



A message from the Governor-General
of the Belgian Congo

The Belgian Congo's War Effort

by PIERRE RYCKMANS

Since the invasion of Belgium on May 10, 1940, the Belgian Congo has had but one object in life. All its problems have been rolled into one: how to contribute most effectively to the common allied victory.

The home army's surrender was felt in the Congo as a grave defeat, a sore trial—nothing more. It was regarded as purely military, with no political significance whatsoever. The King, as Commander in Chief of the army, shared the captivity of his men; but the Government, the country, the King himself, as head of the State, had not submitted to the invader. The capitulation of the *home* army involved, neither in fact nor in intent, the *colonial* army.

The French Government, in search of a scapegoat for the wrath of a disillusioned people; world opinion, without accurate sources of information, might interpret the surrender of May 28 as an abandonment of the alliance. In the Congo, no such mistake was made. The laying down of arms was not contemplated for an instant. By noon on that very 28th of May, even before the proclamation of the Belgian Government, the Leopoldville radio took the cue for the future: "The war is to go on." We went into it to defend our territory; there can be no question of getting out until our territory is won back.

The French armistice of June 23, 1940, remained for us still more definitely *res inter alios acta*, though its actual consequences were perhaps even more serious than those of the occupation of Belgium. At the outset of the invasion, the Belgian Government, the rear services for the army, the Departments of National Defense and of the Colonies, had been established in France. All young Belgians of military age had been evacuated to that country. All colonial activities had set up headquarters there. Every precaution seemed to have been taken so that, even with the mother country invaded, the life of the Colony could go on almost normally until the day of victory. The French collapse swept away all these precautions, and turned our defeat into disaster. The Congo found itself suddenly cut off for a number of weeks, detached from the Belgian Government deprived moreover of its freedom of action in France itself—out of touch with what remained of the Belgian army, with any of the organizing forces in Europe which directed its activities in times of peace, bereft of all support either military or civilian, obliged to go unaided, without the constant flow of fresh energy so necessary in a colony whose climate is debilitating. In 1914-18 the home army had fur-



nished three fourths of the European elements in the mobilized forces of the Congo, and had contributed largely to the civilian ranks in colonial administration as well.

No more than on the 28th of May, was there any thought of giving up the fight because of the French armistice; but all our plans of activity had to be revised and started again *ab ovo*.

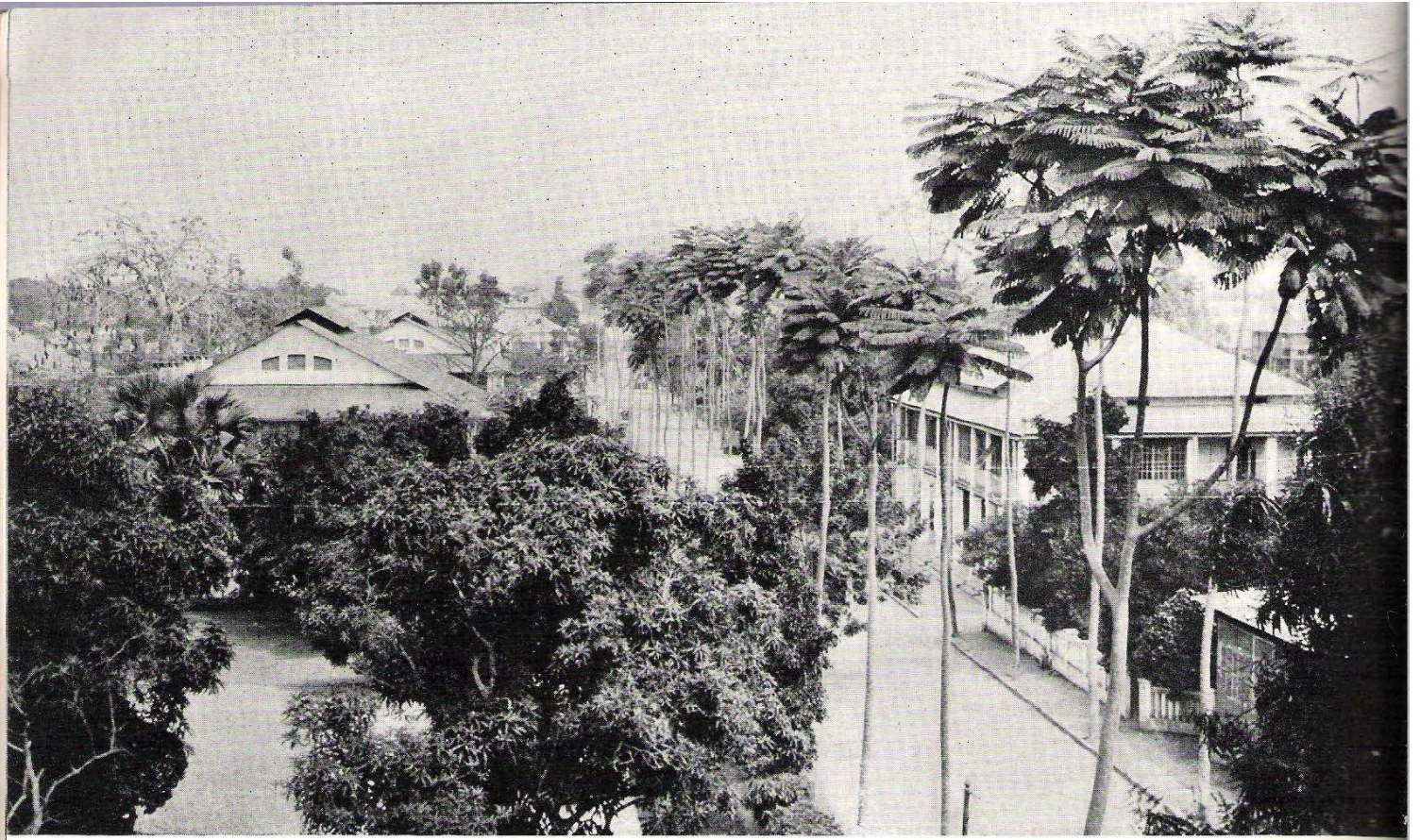
With a total white population of less than thirty thousand, women and children included, and a third of that number belonging to other nationalities, we had to adapt ourselves to hold out for the duration of the war. The greatest possible force had to be mobilized, and our production reorganized to meet the needs of the Allied armies.

Palm oil, butter, and other palm products, coffee, cotton, and copal constituted almost half of our exports prior to the war. Now, almost fifty per cent of these products remained unsold. The port of Antwerp, which had taken three fourths of our exports, was now in enemy hands. Trade between the Congo and the United States, before the war, was all one-sided. We imported automobile parts and mineral oils; our exports in that direction were confined to a small amount of palm oil. In the three months from April to June 1941, we sent four hundred million francs worth of raw materials to the United States.

These few figures bear eloquent witness, I think, to the character and scope of our economic war effort, for it goes without saying that practically all the new American purchases go straight to plants for making munitions.

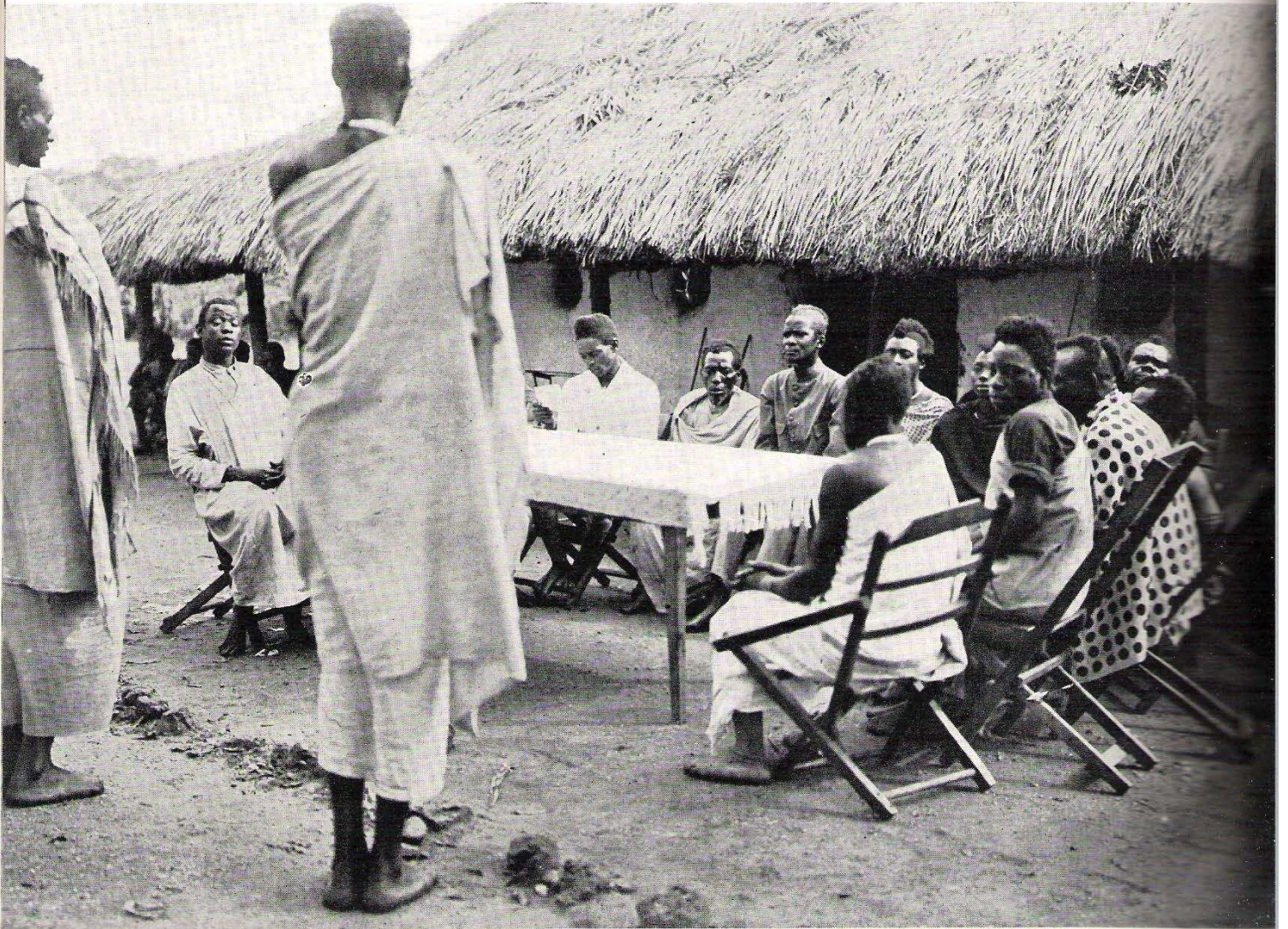
As for our military effort, the part played by Congo troops in the Abyssinian campaign has been revealed to the American public by war correspondent George Weller, of the Chicago Daily News, in terms which have filled all Belgians with pride. Our soldiers are ready to go wherever they are called.

The extension of the war to the Pacific, involving the active participation of the United States, has again profoundly changed the aspects of the problem. But, in the full measure of our ability, wherever we may be called, we will answer: Present.



View of Leopoldville, seen from the balcony of the A. B. C. Hotel.

Native chief administering justice



The Belgian Congo in the War

by *MAX HORN*

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I.—The Political Status of Belgium Overseas.

It need hardly be recalled that in 1908 Belgium took over the sovereign rights, assets and commitments of the Congo Free State, at that time an independent country in personal union with the Kingdom of Belgium under the Belgian crown. An area of roughly one million square miles in the heart of Africa became the Belgian Congo Colony. After the World War—in 1925—the League of Nations entrusted a mandate to Belgium over the adjoining Ruanda-Urundi Territories, formerly two districts of German East Africa. The area of these Territories is comparatively small (about 25,000 square miles) but they are very thickly populated, the number of their inhabitants being estimated at over three million, while the population of the Congo Colony numbers somewhat less than 12 million. They are in all respects administered as a part of the Colony, although they have a separate treasury, the only practical distinction being that it is incumbent on the Congo Government to report on their progress to the League of Nations, and not only to the Belgian Parliament.

A uniform administration of the Colony and Territories was greatly facilitated by the fact that the humanitarian policies and liberal economic system prescribed by the League to Mandatory Powers were already in force in the Belgian Congo. The Belgian Act of Parliament of October 18, 1908, known as the Colonial Charter, lays down the fundamental lines on which the Belgian Possessions shall be governed. This Act embodies a Bill of Rights that safeguards the personal liberties of the people—the natives in particular. It affords equal opportunities to all in the matter of trade regardless of nationality, race or creed, and makes it a primary duty for the Government to promote the spiritual and physical welfare of the native population, notably through encouraging the spread of Christianity and scientific research.

Furthermore it sets out the Constitution of the Colony. Financially the Congo is a separate entity, distinct from Belgium. As regards legislation, the Congo Government is granted a wide autonomy, the only measures subjected to a vote of the Belgian Parliament being amendments to the Charter, foreign treaties, and the Colony's annual budget estimates and its ways and means. The debate on the budget affords Parliament an opportunity to discuss the conduct of the Congo Administration. At the head of this Administration stands the Minister of Colonies, who is assisted by a number of departmental officers and is at the same time a member of the Belgian Cabinet. Legislative enactments are issued in the form of Royal Decrees under the responsibility of the Minister of Colonies after they have been examined and reported on (except in cases of emergency) by the Colonial Council, an advisory body, some of whose

members are Government nominees (mostly retired high Congo officials), the others being appointed by Parliament. The Governor-General of the Congo and Ruanda-Urundi is subordinate to the Minister of Colonies but holds extensive executive powers and has authority to enact temporary legislative measures (Ordinances).

While the Belgian Government—at present established in London and comprising M. de Vleeschauwer, Minister of Colonies—remains responsible for the general policies of the Congo Colony and Ruanda-Urundi Territories, these lands—to which we shall refer as “the Congo” in the following paragraphs—form today an almost completely self-governing entity. When the Belgian Government declared that Italy having committed acts of war against Belgian nationals and Belgian interests, Belgium would take a corresponding stand against Italy, Belgium Overseas—the Congo—already at war with Germany since May 1940, became an active ally of Great Britain in every field. It is today associated fully and unreservedly with the United Nations.

Let us now outline the steps that have been taken with a view to maintaining and increasing the Colony's ability to further the common cause.

II.—War Measures.

(a) *Non-military safeguards against enemy action, and economic measures.*

Immediately after the outbreak of war—on May 10, 1940—the Governor General of the Congo ordered the internment of every male German national of military age, other German subjects being placed under supervision. At the same time German assets in the Congo were “blocked,” and officials appointed for their administration. A few days later, persons other than citizens of friendly countries were prohibited from circulating in the Colony without a permit. Since June 18, 1940, unauthorized gatherings in public places are forbidden.

Corporations formed under Belgian law and corporations formed under Congo law are authorized respectively by the Belgian Act of February 2, 1940 and the Congo Decree of February 19, 1940 to transfer their seats of operations in the event of war, and by the same enactments the control of their assets situated outside of an area under enemy influence is vested exclusively in their representatives resident outside of that area. Practically all corporations operating in the Congo, in which there are important Belgian, British or American interests, are today controlled from the Congo. In some instances it was found that the agents of a Corporation resident in the Colony were without adequate powers of attorney, while their Board of principals, being detained in Belgium, were unable to issue supplementary proxies. In order to remedy this difficulty, an Ordinance of

August 16, 1940 enables the Governor General to grant, at the request of a director or manager of a corporation, the powers of the Board, partners or shareholders to such persons and to such an extent as he may deem suitable. The Governor General has exercised this power in a number of instances.

Exports and imports are subjected to Government control, partly with a view to precluding direct or indirect trading with the enemy, and partly for monetary reasons, notably in order to strengthen the dollar holdings of the Sterling Area, as will be set out in the following chapter; but especially with a desire of husbanding essential goods of which the United Nations stand in need for other purposes. This consideration inspired an Ordinance of July 29, 1941, by which all enterprises are requested to furnish returns on metallurgical products in their possession and the Governor General is empowered to determine at his discretion the uses to which such products shall be applied.

While every effort is made to promote the output of strategic materials, the exportation of agricultural products is subjected to new regulations: at a time when the Congo is supplying foreign outlets with goods the bulk of which went to Belgium in pre-war years, the Government feels particularly justified in establishing stringent rules directed to uphold the good repute of the Colony's products; and there is a great economy of ocean tonnage thanks to these selective measures.

The Congo has a currency of its own, distinct from that of Belgium; but for reasons of convenience, the gold equivalent of the Congo franc was fixed in 1926 at one-fifth of the belga's gold equivalent. Immediately after the German aggression, the Belgian Government entered into a monetary arrangement with Britain and France, whose currencies at the time were stabilized in regard to each other. This agreement fixed a standard rate of exchange of 24 belgas to the English pound sterling, and a corresponding ratio between the belga and the French franc. The Congo Government substituted the same parities for the Congo franc in lieu of its previous gold equivalent. In the first days of June 1940, at the pressing request of the French authorities, the belga was devaluated to the level of the French franc, and its parity with sterling was consequently reduced to 35.325 belgas to the pound. Under the same pressure the Congo Government reluctantly followed suit, enacting that the Central Bank of the Colony—"Banque du Congo Belge" or Congo Bank—would thenceforth base its buying and selling rates for foreign currencies on a parity of 176.625 francs to the English pound. (With a rate of exchange of about four dollars to the pound, the dollar is roughly equivalent to 44 Congo francs.) Whereas in normal times a strongly favorable balance of trade made it easy to maintain the external value of the Congo franc at whatever parity the Government might consider advisable, facilities generously granted by the Bank of England put the Congo Bank in a position to effect without interruption all remittances abroad required by the Colony during the short period of confusion that followed the French Armistice. Very soon, however, new outlets were found for the

Congo's main products, and this expansion of exports, coupled with a severe governmental control of imports, enabled the Colony not only to cover its own requirements in foreign currencies but also to finance the Treasury of the Belgian Government-in-Exile.

Under an Ordinance of May 14, 1940 the Congo Bank—a private chartered institution under Government supervision—is granted a monopoly in foreign exchange dealings all foreign currencies derived from exports after that date being placed at its disposal. The Congo Bank controls, and is responsible for, the entire currency circulation of the Colony, specie as well as notes. Coins other than gold are treated in all respects as metallic banknotes; this is a distinctive feature of the Congo's monetary system. Despite the devaluation to which the monetary unit was subjected in June 1940 and the subsequent adjustment of prices, the amount of currency in circulation shows a relatively small increase. On the other hand bank deposits are accumulating, in unprecedented figures, pending the post-war discharge of commitments towards creditors and stockholders in occupied Belgium. The counterpart of these deposits consists mainly in corresponding sterling holdings of the Congo Bank.

Individual and corporate incomes are subjected to heavy excess-profit taxes and war taxes; and profiteering is curbed by an Ordinance of April 30, 1941, which enables the local Authorities to fix maximum prices for staple articles. Only a "normal" margin of profit may be charged, cost of replacement being taken into account.

Producers of useful goods or services are debarred from spending and investing as they might wish by the watchful severity of the Congo Import and Exchange Controls, and their earnings are limited. Yet there is no sign of their relaxing their efforts to satisfy both the increased local needs and the growing requirements of the United Nations abroad. Mining and manufacturing plants are working 24 hours a day on week-days; though some, it must be admitted, are in operation for only 12 hours on Sundays.

(b) *Military Measures.*

It would not be proper to enlarge here on the importance and location of the Congo's armed forces and their equipment. In the first World War, after Germany had attacked the Colony from her adjoining possessions in violation of the treaties that guaranteed its neutrality, Congo armies successfully carried the fight into enemy territory, the native troops and carriers displaying conspicuous bravery, hardiness and loyalty under the leadership of their white officers. They have shown that they are still made of the same metal.

At the outbreak of the present war, the Congo forces were mobilized. On May 14, 1940 the Governor General invited natives to enlist. On May 17th, he advised the (white) "voluntary territorial guards" that they must hold themselves in readiness. These guards were incorporated in the Army, on October 10th. Three weeks later all Belgians between the ages of seventeen and thirty-six not previously enrolled in the Army were drafted into "training courses."