church, to establish a close relationship with the Kibanguists.

Abako's appeal was twofold. It called forth the tribal nationalism of the Bakongo, and it asserted a spirit of independence against Belgian domination. Kasavubu's dream of restoring the ancient Bakongo Kingdom by eliminating the colonial frontiers which divided the tribe into three, provided a romantic impulse to the independence movement. After the Leopoldville riots and Kasavubu's triumphant return from his brief exile in Belgium, he found himself hailed as the King of the Bakongo. Stripping himself of his *évolué* clothes, he would appear before his enthusiastic followers dressed in traditional leopard skin.

By the end of 1959 the position of the Belgians in the Lower Congo had grown almost hopeless. Their authority could be restored only by military force. But could it be successfully restored? The prospect of a colonial war could not be lightly viewed. In normal circumstances it might have been possible for the Belgians to undertake a repressive campaign to deal with the dissidents. But the situation was not normal. There could be no assurance that a large-scale war in the Lower Congo would not be the signal for risings in other parts of the Congo. All the signs supported the view that a general revolt might easily occur. It was one of the strongest factors in the minds of the Belgians in determining their subsequent policies.

MONTHS OF TWILIGHT

1959 ended as it had begun – in bloodshed. The first serious intertribal fighting had broken out in Kasai in the middle of the year between the Lulua and the Baluba. With the unfamiliar prospect

of self-government, albeit provincial, opening up before them, the Lulua tribesmen suddenly discovered that, through all the years while they had followed the hunt and lazed in the indolence of tribal pastoralism, the Baluba had zestfully entered the new society; they had become strongly entrenched in the white man's world. If the white man went, the Baluba would be in a strong position to take over and impose their authority on the Lulua who, traditionally, had dominated that part of the world until the Belgians came. The Lulua tribal leaders decided the time had come to assert their right to power; their followers interpreted this as a sign to drive the Baluba intruders out of their capital, Luluabourg. The Belgians were awkwardly caught between the spears and the arrows of the conflicting sides. M. van Hemelrijck (who was still Minister of the Congo at the time) was horrified by the responsibility Belgian officials had to carry for dealing with this violence. It was another reason he subsequently gave for his decision to transfer a large measure of responsibility on to the Congolese themselves.

The October statement* by his successor, M. de Schrijver, set off a strenuous competition between the political parties: the 'extremists' rejected his timetable for constitutional advancement, and called for the proposed elections in December to be postponed pending further consultations; the 'moderates' welcomed the proposal. In this rivalry Lumumba showed himself to be the leader of the extreme elements; he was, indeed, most impatient of any delay in granting independence. His demands had grown to outright and immediate independence, thus splitting his party. Albert Kalonji, the Baluba leader in the Diamond District of Kasai, denounced his leader's 'immoderation', formed his own right wing within the MNC, and joined the ranks of the federalists. The contest between the moderates and extremists produced an explosion in Stanleyville where M. Lumumba was campaigning. He was arrested and sentenced to six months' imprisonment. Later he complained of severe police ill-treatment; to prove it he was able to show the unhealed scars on his wrists when he was brought to Brussels in January 1960 to attend the Round Table conference.

The decision to hold this conference in Brussels with the

* See page 68.

Congolese leaders was taken by the Belgian Government in a last desperate effort to retrieve once again the initiative they had lost during the year. The Congo was drifting towards anarchy; Belgian power was no longer able to maintain the law and order which for so long they had managed to keep with such exemplary if stern efficiency. It was time to decide the country's future.

Chapter 8

FIGHT OR ABDICATE

> *'Does anybody really think, in view of the realities of the situation and the nature of the problem, that the Government, any Government, could have acted differently? It is inevitable that the Congo should evolve to independence and it is impossible to prevent it from acquiring this new kind of political freedom. The Government has done right to show a generous attitude in conceding independence.'*
>
> M. EYSKENS, Belgian Prime Minister
> (February, 1960)

THE Round Table Conference opened in Brussels on 20 January 1960. Within a week the fate of the Congo was sealed: it was to become completely independent within six months. The Belgians were completely unprepared for the swiftness with which events had moved.

But it was not only the Belgians who were unprepared. The news reached the second All-African People's Conference in Tunis soon after its opening. Everybody in the hall was silent for a moment; then the applause broke loose. It was a memorable moment in the history of Pan-Africanism. Only a short year earlier Patrice Lumumba had appeared on its platform at the first conference in Accra; then he was an unknown leader from a country without a nationalist movement. Who could have predicted the swift transformation of his, and of the Congo's fortunes? Certainly not the Belgian Prime Minister. In opening the Round Table Conference his speech, though accommodating, was self-assured. 'You, the delegates of the Congo, are present in order to talk with us. From the bottom of our hearts we beg you to speak without fear: let yourselves be guided only by what you esteem is for the good of all the Congolese people. Speak to us freely and without bitterness . . . at the start we are all agreed on one essential factor – the Congo's independence.'

On that point there *was* agreement; but on what terms? The

Belgians did not envisage immediate independence. They believed it was possible to achieve a Belgian-Congolese Community. They hoped, too, that their King might still be recognized as King of an independent Congo. What had gone wrong? As usually happens when a nation suffers from self-deception, the Belgians could not even then bring themselves to understand the extent of Congolese opposition to their continued rule. And, as invariably happens too, in similar situations, their political intelligence reflected what the Government wanted to believe. The reports were that the 'extremists' demanding immediate independence were in a tiny minority. All that was needed was to arrange a 'representative' conference, where the results could be made to speak for themselves. They did; but not in the way the Belgians had intended.

The conference was attended by 81 Congolese delegates – 62 to represent about 20 parties, and 19 delegates to represent tribal and traditional elements. Of the 62 politicians 32 could reasonably be relied upon to take a 'moderate' line; this was more or less guaranteed by the Congo Administration. The bulk of these comprised 22 delegates in the coalition of the Parti National du Progrès (PNP) which was directly financed and guided by the Administration. Their support, together with the tribal and traditional elements should, in normal circumstances, have ensured a 'properly weighted' conference. It was neatly calculated. Only one factor had been overlooked: the pressure of Congolese nationalism. Not even the 'moderates' dared to face their supporters without having pledged themselves to immediate independence. The success of the 'independence now' movement in the December elections* had finally brought that truth home to the Congolese, if not yet to the Belgians.

* The election in December 1959 had taken place despite the opposition to it. In Leopoldville the boycott of Abako and its then ally, PSA, was almost complete. In Orientale, Lumumba's candidates won the urban areas, while the PNP held its ground in the rural areas. In Kasai, Kalonji's MNC and the Lulua tribal organization shared the victory. In Katanga, Tshombe's Conakat won a majority, but Balubakat polled well. In Kivu the PNP tendency appeared to have won against the nationalist-minded CEREA. And in Equator the PNP forces won against a determined bid by the MNC. On the face of it these results showed strong, but by no means decisive, support for the Administration-sponsored PNP; but they foreshadowed the rising fortunes of Lumumba, the strength of Tshombe in Katanga, and the power of Abako in the Lower Congo.

The Belgians' unpreparedness is shown by their proposal that the question of independence be deferred until later in the agenda. The challenge that it should be taken first was easily carried. The unexpected happened. There was a *unanimous* demand for complete independence. Faced with this demand the Belgians had to decide: either they must accept or fight.

The Belgian Government (a coalition between the Christian Social Party and the Liberals) was temperamentally inclined against repression; Catholic interests favoured concessions, as did an influential section of Big Business. King Baudouin, too, was under strong liberal influences. And the Government was under no illusions about the dangers already threatening them in the Lower Congo. They accepted the demand for complete independence.

But the second blow struck them even more sharply: a motion that independence should be achieved on 30 June 1960 was carried by an overwhelming majority. By then it was too late to resist, even if the will to do so had been there. The Belgians decided to rely on gratitude for their past achievements, on the indisputable need for continued Belgian financial and technical aid, and on the goodwill that would be earned by a spirit of generosity in conceding immediate independence. These factors, they believed would ensure close cooperation between an independent Congo and themselves. If things subsequently went wrong, the reasons must be looked for in deeper causes. On the face of it, the Belgian decision was boldly realistic. In fact, they had no alternative (as the Prime Minister later said) once they found the Congolese leaders completely agreed on the vital principles. A closer examination of what happened at the Round Table Conference provides some clues for the Belgians' subsequent failure.

BLACK FACES IN BRUSSELS

The atmosphere in Brussels in January 1960 was decidedly unusual. The sight of black faces in the city was comparatively rare, because it had been the policy of the Belgians not to allow Congolese to study, or rarely even to visit, Europe. The sight of two hundred* black faces in the streets and squares and hotels of

* Although there were only eighty-one official delegates, most parties sent teams of advisers as well.

Brussels made the *presence* of the Congo a reality for the majority of the Belgians for the first time in their lives. People stood unashamedly and stared; with the help of pictures in their daily papers – suddenly given over to front-page coverage of the doings and sayings of the hitherto anonymous Congolese – they tried to spot the different personalities. When I was walking one day with Patrice Lumumba a woman came up and asked him who he was. 'There,' she said triumphantly, 'I told you it was that man Lumumba.'

The Belgians seemed to enjoy their personal discovery of the Congolese as much as their guests enjoyed Brussels despite its intense, bright coldness. The younger delegates took over a down-town café and turned it into a nightly haunt for African dancing and singing. It became the social venue for Congolese of all parties. Many of the leaders were now meeting each other for the first time, and making friends – or enemies. One Sunday morning I sat patiently by for half an hour in the foyer of a Brussels hotel while Moise Tshombe, foolishly elegant and suave, loudly lectured Lumumba; that argument ended with Lumumba saying three crisp sentences to Tshombe, who treated his curt dismissal with pleasant good humour.

Lumumba had been flown straight from prison to Brussels after the decision on independence had been taken. The Belgians were clearly embarrassed by the evidence of ill-treatment he showed on his arrival; the official explanation was that his handcuffs had been rather roughly twisted when he had refused to obey a command. But Lumumba's mood was all forgiveness and friendship; there was no evidence of any feeling that one good twist deserved another. Lumumba quickly became the popular figure at the conference. He was lodged in room 53 in the Cosmopolitan Hotel. It was a small, plain room with two plain narrow beds, both too short for the length of their occupant. There were two narrow tables, covered with bottles of vitamin tablets, and strewn with scraps of paper on which were scribbled designs for an independence flag. The half-open cupboard door showed two extra suits and two pairs of shoes. The telephone never stopped ringing; young men padded in and out of the room constantly; some of them went barefooted and wore their early morning pyjamas.

I found Lumumba's attitude at that time distinctly cooperative, though inflexible on some points. Despite constant interruptions he talked without losing his thread for several hours. 'In a young state you must have strong and visible powers. Mistakes have been made in the past, but we now want to set up, with the help of the powers who have been in Africa, a powerful *bloc*. If this does not happen, it will be the fault of the West. We are friendly to the West which has helped us up to now. In the future our relations must be based on equality. We can walk hand in hand with the West to construct in Black Africa a grand, well-organized society.' He spoke of his great attachment to Dr Nkrumah. 'I have been greatly impressed by Nkrumah's praise for the British.'

The second Congo Headquarters was at the ritzy Plaza Hotel where the Abako delegation stayed. Unlike Lumumba's, Kasavubu's room was large and elegantly decorated in Regency red-and-white striped wallpaper, with satin curtains and coverings. But he was much more difficult to talk to at first. He sat squatly in a stiff chair, his chunky body tense, his short, thick legs planted firmly on the ground. He peered stolidly from behind thick lenses. Two good-looking, courteous young acolytes sat uneasily on one of the beds, interrupting only when appealed to for confirmation of what their leader was saying. Below us a Sunday afternoon tea-dance was going on. The lobby of the hotel was full of delegates and of strangers firmly stuck behind their papers: some were plain-clothes policemen keeping an eye on what was going on; others were 'contact men' trying to nobble the delegates with promises of foreign aid and propositions for commercial transactions.

Kasavubu had just come in from an Abako caucus meeting that had started at ten that morning and finished at four o'clock. It was typical of the strain under which everybody was working. Unlike Lumumba he had not a good word to say for the Belgians. 'They have agreed to talk at last, but they are not willing to give us the means to achieve independence. The Belgian authorities have committed suicide. There is a complete lack of confidence in the Administration. They are no longer capable of carrying on, but they are also not prepared to let anybody else carry on. There must obviously be some time for preparation, but this

requires some transitional power other than the Belgians'. There are no national parties in the Congo, other than those organized by the Administration, such as the PNP. Originally the Administration also encouraged the MNC, but that is no longer the case. The question of a single, united Congo is simply a matter of "words". Whatever the "word", there will be unity. There is no question of Abako not cooperating to achieve the country's unity. I never wanted to separate the Lower Congo from the rest of the country to form a separate Kingdom. That is simply colonialist propaganda against me. They even go so far as to call me a communist.'

I asked him why the Belgians had changed their policies in the Congo. He explained that 'in the past the Belgians did not have enough contact with the people to know what was really happening, and did not heed even the information they received. They were surprised to discover how strong the spirit of independence had become. Every Congo leader has been caught up in this spirit. Now it is 30 June, whether independence works or not. There is no question of delaying it.'

Why was he suspicious of the Belgians? 'They are still trying to divide everybody. Only a provisional government can organize proper elections. No elections organized by the Belgian Administration can succeed.' Was he in the pay of foreigners as was being alleged? 'This is simply propaganda against me. Admittedly my family live in Brazzaville, the capital of the French Congo, but they have lived there a long time.'

His policy was 'an open door for all countries to help in the Congo. For the moment we are all nationalists. We will guarantee the Belgians' economic interests.' His advocacy, of a loose federation was to promote true national unity. 'As national unity developed it would be possible to strengthen the central institutions. Congolese feelings of oneness are only now beginning.'

AFRICANS BAD AND GOOD

The Belgian Press had cast Kasavubu in the role of the Bad African: day after day he was accused of plotting with Belgium's enemies. Although he was seen daily with Professor van

Bilsen,* he was charged with working with the agents of M. Soustelle, France's arch-reactionary, with a view to 'stealing' the Lower Congo (the site of the Inga project) for the French Congo. In those days Kasavubu was certainly seeing lots of people, and some of them were 'strange'. He had made a mysterious trip to France, but returned without staying there. Kasavubu was quite willing, however, to clear up the mystery. 'I want to make sure,' he told me at the time, 'that when the Congo becomes independent we will not have to rely only on the Belgians.'

Kasavubu had started the conference in a strong position. He secured the initiative by forming a Cartel (a coalition of parties) between Abako, the Kalonji wing of MNC, and the Parti Solidaire Africain (the second largest party in Leopoldville province). This gave him the support of twenty-two of the sixty-two political delegates. His strength equalled that of the officially approved PNP. Lumumba's MNC at first had only three delegates. Tshombe was running his own ticket with four delegates. The other eleven delegates belonged to four different parties.

In the first week of the conference Kasavubu lost his initiative through tactical mistakes. Not only did he succeed in splitting the Abako Cartel, he split his own party as well. The Protestant wing of the Abako, led by Daniel Kanza and his sons, joined in the Belgian attack on him as 'the agent of foreign powers'. Kasavubu withdrew from the conference, threatening to boycott it unless it agreed to create an interim government immediately to whom authority could be entrusted to run the country and to prepare for elections. He also demanded an immediate decision on the federal future of the independent Congo. His tactics united the conference against him. In the end he was compelled to return to the conference table, but by then he had lost his formidable position. Lumumba took the initiative from Kasavubu, and his only effective rivals were the PNP.

The PNP was the force on which the Belgians were staking their future, covering themselves with a side-bet on Lumumba's

* Professor A. J. J. van Bilsen, who enjoys the confidence of the Catholic hierarchy, was the author of the Thirty Year Plan for Congo independence (see page 52) which, at the time of its publication in 1955, was condemned by the authorities as being dangerously idealistic and wildly unrealistic. How distant his 'radical' plans for independence by 1985 seemed in January 1960!

MNC. The rank outsider was Abako. The split in its ranks was gleefully hailed; well-informed circles confidently predicted that the Kanza faction would win and that Kasavubu would disappear from the scene. Once again their predictions were to be proved wrong. PNP was to be defeated, and Kasavubu was to defeat his opponents in Abako with hardly a struggle. The Belgian Press made no secret of the Administration's support for the PNP; their leaders were praised and courted. But the Conakat leader, Moise Tshombe, was by no means popular. Officials and the Press said quite openly that he was being subsidized by certain financial interests, whose tactics they deplored. It was only much later that Tshombe, for a fleeting moment, became the darling of Brussels.

The Belgian line was now plain. It was to encourage support for the 'moderates', especially the PNP and the traditional elements who might be relied upon to follow a pro-Belgian policy; to work quietly for a Belgian-Congolese Community after independence; to promote the idea of a common loyalty to the Crown; to safeguard the integrity of the country after independence, and to ensure the safety of Belgian economic interests. These objectives were to be achieved in several ways: by treaties guaranteeing Belgium's legitimate interests; by underpinning the Administration and economic development through the provision of technical and financial aid, and by attracting foreign capital. The Belgians also insisted on the retention of their military bases. They really saw themselves administering the country under an African Government, until such time as the Congolese were ready to take over themselves. This was precisely what the dismissed Minister of the Congo, M. van Hemelrijck, had envisaged nine months earlier. The difference was that the initiative still lay partly with the Belgians when he had proposed it; by the time his ideas came to be accepted the initiative had been lost. But for many Belgians the only question of real importance that remained was how best to protect their vast economic interests in the Congo.

HOSTAGE TO FORTUNE

Estimates of Belgian investments and commitments in the Congo

vary greatly; nor is it easy to disentangle the precise inter-relationship of the economies of the two countries. Belgium's financial involvement in the Congo has been variously put at between £1,500 millions and £2,450 millions, depending on what is taken into calculation, and what valuation is put on shareholdings. At the beginning of 1959 the value of shares owned by Belgian investors in colonial enterprises was officially given as £420 millions. This figure did not include investments in private enterprises – factories, restaurants, hotels, buildings, farming, and commercial trading concerns.

The growth of political uncertainty in 1959 had set off a wild flight of capital from the Congo; by the end of that year it exceeded £35 million. In 1960 it was running at the rate of £7 million a month before the Belgians finally decided to intervene. They persuaded the principal financial groups to transfer some of their capital back to the Congo, and to make *advance* payments to the colony's Treasury representing future taxes, duties, and dividends amounting to £17,500,000. This policy in effect pledged the country's future earnings to meeting its past and current deficits, thus seriously threatening the future liquidity of the independent Congo's finances, already heavily burdened by service charges on its public debt.

At the beginning of 1960 the Congo Government was faced with a £40 million deficit, the result of three years of declining fortunes caused by the drop in world commodity prices since 1956. To this figure must be added a further £30 million which was the estimated deficit for 1960 – an estimate made before the catastrophe. To help meet these enormous deficits the Belgians had roused themselves to an unprecedented national effort. They proposed to grant the Congo a subsidy in 1960 amounting to nearly £19 million, apart from £4 million allocated to the Investment Fund of the Overseas Territories of the European Economic Community, and £7 million pledged to the creation of a Belgo-Congolese Development Corporation. But these subsidies, amounted to less than half the deficits of 1956–9.

Nor did this constitute the full liabilities to be assumed by the first Congo Government. It inherited a Public Debt of £350 million which had been raised and guaranteed by the Belgians. The servicing and redemption of this Debt required almost 25

per cent of the Congo's annual budget, far and away the highest debt burden bequeathed to any of the former African colonies. There are two softening features about the size of this Debt. First, the Congo Government inherited a Portfolio of assets valued at about £240 million, comprising a large slice of the holdings in the Union Minière, and outright ownership of several large public utilities; but this inheritance contributed nothing to ensuring the immediate liquidity of the new Government. Secondly, full allowance should be made for the fact that the greatest part of the Debt had been incurred in development work within the Congo.*

Belgian economic policy in the Congo was laid down in 1908 when parliament, in agreeing to take the country over from the King, decided that the finances of the two countries should be kept entirely separate. The justification for this policy was that Belgium should not profit from the Congo. But this attractive-sounding proposition ignored the vast benefits the Belgian economy derived from the colony's resources. Apart from profits on investment (which, it might properly be argued, represented normal business returns), Belgium thrived on the fabulous gold earnings derived from Congo exports. For example, the Congo contributed greatly towards sustaining the Belgian economy throughout the Second World War. It was not altogether a one-sided deal; the Congo benefited, for example, by its ability to raise capital on the strength of Belgium's security. But the balance of advantage decidedly favoured the Belgians as *Inforcongo* admitted in 1959. Nevertheless she made no monetary contributions to the Congo until 1959.

Belgium's financial relations with her colony were criticized from the outset. Thus, early in 1909, E. D. Morel raised important questions in a memorandum sent to the British Government on behalf of the Congo Reform Association.† He pointed out that the colony was already then saddled with an annual debt charge of £236,654. The Belgian Government, as one of its first acts in taking over the colony from Leopold, raised a loan of £1,340,671, to be serviced and repaid by the Congo itself. It was to be spent, *inter alia*, for the following purposes:

* This point is elaborated in the next chapter.

† E. D. Morel. *The Future of the Congo*, 1909.

Various enterprises connected in part with organizing the Belgian occupation of the Katanga	£958,182
Purchase of a battery for the Fort below Boma; purchase of artillery, arms, and ammunition	£80,000
Subsidy to King Leopold	£132,000

Morel's petition complained that Belgium also expected the natives to pay £8,944 for the upkeep of a Museum at Tervuren in Belgium, and £2,740 for the upkeep of the Colonial Institute.

The Colonial Minister's budgetary estimates for 1910 required that the natives of the colony also find the following sums:

Annuity to Prince Albert until he succeeds to the Belgian throne	£4,800
Annuity to Princess Clementine until she marries	£3,000
Annuities to the former officials of the Crown domain	£2,400
Annuities to the congregation of the missionaries of Scheut	£2,600
Upkeep of tropical greenhouses and colonial collections at Laeken in Belgium	£16,000

'I would merely observe', added Morel, 'that the Belgian Government, alone among the governments of Christendom, claims the right to govern a tropical dependency in Africa by means of enormous taxes wrung from its inhabitants, and by the issue of loans the interest upon which it expects its African subjects to pay; and caps this claim by demanding of these same African subjects that they shall provide subsidies for the Belgian heir apparent and his sister, for ex-officials, for missionary, medical, and philanthropic institutions in Belgium; that they shall provide for the upkeep of museums, institutes, and tropical greenhouses in Belgium, and that they shall even pay the salaries of the governing body of the Congo in Brussels, and the cost of newspapers and periodicals presumably intended for the edification of the members of that body. . . .'

AGREEMENT ON PAPER

The conference ended on 20 February. There was a cheerful reception at the Palace. Only Joseph Kasavubu stayed away. No other leader – Belgian or Congolese – gave the least sign of anxiety about the future. The Prime Minister, M. Eyskens, proclaimed: 'The task has been accomplished . . . I can fearlessly assert in an atmosphere of mutual trust and confidence, almost without parallel in history.' The King recalled the memory of Leopold II. 'An exceptional and admirable factor is that my great-great-uncle did not achieve this union through conquest, but essentially by peaceful methods. . . .'

Lumumba's speech was brimful of goodwill for the Belgians and for the Europeans living in the Congo. 'It is with their collaboration that we wish to create the Congolese nation, in which all will find their share of happiness and satisfaction.' Even Tshombe was happy; he welcomed the proposal to avoid decentralization in the new State. 'Thanks to this basic reform, the independent Congo of tomorrow will escape the dislocation which threatened it.' He was to be the first to retreat from the Brussels agreement.

The final agreement left a great deal unsaid and undone. Economic and other guarantees were to be worked out at a later conference. The constitution itself was left vague, with no clear-cut decision on whether it would be a federal or a unitary state. All that was laid down was the division of functions between the centre and the provinces, with a partition of authority between them.

BELGIAN POLICY ON THE CONGO'S INTEGRITY

The Round Table Conference laid it down that the Congo should achieve its independence 'within its present frontiers'. In the light of the subsequent controversy over Katanga's bid for independence it is important to recall Belgium's policy on the integrity of the Congo. During their rule the Belgians naturally argued that there could be no question of any of the six provinces seceding. This attitude was stated, time and again, with special