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THE BELGIAN CONGO

Some Recent Changes

THE
BELGIAN CONGO

SOME RECENT CHANGES

RUTH SLADE

*Issued under the auspices of the
Institute of Race Relations*

OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS

LONDON NEW YORK CAPE TOWN

1960

Oxford University Press, Amen House, London E.C.4

GLASGOW NEW YORK TORONTO MELBOURNE WELLINGTON

BOMBAY CALCUTTA MADRAS KARACHI KUALA LUMPUR

CAPE TOWN IBADAN NAIROBI ACCRA

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Printed in Great Britain

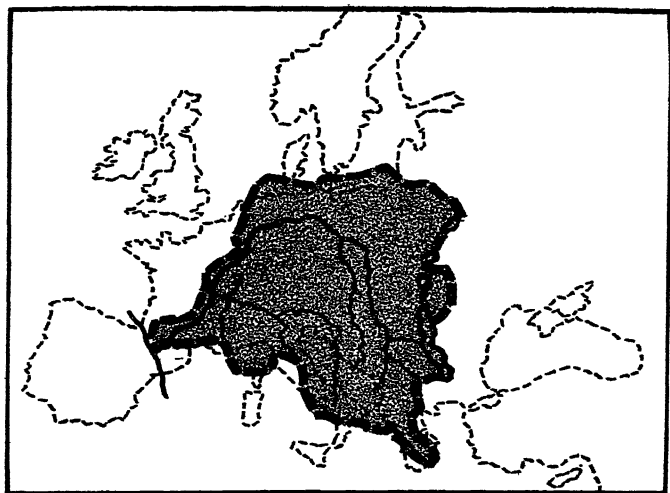
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THE writer's longer study of the Belgian Congo, which is in progress, and the visit to the Congo from which this booklet has resulted, have been made possible by the generosity of the Rockefeller Foundation, to whom her thanks and those of the Institute of Race Relations are due.



MAP 1. The Congo superimposed on Europe



MAP 2. The Congo as part of Africa



MAP 3. The Belgian Congo.

I. PATERNALISM

The Isolation of the Congo from the Rest of Africa

FOR long the Congo appeared to be a peaceful island untouched by African anti-colonialism. Even the maps produced in Belgium seem designed to convey this impression of an isolated island fortress; often they give only the sharp outline of that immense square of Central Africa, with its two tapering additions, the one pushing West to provide an outlet to the Atlantic, and the other South-eastward down into the Copperbelt. Then on the Eastern border they show the Belgian trusteeship territory of Ruanda-Urundi adjoining the Congo like an afterthought. Apart from this, however, there is little indication that it is not water which surrounds the Congo, but other African territories. From the maps they see in the schoolroom most Belgian children would be able to draw a passable outline sketch of their country's colony, but there would probably be few who could set it in its African surroundings.

Until recently, of course, the need to place the Congo in relation to its African context was not particularly apparent; only now has this become inescapable. Theoretically the evolution of the Congo was to have taken place in a logical succession of slow and easy stages; mass education was to provide a literate population before the education of an *élite* was considered, and a long apprenticeship in consultative councils was to prepare the way for democratic institutions at some remote date. At the same time a system of social welfare and the gradual creation of an African middle class provided satisfaction for the immediate future, and it was thought that a calm and peaceful discussion of economic and political emancipation could safely be relegated to some distant period. Theoretically the plan was perfect; and if the

isolation of the Congo from the rest of the continent could have continued indefinitely it might have met with an outstanding success.

For thirty years international opinion was indifferent, and African opinion within the Congo a negligible factor, uninfluenced by native opinion elsewhere. Undisturbed by either, Belgian empiricism prudently followed the path of economic development and increasing social prosperity. In 1939 the threefold foundation of Belgian authority in the Congo—the State, the companies, and the Church—was unassailed and apparently unassailable. The State official, the capitalist, and the missionary worked hand in hand to lead the Congo—eighty times the size of Belgium—forward along the highroad of civilization and progress. As Governor-General Ryckmans said: ‘Rule in order to serve. . . This is the sole excuse for colonial conquest; it is also its complete justification. To serve Africa—that means to civilize her.’¹ The civilization of her African colony—seen largely in terms of technical progress, native welfare, and the introduction of Christianity—had been put forward as the conscious aim and ideal of Belgium ever since she took over the Congo Independent State from Leopold II in 1908. In contrast to the earlier period of outright exploitation there were, between annexation and the outbreak of war in 1939, three decades of benevolent paternalism.

A Civilizing Mission

The Europeans had come to the conclusion that their exploitation of the natural resources and the labour which made up the wealth of the Congo basin ought to be justified by evidence of the benefits which Africans were receiving from contacts with them—benefits in terms of a settled life, reasonable housing conditions, enough to eat, and access to the spiritual resources of Christendom. It was evident that her African colony was bringing wealth to Belgium; in return, the Belgian task was to transmit Western civilization

¹ P. Ryckmans, *Dominer pour servir*, Brussels, 1931.

to the Congo. It was the latter aspect that was stressed during this period. The economic reason for Belgium's interest in the Congo was barely mentioned; the whites had become the 'tutors' of the Africans, they were keenly aware of a civilizing mission which it was their duty to fulfil and they loudly proclaimed their consciousness of 'the white man's burden'. In the phrase of M. Pierre Ryckmans, '*dominer pour servir*'.

The Africans had not been asked to express their opinions on the subject of the introduction of Western civilization; it was assumed that they would be glad enough of the change once they discovered that they were to be compensated for the inconveniences—such as forced labour—by an improvement in their material conditions of life. There was no idea, during these years, of 'equality' between black and white; it seemed abundantly evident that the relationship between European and African could only be that of benefactor and recipient. The 'Prospero complex' had developed easily enough among the Europeans.¹ 'You are my father and my mother', a phrase often used by Africans in addressing a European administrator or missionary, expressed very well their sense of dependence upon the invaders who were changing the old patterns of tribal society with frightening speed. As in the old society a man was dependent upon his ancestors and their spokesman, his chief, so now he had transferred his dependence to the new powers in the land, the whites to whom even the hereditary chiefs owed obedience. And in fact for long the father-son relationship seemed satisfactory enough. Relations between black and white continued simple and uniform. Few could have predicted the development of a complex situation such as that of the present day, in which Europeans are in contact not only with rural Africans still more or less supported by their traditional institutions, but also with the students of the two universities, and with those at every stage between the two

¹ O. Mannoni, *Psychologie de la colonisation*, Paris, 1950, translated as *Prospero and Caliban*, Methuen, London, 1956.

extremes, for some of whom 'paternalism' has come to be the most irritating aspect of the colonial system.

Paternalism, the Traditional Policy.

In the pre-war Congo paternalism had paid, and had produced practical results remarkable in Africa. When the great concessionary companies—*Union Minière du Haut-Katanga*, *Forminière*, *Huileries du Congo Belge* among the most important—found it necessary to concentrate thousands of men around the mines, tearing them away from their traditional tribal backgrounds, it was good business to provide accommodation for their families, to give them food, clothing, medical care and social amenities, the pastoral solicitude of a Catholic mission, and an educational system for their children. To look after the workers and their families from the cradle to the grave was the best way to keep the labour supply healthy and contented, to avoid industrial disputes, and to encourage labour stability. This thorough-going and intelligent paternalism of the companies had produced impressive material results. What it had *not* done, however, was to leave anything to the initiative of the Africans. The danger was that this businesslike attitude risked treating the African workers as something less than men. 'See how well we look after our cattle,' remarked a paternalist of the Katanga as he proudly displayed the schools, the hospital, the maternity centre, and the sports ground of one of his camps.¹

After the War, a few warning voices began to be raised:

'The social question, in Congo as in Belgium, is something other than the multiplication of clinics and of swimming pools or a distribution of alms. If tomorrow all the squalid huts that remain in the workers' quarters could be removed, water and electricity laid on, family allowances and social insurance extended, and wages and living stan-

¹ A. A. J. Van Bilsen, 'Un plan de trente ans pour l'émancipation politique de l'Afrique belge', in *Les dossiers de l'Action Sociale Catholique*, Brussels, 1950.

dards raised, the European companies would have done their duty, but the industrialized native would be very little happier. The object of paternalist policy is to make him someone who is assisted, insured and pensioned, instead of making him a free man; the person is sacrificed to the individual. Each native is provided with his standardized house, mass-produced furniture, pre-determined scale of food, his free time regulated to the last detail and without a trace of imagination; on top of which, to stop him making an unwise use of his money, a part of his wages is replaced by payment in kind. Man is turned into a sort of vegetable, in an anticipation of the mechanical earthly paradise of Bernanos. But at all times, men have found freedom in misery preferable to a comfortable slavery. A certain paternalism vis-à-vis the African in the Congo will doubtless be inevitable for a considerable time to come, but we must remember that liberty which has once been taken away is difficult to give back. We must begin at once with the task of deproletarianizing the native worker and giving him his freedom by progressively causing him to participate himself in the improvement of his conditions of life and in the administration of the work camps, in preparation for the day, inevitably still long distant, when he will be able to take part in the direction of the concern itself. The function of the camp leader is not, as most people still imagine, to be the brain of the native worker, but rather to teach the latter to be able to do without him. The object which we seek, after all, is the native's own happiness, and a man can only receive his true happiness at his own hands.¹

The paternalism of the Government had been as practical as that of the capitalists. It had concentrated on the material well-being of the masses and the provision of primary education, with the idea that this policy would be more likely to ensure a contented population than would the granting of political rights and the formation of an *élite*. Secondary

¹ G. Malengreau, *La Revue Nouvelle*, V, no. 2, February 1947, p. 101.

education (apart from the training of African priests) had been adapted to the immediate needs of the country, to the production of clerks, nurses, and so on, while Africans had not been admitted to the liberal professions nor to university education. Hospitals and clinics, social centres and housing schemes, the inspection of working conditions and the regulation of wages, had together provided a background of social welfare in the Congo. There had emerged what might loosely be termed an African middle class, composed of clerks, railway employees, medical assistants, mechanics, chauffeurs, and the like. These men had good, regular jobs, comparatively well paid (although not in relation to the salaries of Europeans), and were for the present satisfied with their lot. The classic exchange between an African of Brazzaville and an African of Leopoldville puts it very well: 'I am a French citizen; you are merely a subject.' 'But I am a rich man; you are poor.'

The Limitations of Paternalism

Good economic conditions for the emerging middle class, a comprehensive social legislation, and an educational system for the masses were not everything. As against the positive achievements in the social and economic fields, there were large gaps in other directions. The Africans had been given no political responsibilities, no *élite* capable of leadership had been formed, no Congolese had been sent to study abroad, any potential politico-religious agitators had been transported far from home, a strict censorship of the Press prevented the free expression of opinion, and no Africans had been admitted to the higher government positions. There was, moreover, a very real racial discrimination; in the fields of education, medical services, and housing Africans and Europeans were treated as two totally separated communities—a distinction said to be justified on social and cultural grounds. So far as votes were concerned, however, the Europeans were in no better position than the Africans. The Belgian Congo had been developed as a black country,

supervised by a restricted group of whites who received their instructions in detail from Brussels. As far as possible, the emergence of 'poor whites' had been discouraged, and Europeans, like the Africans, had enjoyed no political rights. The basic assumption of this policy in the Congo had been as follows: that given a fair degree of material prosperity, and as little evidence as possible of discrimination—as in the matter of votes, for example—and given religious training (at this period most atheist or agnostic Socialists appear to have thought the existence of the missions necessary and useful) and protection from Brussels against the Europeans on the spot, the Africans would be content for the colonial régime to continue indefinitely. This attitude remained unchanged after the War. When Governor-General Ryckmans left the Colony to represent Belgium on the Trusteeship Council of the United Nations he said to his former colleagues in the administration:

'If I had to leave you a last message, I would say that the function of the State is to create and guarantee man's happiness, and that the prosperity of a country is that of the great mass of its inhabitants, and that Belgium will have succeeded in her colonial task when our natives live happily under our flag.'

II. AFRICAN DISCONTENT

The Breakdown of Isolation

WHAT the Belgians had not taken into account was the fact that the Congo was not going to be left in isolation to proceed tranquilly along this path of material prosperity in strict subordination to Brussels. This policy had been a positive and workable one while the Congo had existed as a world on its own, and as long as the Europeans, as well as the Africans, had been denied political rights. The Second World War broke abruptly into this neatly designed pattern. The horizons of the Congolese were rapidly widened as a result of African troops serving abroad in Egypt, the Middle East, and Burma. Sometimes their relationships with Europeans were suddenly reversed; in the dignity of military uniform some had guarded poorly-clad white soldiers and fired on them if they tried to escape. Others had slept with white prostitutes; 'this,' said one, 'was *the* great crisis of my life, and I can never think of Europeans in the same way again'. In the Congo itself, the Africans had observed American Negroes being treated as the equals of white troops. Propaganda against Nazi racial doctrines had been used in order to stimulate the war effort in the Congo and to speed up the collection of rubber and the production of vital minerals. At the same time, to many Congolese Hitler became a kind of mythical figure, whom they imagined coming to the Congo in the shape of a liberator who would drive out the Belgians.

The Post-war Situation

As a result of the War, not only did European prestige in the Congo decline but there was less personal contact between Europeans and Africans than there had been

before. The officials of the administration had been obliged to give their attention to the problems of the war-time production of rubber and minerals, and thus had tended to neglect native policy. The Europeans in general had been exhausted by their prolonged stay in the tropics and by the efforts demanded of them during the War. Moreover, they tended to have their wives and families with them and, unlike the bachelor colonists of earlier years, stayed at home in the evenings instead of seeking African society. At the end of the War many Congolese were complaining somewhat bitterly that 'the whites don't like us any more'.¹

Not only was there a decline in personal contacts between white and black, but the Europeans on their side were beginning to agitate for greater autonomy for the Congo. They had lived through a period of isolation from metropolitan Belgium and, so far as they were concerned, they saw no reason why the links with Brussels should ever be so close again. It was not so much that they wanted to send their votes home, as they had seen the American soldiers doing; they were less interested in metropolitan politics than in the shaping of policy in the Congo itself. From their point of view, the Central Government showed too great a partiality for the Africans. 'We can deal with the blacks; we know them. Brussels can only theorize,' was their attitude.

The social dislocation resulting from the rush to the towns made the situation in the Congo at the end of the War all the more uneasy. The economic effort of the war years had been intense. The Africans of the interior had been hard pressed by the compulsory labour demanded of them, and there had been a considerable movement towards the cities. The population of Leopoldville, 40,000 in 1939, had grown to nearly 100,000 by 1945. In 1938 8.3 per cent. of the total population lived in the *centres extra-coutumiers* (urban or mining centres outside the traditional areas); by 1946 the

¹ G. Malengreau, 'Recent Developments in Belgian Africa', in *Africa Today*, ed. C. Grove Haines, Baltimore, 1955, p. 340.

percentage had risen to 14.9. And in the towns the growing discontent spread rapidly.

There had been several indications that the pre-war calm was not going to last for ever, and that the Africans were beginning to feel that their collective strength could be a match for European force. In 1941 there occurred the strike of *Union Minière* employees and rioting at Elisabethville, and in 1944 came the revolt of a group of soldiers of the *Force Publique* at Luluabourg, followed in 1945 by strikes and rioting at Matadi. These signs of unrest had been dealt with firmly and easily, and they were, after all, only more or less isolated local incidents.

The Influence of Post-war Developments in the Rest of Africa

It was no longer possible, however, to insulate the Congo against influences from outside. The political life of Brazzaville can hardly fail to affect Leopoldville, since the two capitals are separated only by a strip of water. The prestige of Nasser grew rapidly, especially in the East, always susceptible to Arab influences, where many Congolese listen avidly to the Kiswahili programmes of Cairo Radio. The independence of Ghana in 1956, and the nationalist movements in Nyasaland and Southern Rhodesia were bound to affect the Congo, while European attitudes in the Union of South Africa and in Kenya gradually became better known there and aroused increasingly unfavourable reactions. Moreover, the different status of Ruanda-Urundi as a trusteeship territory tended to encourage comparisons between Belgian policy there and in the Congo. Responsible Congolese are ready enough to admit all that benevolent paternalism had done for the Congo, but they cannot remain unaffected by the desire for autonomy being manifested all over the continent. There has been a growing realization in the Congo that good government is not the same as self-government, and that in our day the one cannot take the place of the other for anything more than a limited period. It is a principle of which all the colonial nations, and

Belgium notably among them, are continually being reminded by the growing body of anti-colonial opinion finding expression in the United Nations Organization.

Emergence of the Évolués

By the end of the War in 1945 it was, of course, only a very few Congolese—mainly among those in the towns—who were ready to take an interest in what was happening in other parts of Africa. These were the *évolués*, as they began to be called, Africans who had received more education than their fellows and could speak French with fair ease, had renounced polygamy, and were comparatively well-off—the ‘middle class’ whose creation Belgian policy had encouraged.

Racial Discrimination

It was these men who at the end of the War were beginning to compare their position with that of the Europeans, and to ask the reason for the great gulf which existed between white and black. They were turning their backs on traditional Bantu society, and saw their best hope for the future in assimilation to the Western way of life. It was an overwhelming disappointment to them when they became aware of the attitude of the great majority of the Europeans towards their aspirations, expressed in such modified forms of the colour bar as were beginning to make themselves felt in the Congo, especially in the sphere of social relations. They became aware that while the whites had taken seriously their task as ‘tutors’, had striven in various ways to introduce new and Western forms of culture, and to a certain extent to europeanize the Africans, there was a point at which they seemed determined that the process should stop. When it came to inviting Africans to a meal, to buying meat at the same butcher’s shop, to travelling next to an African in the train, to letting their children sit on the same school benches as young Africans, to the great bitterness of the *évolués* the Europeans objected. All had been well as long as the Africans

had remained as children who were to be taught and encouraged and gradually persuaded to change what appeared to the Europeans to be the more barbarous of their habits. But the limit was reached at the adolescent stage, when Africans began to want to be treated on terms of equality, as adults, to be regarded as brothers rather than as sons, and when small but increasingly vocal groups of *évolués* began to criticize white paternalism and to demand that a completely new relationship should replace the old. As for the Europeans, this change in attitude for the most part genuinely puzzled them; they looked back in longing to the good old days when the 'boy' was entirely submissive to his master, and they much regretted the new state of affairs.

What made matters worse was that European attitudes in the social sphere seemed to be supported by the discrimination between white and black that was to be found in pre-war legislation. What had then been justified by the great differences between European and Bantu culture had lost its meaning when the way of life of certain Africans began to approach that of the whites. What had been reasonable social distinction became insupportable racial discrimination. For example, the sharp division between the European town and the *cité indigène* could not continue to be justified on hygienic grounds when the standards of hygiene in some African families were the same as those of the Europeans. In labour relations a paternalist structure had been necessary in earlier days to protect African workers who knew nothing of trade unions and industrial disputes, but with the birth of an African trade union movement, this was no longer the case after the War.¹ Payment in the form of lodging and

¹ It is true that this movement had been fostered largely by the white unions (Europeans had taken advantage of their war-time state of isolation from Brussels in order to unionize) which had seen African unions chiefly as a means of giving weight to the demands of European workers. Its growth was hindered both by the Africans' lack of knowledge of the objects and methods of trade unionism and also by governmental restrictions based on the apprehension that the formation of trade unions would have political repercussions.

rations had protected African workers who had been abruptly removed from village life to the mining camps; this became obsolete as soon as they demanded freedom to dispose of their wages as they wished. The distinctions in the penal code between native and non-native were beginning to seem irksome to some of the urbanized Congolese; Africans could be flogged, for example, while Europeans could not. Africans began to ask why it should be Europeans who represented native interests in the *Conseil de Gouvernement* and the *Conseils de Province*, why only the white minority should possess the right to be consulted about the affairs of the Colony. The *évolués* were becoming aware that the existing legal discrimination between European immigrants and the indigenous Africans gave the former a privileged position. They regarded this situation as unjustifiable, and refused to accept its indefinite continuation.

The Difficult Position of the Évolués

The situation in which the *évolués* found themselves was a particularly difficult one. They lived as it were between two worlds, that of the traditional Bantu culture and that of Western civilization. While they had a foot in each, they were really at home in neither. It was perhaps the seminarians who first felt the dichotomy with full force. An African immersed during term-time in a European rhythm of life, hemmed in by European discipline, following European studies in European categories, and eating semi-European food, would return during the holidays to share the life of his family in a small village where clocks, libraries, and European dress and food were unheard of, and where nobody would have the slightest idea about his mode of life during the rest of the year. Small wonder that he felt out of place in traditional tribal life, while at the same time remaining deeply conscious of belonging to Africa and in no way desiring total assimilation by the West.

Isolated individuals at the meeting-point of two cultures, the *évolués* were possessed increasingly of a sense of their own

personality, in contrast to the tribal psychology, in which the group is completely dominant. Influenced by African intellectuals in France, notably the *Présence Africaine* group in Paris, they began to react against the assumption of most Europeans that Africans are in the process of development from an inferior to a superior stage, and to think instead in terms of the contact between two civilizations. While acknowledging European technical superiority, they became conscious that on another level, in the sphere of human relations and the art of living, they possessed much from which Europeans might well learn to profit. They began to resent being treated as less than fully responsible and to demand recognition of their equality, as persons, with Europeans. They were intensely irritated by any tendency to treat Africans as showpieces; a reaction which was sharply manifested in relation to the Congolese village and the school for African children which formed part of the 1958 Brussels Exhibition. 'Why should our people and our children be exposed to view as if they were animals in a zoo?' they asked. They grew to dislike discussions about 'the African', which seemed to assume that he was a strange being completely different from the European.

'One of the westerner's prejudices when he disembarks on African soil is his belief that there is some kind of fundamental difference between white and black. This is because you talk too much about "the African"; the African is like this, the African is like that, the African mentality, African psychology, African philosophy, African intelligence . . . Some colonials follow special courses in order to learn to know the African. Goodness knows what they are told in these lectures. But in any case the African seems to be envisaged by them as if he were some kind of strange animal.'¹

¹ The Abbé Malula of Leopoldville, speaking at the Brussels Exhibition, July 1958.

Demands for Higher Education

It was in the educational field that the *évolués* felt most strongly their inferiority and their need to progress if they were to make good their claim to essential equality with the whites. Before the War the Belgians had concentrated on primary education in the Congo, basing their policy on the belief that if an effectual and widespread system of primary education were established before Africans were allowed to embark on higher education there would be less danger of creating an African *élite* separate from the rest of the population, as was happening in other neighbouring colonies. It was clear, too, that if Congolese went to Europe to study they would inevitably return with new ideas about the political situation in the Colony, and the Belgians certainly did not wish to do anything to encourage political agitation in the Congo. Thus after the War it was only with great caution that Africans began to be admitted to higher education and with even greater caution that a few were allowed to depart for Europe. This policy, like the remaining legislative discrimination between Africans and Europeans, the social colour bar, and the exclusion of Africans from higher administrative posts, caused bitterness and a certain hopelessness on the part of the *évolués*, who saw European education as the chief means by which they might progress towards equality with the whites.

'Equal Pay for Equal Work'

Alongside the desire for higher education went the hope that the qualifications acquired by it would be rewarded with salaries comparable to those of Europeans. The great difference between the standard of living of white and black in the Congo was a primary cause of the *évolués'* resentment. African *assistants médicaux* with years of training behind them and entrusted with considerable responsibilities began to compare their salaries (about 37,500 francs annually) with the much higher amounts (about 137,000 francs) received

by the white *agents sanitaires* who had done a mere six months of preparatory training at Antwerp. Africans were not interested when they were told that the standard of living of workers in the Congo was higher than that of workers in India, that there was far more social welfare in the Congo than there was in Turkey, or that an African worker whose output was 70 per cent. of that of a comparable worker in Belgium might well be receiving an equally high salary in proportion. What they could see with their own eyes was the contrast between the housing, the schools, the street-lighting, and the state of the roads of the European city and of the *cit  indig ne*, respectively; they could not help comparing the European's Cadillac with the African's bicycle, the luxury of the European way of life with the African's lack of bare necessities.

The contrast was even sharper than in other parts of Africa, since the European standard of living in the Congo was exceptionally high; it had been necessary to attract Belgians, who were not travellers by nature and who preferred to stay comfortably at home, by the prospect of material conditions far superior to those which they could expect in Belgium. Faced with this double standard, the * volu s* reacted with the demand for 'equal pay for equal work'. They pressed eagerly for the *statut unique* (equal salaries and conditions for all employees of the administration, black or white), which had been discussed intermittently since 1948 but could no longer be shelved when, in 1958, the first Congolese students were due to graduate from Lovanium.

Political Awakening

The * volu s'* discontent with their social and economic status was accompanied by a growing political consciousness, although the latter was embryonic compared with that emerging elsewhere in Africa during the post-war years. Isolation from outside influences, the difficulty of communications within the Congo itself, and the degree of

material progress attained there combined to encourage restraint in demands for political progress. The first of these did not come until July 1956. Taking up an idea already aired by a Belgian lecturer,¹ the first Congolese manifesto, which appeared in a journal called *Conscience Africaine*, asked for a thirty-year timetable for political, social, and economic emancipation in the Congo. The final goal, declared this manifesto, should be a Congolese nation composed of Africans and Europeans, and its authors strongly criticized the view that there was no important difference between Belgian domination of the Congo and the mere presence of Belgians there.

The second manifesto appeared a short while later; it was far more angry and impatient in tone, and took the form of a reply to the *Conscience Africaine* proposition by the Abako. This society was originally a cultural association of the Bakongo, founded to promote the study and appreciation of their language and history. Now it began to take on a political tone, and to look back nostalgically to the days when the Kingdom of Congo, with its capital at San Salvador, extended a unified rule over all the Bakongo, at present living divided between Portuguese, Belgian, and French territory. The Abako urged the necessity for the emergence of several political parties in the Congo, whereas *Conscience Africaine* had considered that one strong national party would suffice for the moment. The excitement aroused by these two manifestos seemed to die a natural death; it did not in fact result in the creation of political parties at that period. Under the surface, however, the evolution of ideas proceeded rapidly. Whereas in 1956 the *évolués* were asking for planned emancipation by gradual stages, in 1959 they were demanding independence for 1961.

¹ A. A. J. Van Bilsen, 'Un plan de trente ans pour l'émancipation politique de l'Afrique Belge', in *Les dossiers de l'Action sociale catholique*, Brussels, February 1956.

III. THE BELGIAN ANSWER

(a) GOVERNMENT ACTION

Official Attitudes and Pronouncements

WE have seen, then, that at the end of the War the Congo was necessarily becoming less insulated against outside influences, and that the *évolués* were beginning to resent the paternalistic attitude of the Europeans, the racial discrimination which was written into the Colony's legislation, and the social colour bar. The policy of the Government in the post-war years attempted to take account of this African feeling, but all it managed to achieve was a series of piecemeal concessions to the demands of the *évolués*; no concerted plan was worked out. Following the usual pattern of colonial history, Belgium endeavoured to find answers to problems which already existed, rather than to foresee those which were likely to arise and to take steps to forestall them.

So far as official attitudes and pronouncements were concerned, the Government continually spoke out against racial discrimination during the post-war years. Its legislative policy aimed at the gradual integration of black and white, but, as Governor-General Jungers declared when he opened the *Conseil de Gouvernement* in 1949, it was not enough that racial discrimination should be banished from the legal texts; it was also necessary 'that men's minds should be exempt from its influence'. He went on to say: 'It is not possible to conceive of a country in which there is no social hierarchy. But when the present evolution reaches its full development, this hierarchy must be based solely on differences of competence, of efficiency and of education.'

But notwithstanding well-intentioned declarations and a certain lessening of racial discrimination during the follow-

ing years, it was the visit of King Baudouin to the Congo six years later that really brought the question of race relations to the fore and aroused great hopes and intense enthusiasm among the African population. Some Europeans were shocked to see the King mixing informally and with evident pleasure with his subjects, freely shaking hands with them, or fetching a chair so that an African woman who found it impossible to follow the conversation might be seated while he talked to her husband in French. As the Africans asked: 'What other white would have done that?' For the Congolese, the King was in their country not as the representative of Belgium, but as their own great chief, someone who was interested in their social welfare and in the difficulties of their daily lives. For example, he showed his concern about their living conditions in a practical way by creating a special fund to make loans to Africans who wished to construct and own their houses in the *centres extra-coutumiers*. The King appeared to the Congolese in the form of a liberator who would put the Europeans in their place, sweep away the social barriers dividing white and black, and usher in a happier state of affairs. It was thus a bitter disappointment to many to find that all did not immediately change after his visit.

On his return from Africa, besides underlining the importance for the future of the Congo of an improvement in race relations, the King took up the already existing concept of a Belgo-Congolese community:

'I want to insist on the fact that the basic problem which now confronts the Congo is that of human relationships between black and white. It is not enough to equip the country materially, to endow it with wise social legislation, and to improve the standard of living of its inhabitants; it is imperative that the whites and the natives should show the widest mutual understanding in their daily contacts. The time will then come—the date cannot yet be determined—to give our African territories a status which will guarantee,

for the happiness of all, the continuing existence of a true Belgo-Congolese community, and which will assure to each, white or black, his proper share in the country's government, according to his own qualities and capacity. Before we realise this high ideal, Gentlemen, much remains to be done.'¹

When he opened the *Conseil de Gouvernement* a few weeks later, Governor-General Petillon took up the King's words, declaring that Belgian policy for the Congo would be neither segregation, nor—except for the few—assimilation, but association. The meaning of this latter term was not completely clear—the Africans were inclined to ask whether it meant the association of a white rider sitting on a black horse. Nor was the 'Belgo-Congolese community' clearly defined. This phrase was used with respect for a while, since it had the royal stamp upon it. Later—although still used in official statements—it came to be treated with a certain cynicism, both in Belgium and in the Congo, as having no precise content.

However, the Government certainly showed some awareness of African thinking in its terminology. Several times Governor-General Petillon referred to the old paternalistic attitude as out of date; in July 1956, for example, he said that the time was approaching when the Congolese would be saying 'Brother' instead of 'Father' to the whites. By 1957, the word 'emancipation' had crept into official terminology. The Colonial Minister Buisseret declared that Belgian policy was simply 'to humanize, to develop, to associate, and finally to emancipate in the framework of that association'.² By 1958 another stage had been reached. When the *Parti Social Chrétien* took office and M. Petillon became Colonial Minister, he immediately opted for 'decolonization'. Over-

¹ From King Baudouin's speech to the Royal African Circle, Brussels, 1 July 1955.

² From M. Buisseret's speech to the *Académie Royale des Sciences Coloniales*, 23 October 1957.

night the *Ministère des Colonies* became the *Ministère du Congo Belge et du Ruanda-Urundi*. Yet only eight years before this it had been possible to declare that 'never, up till now, has the word "colony" taken on a pejorative sense in Belgium, and we shall probably be the last to replace it in our official terminology'.¹

Not content with fine words about race relations and the Belgo-Congolese community, the Government wrote the official attitude into the legislation in December 1957, by a 'Degree intended to ensure the repression of acts of a kind to provoke or encourage racial hatred in the Belgian Congo'. Anyone who 'showed racial or ethnic aversion or hatred' was to be liable to punishment by fine or imprisonment or both. This was envisaged at first as directed primarily against the racial attitudes of certain Europeans in the Congo, but of course it also applied to similar attitudes on the part of the Africans, and it was by virtue of this Act that a number of Congolese were arrested after the riots of January 1959 at Leopoldville.

Towards Social Integration

Together with this official attack on manifestations of racial hatred went a serious attempt to begin to integrate the *évolués* into European society. In 1948 the *carte de mérite civique*—a certificate which attested good behaviour but which brought its bearer no very precise benefits—provided for a partial assimilation. The system of *immatriculation*, however, was to give complete juridical assimilation. *Immatriculation* had first been introduced as long ago as 1892—when it was decreed that an African who registered himself as 'civilized' was to enjoy the same civil status as a European—but this measure had remained a dead letter; the legislative distinction continued to be between native and non-native, not between *immatriculé* and *non-immatriculé*. It was the racial character of this distinction which had to be changed after

¹ G. Malengreau, 'La Politique coloniale de la Belgique', in *Principles and Methods of Colonial Administration*, London, 1950, p. 41.

the War. In 1949 a commission was set up to study the question of the status of 'civilized' Africans, in 1951 Governor-General Jungers announced the Government's policy of juridical assimilation, and in 1952 the decree on *immatriculation* came into force, giving those Africans who had attained 'civilization in its Western form' juridical assimilation with Europeans. The commission considered whether the *immatriculés* ought to be assimilated not only juridically but also socially and economically. But this suggestion was considered too advanced and was dropped, to the intense disappointment of the Africans, who had hoped that *immatriculation* would mean their admission into European society and the removal of all economic and social barriers. Juridical assimilation was in fact the least interesting of any form of equality from the African point of view. What an African really cared about was not being judged in the same courts as a European, but that his standard of living should come nearer to that of the whites, that his children should have the same educational advantages as European children, and that he should be accepted as a person worthy of respect by the Europeans with whom he came into contact. *Immatriculation* touched none of these points, and by-passed, so the Africans felt, all that really mattered to them.

Immatriculation was not well received, either by Europeans or Africans. European attitudes showed, according to the Congolese, how little the whites desired to extend their privileged position to include even a small group of Africans. The fact that the project had been elaborated at Brussels was enough to condemn it in the eyes of many Europeans in the Congo, impatient of metropolitan initiatives,¹ and they made no secret of the fact that they thought it premature, and the policy of assimilation a dangerous one. On the African side, criticisms came not only from those *évolués* who felt that *immatriculation* did not go far enough in satisfying their demands but also from those who felt that it threatened

¹ A. Sohier, 'La politique d'intégration', *Zaire*, II, November 1951, p. 903.

African solidarity, artificially splitting the African community and making the *immatriculés* a caste apart from their fellows. Thus many who could have qualified—including the majority of Congolese priests—refused to apply for *immatriculation*.

Legislative Racial Discrimination Removed

Besides the attempt to assimilate a certain number of Africans to the status of the Europeans in the Congo, an effort was made to alleviate the growing discontent of the *évolués* by the gradual suppression of the distinction between black and white in the Colony's legislation. Certain rights, which had formerly belonged exclusively to Europeans, were extended to Africans. For example, in 1953 all Africans, whether *immatriculés* or not, were empowered to become land-owners, both in the *centres extra-coutumiers* (they were thus protected from eviction) and in the rural areas, where they could therefore theoretically become *colons* in the same way as Europeans. In 1955 Africans were authorized to buy and consume all alcoholic drinks (previously they had been limited to beer) and were admitted to cafés run by whites which had previously been reserved for Europeans. Thus there is, legally, no colour discrimination in the sale and consumption of alcoholic drinks. There are still cases where Africans who present themselves are told 'we don't serve blacks here', but when a complaint is made to the authorities the proprietor is promptly fined. Legal rights, however, are not sufficient to banish an uncomfortable feeling of not being wanted, and in practice the economic barrier is such that many cafés and restaurants are effectively reserved to European use. In 1958 some of the restrictions on the freedom of movement of Africans in the Congo were abolished. An effort was made towards the unification of the penal legislation; it was decreed that white and black, *immatriculés* or not, were to be judged by all types of courts, whereas previously the *tribunal de police* had been competent to judge Africans but not Europeans. So far as industrial legislation

was concerned, there had been an effort over a period of several years to bring the *contrat d'emploi* (which applied to Europeans) and the *contrat de travail* (which applied to Africans) nearer to each other; by 1958 the main differences left were those concerning holidays and the giving of notice. During the same period a spate of legislation concerned with working conditions was either applied indiscriminately to Europeans and Africans, or extended to Africans benefits which had previously been given to Europeans. Thus in 1951 family allowances were granted to Congolese workers, and in 1956 an old-age pension and health-insurance scheme was introduced for Africans. The Government was clearly working gradually towards racial equality before the law, in contrast to the discrimination which had formerly marked the whole of the Colony's legislation.

Consultative Councils

In the same spirit there was in the early post-war years a certain Africanization of the Congo's consultative councils—the *Conseil de Gouvernement*, the *Conseils de Province*, and the *Députation permanente*. Before 1947 native interests on these councils had always been represented by Europeans; in 1947 two Africans replaced two of these Europeans on the *Conseil de Gouvernement*, and from 1951 native interests were represented entirely by eight Africans appointed by the Government. In 1957 a more thorough-going reform did away with the representation of the natives as such, and instead created new categories of councillors—who could be European or African—to represent the societies, the independent middle classes, the workers, the rural areas, and so on. In practice, this meant that more Africans sat on the councils than before. These councils were at first simply consultative. Slowly they were given more powers; from 1957, for example, the *Conseil de Gouvernement* could make propositions for the Colony's budget, instead of merely examining the proposals of Brussels. But nevertheless such changes did not go very far towards appeasing the desire for a deliberative assembly.

Communal Elections

According to the Belgian plan, preparation for the responsibilities of legislative government was also to begin on the communal level; in their communes the Africans were to gain experience of democratic procedure which would later serve them on the national plane. A beginning was made in 1957 with the decree on the *statut de villes*. Certain towns were divided into communes (African or European), each of which then elected its own communal council on a three-year mandate; the *bourgemestre* was chosen by the communal council, but nominated by the Provincial Governor, who could thus veto any candidate whom he considered to be unsuitable. All males of twenty-five years or over, either Belgians or Africans born in the Congo, were entitled to vote. Late in 1957 the first elections were held in Leopoldville, Elisabethville, and Jadotville; in 1958 Bukavu, Lulua-bourg, Stanleyville, and two satellite towns of Leopoldville came under the *statut des villes*, and at the end of the year another series of communal elections was held.

On the whole, voting in the African communes followed tribal divisions; a man tended to vote for a candidate who belonged to his own tribe rather than for one of whose programme he approved. Often enough a candidate did not put forward a programme at all, although sometimes he might—in Elisabethville for example—label himself as a Liberal or a Socialist. Again, there were the few who put forward a programme of local improvements. One candidate at Stanleyville proposed a three-point programme to the electorate at the end of 1958. There was to be discipline on the roads, with a strict enforcement of the speed limit and the provision of street-lighting (there had been five after-dark murders in the commune during the preceding six months); there was to be discipline in the sphere of recreation, with an attempt to empty the bars of the large numbers of men who congregated there even when they were not actually drinking, together with the provision of a

football field; and there was to be more discipline in general—one of the points under this head being that the gardens around the houses were to be cared for instead of being left to run wild. But the majority of candidates did not present themselves as having any particular attachment to the Belgian political parties, nor any special plans for local improvements, but simply as having sufficient education and ability to represent the electorate before the Europeans. 'I am a man who can defend your interests before the whites,' a candidate might say, supporting his words with a liberal distribution of beer. But in the last resort the votes were generally cast along tribal lines. If a man surveyed the list of candidates in his commune and found that nobody from his own tribe appeared on it he might quite well declare that 'there's no one I can vote for here'. This tendency was often combated by the younger men who had come under the influence of the students of the Congolese or Belgian universities. Unlike their elders, they had reached the conclusion that in the modern world the encouragement of small groups, tribal or otherwise, was a retrograde step, and that economically or politically it would be better that the Congo should preserve the unity it had gained under Belgian colonial rule.

Trade Unions

In industrial relations, as in politics, the Belgians realized that it was necessary to prepare the Africans for the future exercise of democratic responsibilities. A beginning had been made immediately after the War in 1946, with the creation of consultative councils of African workers intended to facilitate contact both between the employers and their African personnel and between the administration and the workers. But as in the field of government, admission to these consultative councils only aroused the desire for a more decisive voice in affairs which touched the interests of the participants so directly, and a natural result was the emergence of a demand for African trade unions. The Euro-

peans in the Congo had taken advantage of their isolation from Brussels during the War to form unions; before 1939 this had not been possible, since the societies had simply sent home any of their employees who had shown signs of giving trouble. In 1942 it became legal for Europeans to form unions, and, in 1944 (after several illegal strikes had occurred), to strike. Two years later Africans were permitted to group themselves in professional associations; strikes, however, remained illegal. They finally gained the right to strike in January 1957, at the time of the revision of the whole of the legislation concerning the right of association in the Congo. Racial discrimination in this field was thus removed; it was the *inhabitants* of the Congo who were given the right to associate in order to defend their professional interests, and also (with the exception of the agents of the administration) the right to strike. This right of association was only given, however, subject to government approval of each particular association; each had to be registered by the administration, and if registration was refused there was no appeal.

African Salaries

In the post-war years it was the question of salaries which appeared to the Congolese as the acid test of European intentions; fine words in official speeches about the Belgo-Congolese community meant little while there remained so great a difference between the rates of pay of Europeans and those of Africans doing precisely the same jobs in the service of the administration. Before the War there had been no problem, for the functions of Europeans and Africans had been quite distinct; when this was no longer so the problem of the discrepancies in salary was posed acutely, and was inevitably felt by the Congolese to be a sign of racial discrimination. The demand for equal pay for equal work became more and more general among the Africans. The *évolués*, who had previously been content to compare their earnings with those of their less-qualified fellows, now tended

instead to compare them with the salaries of Europeans. And while they might not take account of the fact that an employer might sometimes be able to get the same work done by one European girl typist as by two African clerks, they were very quick to notice the difference between the two rates of pay.

In this field, as in others, the Government failed to foresee the problem and take the necessary measures in advance; it was overtaken by circumstances and by African pressure. Not until 1958, when the first students were due to graduate from Lovanium, did the Government really come to grips with a problem which had been discussed intermittently during the preceding ten years. Now, however, it was obliged to take account of the opinion of these students, who would soon be comparing their salaries with those of white graduates, an opinion, moreover, which they did not hesitate to express publicly. In February 1958 the students of Lovanium prepared a memorandum on the subject. Since, however, the Government seemed to take no notice of their proposals, they sent an open letter to the Colonial Minister in April, to remind him of the interview which they had recently had with him. They had, they recalled, informed him then that they were, and would remain, opposed to all forms of colonialism. The Minister had promised, they said, that all discrimination between black and white in the Congo was to cease. Why, then, they asked, should a difference be made between the salaries paid to those agents of the administration who were engaged in Belgium and those of agents engaged in the Congo? Why should the former receive half as much again on the grounds of their specialization, when in fact their qualifications were identical with those of their African colleagues, and why should they in addition receive larger family allowances? The difference was the more questionable in view of the fact that the definition of those engaged in Belgium had been so arranged that 'in practice the metropolitan is no longer a Belgian whose habitual residence is in Belgium, engaged for a limited term

of service in the Congo, but anyone whose parents are Belgians'. The students were sarcastic about those who were Congolese when it came to exploiting the land and its wealth, and metropolitans when it came to wanting a large salary. If Europeans and Africans were not given the same treatment, they wrote, they were ready to turn the Congo into a second Algeria. This latter threat, however, they consented to withdraw a week later.

After these representations from the students and further pressure from the trade unions it was finally decided that in January 1959 a *statut unique* should come into force for all the agents of the administration; that is to say that for equal qualifications and capacity all were to receive equal remuneration and equal opportunities for advancement. There was to be no difference between the salaries of those engaged in the Congo, whether African or European, and those of Europeans engaged in Belgium. Private enterprise, it was clear, would sooner or later be obliged to follow the example of the Government.

Inter-racial Education

Equal pay for equal qualifications was, of course, valueless unless Africans had the opportunity to gain qualifications which were in fact equal to those of Europeans. In the post-war years one of the most insistent African demands was that for higher education, and in general for educational opportunities equal to those of the whites. In the years before the War almost all education in the Congo had been provided by the mission schools—by the national missions (mainly Catholic) with the aid of government subsidies, and by the foreign missions (mainly Protestant) without such help. Education had been primarily education for the masses, and there was no higher education for Africans except in the seminaries. There were two entirely separate educational systems, one for the small minority of European children, and the other for the African majority. After the War the Catholic monopoly was broken when, in 1946, a

Liberal Minister accorded subsidies to Protestant mission schools, and also set up non-confessional State schools within the educational system intended for European children. In 1948 the strict racial discrimination in education began to break down, when schools formerly reserved for European children were opened to Asiatic children and to those children of mixed race whose fathers accepted legal responsibility for them. Two years later, the same privilege was extended to Congolese children and to those children of mixed race who were not recognized by their fathers. On both occasions some of the European parents objected, but the scheme went ahead in spite of their protests; thus after 1950 there was no longer any legal barrier to inter-racial education in the Congo.

There still remained a distinction between the races, for African children who applied for admission to European schools were obliged to appear before special commissions which examined not only their educational qualifications but also the general standard of living of their families, and matters such as their personal hygiene and freedom from infection. After a few years the *évolués* began to dislike this test, on the grounds that it represented a form of racial discrimination and was open to serious abuse. It was not surprising that a parent objected if the commission deemed his child to be unsuitable for a European school on grounds of health, while at the same time he was told that the child's condition was not serious enough to warrant medical attention. This happened in a large number of cases in Elisabethville in the autumn of 1958.

University Education

Although Africans were now admitted to European primary and secondary schools and a number of new schools were started which were specifically inter-racial (such as the college opened at Usumbura in 1951 and the *athénées* set up in 1955), this did not satisfy the Congolese. There was an increasing demand for university education. It was govern-

ment policy, however, to discourage students from going to Europe. From 1953 onwards only a very few Congolese, sent by private initiative or, later, by the *Conseils Supérieurs* of Ruanda or Urundi, had received permission to study in Belgium. Individual Belgians pressed for the number to be increased and for a special fund to be set up for this purpose, but this was consistently opposed by the Government. Therefore, in response to African pressure, universities had to be provided at home.

In 1956, the year in which the first Congolese student graduated at Louvain, the Congo's first university—the Catholic University of Lovanium, daughter of Louvain—was opened at Leopoldville. Two years later a non-confessional State university was set up at Elisabethville. Both were inter-racial, Lovanium with roughly two-thirds of its students (365 in all in 1958–59) African and a third European, and Elisabethville (with 219 students in 1958–59) having almost the reverse proportion of white to black, about a quarter of the students being African.

Education for Women

The education of Congolese women has lagged far behind that of the men. In the early years the administration was chiefly concerned with primary education for boys with a view to forming auxiliaries for the administration, while African parents did not realize the value of education for their daughters. Later the *évolués* themselves were not unanimous in their attitudes to girls' education; some wanted companions who could share their interests and accept an equal responsibility in bringing up their children, but others still preferred wives who had not been to school, on the grounds that they would be more docile and obedient and would work harder. Gradually, however, the former view prevailed. The *évolués* who wished to receive Europeans in their homes were embarrassed when their wives could not speak enough French to greet their visitors, let alone to join in a conversation. Some began to teach their wives French

themselves, but this was rare; most blamed the Europeans for not having done so earlier. A certain number of boarding schools for the daughters of *évolués* were opened in which the teaching was in French right from the lowest classes.

The social services developed after the War also provided increasing education for women. The *foyers sociaux* were designed to give African women practical instruction in running a home and, by training some of the more advanced as monitors entrusted with the task of teaching and helping the others, to develop a sense of social responsibility. These *foyers* are crowded, noisy, happy places. But there is, of course, the danger that the social workers, who are among the minority of European women who learn the local languages, and whose professional work is concerned with the African women, may become an artificial buffer between black and white, rather than a connecting link. So long as African women did not speak French, there could be very little contact between them and the majority of European women in the Congo, who usually spoke only enough of the local language to be able to direct the household tasks. An effort has therefore been made to interest European women in voluntary work in connexion with the *foyers sociaux*, and to arrange special courses for the wives of State agents and company employees before they leave Belgium to prepare them for life in the Congo, and especially to help them to realize the importance of their relations with African women. Sometimes groups of Europeans meet with Africans to give practical hints on the running of a household or the arrangement of a home. In more informal groups of this kind it may be possible to get beyond the relationship of teacher and taught, which is inevitable in the *foyers sociaux*. The Catholic 'family movement' has begun to extend the idea of contact between Europeans and Africans to the plane of the whole family.

(b) NON-GOVERNMENT MOVES

Catholic Missions

In many ways the missions had gone ahead of the Government towards integration. The first African had been ordained priest in the Congo as early as 1917, and by 1959 there were more than six hundred Congolese priests. Two African bishops had been consecrated—one at the head of a Vicariate in Ruanda in 1952, and an auxiliary Bishop in the lower Congo in 1956—long before there was anything comparable in the sphere of civil government. The Bishops' declaration of June 1956 made it clear that the Church approved in principle of political emancipation:

'All the inhabitants of a country have the duty to collaborate actively for the common good. They have therefore the right to take part in the conduct of public affairs.

'The trustee nation is obliged to respect this right, and to favour its exercise by progressive political education.

'The native peoples must be aware of the complexity of their responsibilities, and must fit themselves to assume them. It is not for the Church to pronounce on the precise form in which a people's emancipation may come. She considers this legitimate so long as it is accomplished in charity and the respect of mutual rights.'

The election in Belgium of a Liberal-Socialist coalition Government in 1954 led to a clash between the Government and the Catholic missions over educational policy in the Congo; about the same time Rome was showing an increasing desire to dissociate evangelization from the colonial system and to ensure that the Church in Africa should as far as possible be thoroughly 'African'. The two factors in combination encouraged the Catholic missions to break away from the close link with the State which they had traditionally conserved in the Belgian Congo. This breaking of the old-established alliance was regarded as something of

a stab in the back by a section of the colonial administration; the Church was accused of wanting to go too fast, of siding with the African extremists, of working with the State so long as it suited her interests and then withdrawing her collaboration when things became difficult.

There were quite as many critics on the opposite side, however; in the eyes of many Africans the Church was inextricably linked with the colonial authorities, it was European in form and expression, and the domination of the missionaries was felt to be just as irksome as that of any other class of whites. Some said that the missions had only been interested in the education of priests, and not in the higher education of the laity; that they had encouraged low salaries for Africans on the grounds that their needs were few and higher salaries would only be spent on concubines; and that in general the Church tended to hinder African progress. Some of the *évolués* were inclined to think of the Church as something which belonged to their childhood in the villages, but which had lost its relevance when they moved to the towns. Often they became embittered by the way in which the Church appeared to practise racial discrimination; many churches were in fact, if not in theory, 'white' or 'black' as a result of their geographical location, and in other areas the Europeans would install themselves comfortably in the choir as a matter of course, while the Africans were expected to take their places in the nave. And while the *évolués* were irritated by this racial discrimination, and by their impression that the Church did not encourage any but the priests to progress towards assimilation into European society, the mass of Africans tended to regard Christianity as a foreign importation, something which was, after all, a European affair. This was one reason for the success of separatist movements, such as Kimbangism, Kitawala, the Ba-apostolic group, and others, which offered the Africans a black mediator or interpreted the history of salvation in expressly African terms. Jesus of Nazareth was the Christ of the Europeans; could He really be the Christ of

the Africans too? At Midnight Mass a congregation interrupted the sermon of a Congolese priest with cries of 'It isn't true' when he declared that Christ had become incarnate to save Africans, and when he added 'and the Europeans', with cries of 'Bravo for the whites'. Children greeted the sight of a black doll destined for a nativity play with a scornful 'He wasn't black'.

There was the feeling, too, that African priests were treated as inferiors by the missionaries, that they were placed in the hardest and least-rewarding posts, and that when they lived and worked in teams with Europeans they were kept in subordinate positions. A priest straight out from Europe lost his breviary one day and discovered that a newly-ordained African had borrowed it to compare it page by page with his own; he had feared that as an African he might have been given a second-rate breviary which was not quite up to European standards. It was in fact not always true that African priests were placed in subordinate posts; in Ruanda there was an African Bishop in charge of a diocese, and in Leopoldville the African Rector of a large parish had two European missionaries serving as curates under him. But the *évolués* were inclined to ask why there were only two African bishops, why there were not many more African priests, and why there were no African professors in the seminaries.

Protestant Missions

The Protestant missions, too, had gone ahead with the training of African pastors; well over five hundred men had been ordained by 1958, and twice that number were fulfilling the function of pastor although they were not ordained. There was often the same feeling about their being placed in subordinate positions and not being entrusted with very much responsibility as there was in the case of the African priests. Without a non-missionary European population, however, the Protestants suffered less than the Catholics from racial divisions in their churches, and since they were

not in the main of Belgian nationality, they were less identified in the eyes of the Congolese with the colonial administration.

The majority of the Protestant missions at work in the Congo thought of the Church in terms of the local 'gathered community'. They aimed at gradually transferring authority from the European missionaries to the African leaders of the local churches. But it was impossible to hand over authority in this way, however, until the Government had accorded the right of association to Africans, for an African church, independent of the European mission organization, could not legally exist. The missions had banded together to form the Congo Protestant Council; in 1956 Africans were admitted to this body as full voting members—a privilege previously reserved for European missionaries only. There was some opposition to this method of securing a colony-wide fellowship of African Protestants, however; since the Congo Protestant Council was a missionary organization, designed to form a link between the missions as such, some Protestants believed that rather than try to integrate Africans into it, a quite separate council should be formed, composed of representatives of the African churches. But whatever the disagreement over methods, there was no doubt about the principle. As the Secretary of the Protestant Bureau in Brussels wrote early in 1959:

'To me it has been clear for many years that the Congo missions and missionaries must get away from the paternal ways in which we have led most of our activities in the Congo. We have often worked under the misconception that the Africans are grown-ups with a child's mind. Nothing is more false. They are adults, think as adults, and want responsibility as adults.'

The Protestant missionaries, like the Catholics, were becoming convinced that the paternalism of the past was finished; they were coming to see that the young Congo

churches must be given responsibility for their own future, aided, but not directed, by the European missionaries.

Attempts at Social Integration

Thus both the Government and non-government groups were moving at various speeds from the old paternalism in the direction of racial integration. In many ways the missions had preceded the administration. The big companies had lagged behind, but they, too, were following the general pattern by 1959. In the mining camps of the Katanga, recreational centres run by elected African committees had appeared, and more Africans were moving out of the camps into the *centres extra-coutumiers*, where they could buy their own houses. So far as the European settlers were concerned, having tried unsuccessfully to persuade the Government to favour a radical increase in white settlement in the Congo during the preceding years, they made at least one serious attempt to put integration into practice when in 1953 they invited the African 'middle class' to join the various settlers' unions; the *Fédération des Colons* became the *Fédération des Colons et des Classes Moyennes du Congo*. This attempt was not, however, particularly successful, since after a hopeful beginning the settlers were not in fact able to persuade the African middle class (clerks, small contractors, shopkeepers, and the like) that the two groups had enough joint interests to make a common front worth-while.

There had been quite a number of other private moves towards closer contact between black and white—the Belgo-Congolese groups in some of the towns, the Catholic 'family movement', and the Socialist *amicales*. Some of these, however, tended to foster somewhat artificial contacts with no relevance to the ordinary relationships between black and white in daily life, and Africans became embittered by the fact that Europeans who would warmly shake hands with them in the context of a Belgo-Congolese group would pass them by in the street without a sign of recognition. However, the first African family moved into the European city at

Leopoldville in the summer of 1958; at first there was some opposition on the part of the neighbours, but they were soon on friendly terms with the new inhabitants.

Social integration was seen to be not merely a question of legislation but, above all, one of attitudes. And for the Africans it was becoming essential to know whether or not social integration was a practical possibility. Even children of seven or eight would put a host of questions on this theme to a stranger. 'Do you have black priests in your country—black bishops? Do you have white bricklayers—white farm labourers? Do you have asphalted roads everywhere? Do you have settlers in your country? Do the whites and the blacks live together there?' Every aspect of life in the Congo tended to be seen in racial terms. The normal relationship of teacher to taught, and the necessary discipline that this involves for the latter, was often resented, as if it constituted a form of racial discrimination, since inevitably the teacher was European and the pupils African. Some Africans felt that they were reprimanded or failed their examinations not because they had not worked hard enough, but because they were black. But, above all, Africans wanted a relationship with Europeans which was more than just limited to the sphere of their work; they desired a personal relationship. On one occasion a departmental head did not tell his African colleagues that his father had died; they learned the news from some other source, and commented sorrowfully, 'You see, he only regards us as workers, not as people.' Legal differences between black and white might be disappearing, but many tensions still remained in the field of personal relationships.

IV. DEVELOPMENTS IN THE CONGO, 1954-58

The Breakdown of Belgian Solidarity in the Congo

THE general discontent of the *évolués* in the post-war years, the integration policy of the Government and of private bodies, and the rapidity with which events were moving in other parts of Africa all threatened the stability of the colonial régime in the Congo. But this was shaken even more, by the change of government in 1954, when the Belgian electorate replaced a Catholic government by a Liberal-Socialist coalition. The importance of this event for the Congo lay not so much in a sudden change of colonial policy, for the broad lines of M. Buisseret's policy as Colonial Minister followed that of his predecessors, but rather in the fact that it brought Africans to a realization of the divisions which existed among the Belgians themselves. This election marked the breakdown of the all-powerful alliance of the administration, the Catholic missions, and the companies, a union which had been shaken but not destroyed immediately after the War. The year 1954 saw the dissolution of the old front of white solidarity in the Congo.

In the first place the Government's educational policy aroused the hostility of the missions. In 1946 a Liberal Minister had set up a number of 'lay' schools on the Belgian pattern which were open to European children in the Congo, as against the confessional schools, which had previously been the only ones available for white or black. In view of this it was unreasonable that African parents, whatever their beliefs, should be obliged to send their children to confessional schools. But M. Buisseret's methods in extending the right of choice to African parents were far from happy;

the report of his commission of inquiry¹ ridiculed the whole system of Catholic education in the Congo, and when the Minister announced his intention of setting up lay schools for African children he also proposed crippling cuts in the subsidies granted to Catholic schools. The latter threatened to go on strike if these impossible conditions were imposed, and the Congo Press took up sides for or against the Minister. The big companies were unfavourable to the new policy, fearing that the disruption of the old alliance between State, Church, and capitalism would shake the stability of the colonial régime in the Congo, and the Governor-General uttered a warning against the introduction of Belgian party politics into the life of the colony. 'In the Congo we should not start to scorn and hate each other. We ought not to allow the inhabitants of the country—I am thinking especially of the natives—to be led into false conflicts, nor enlisted in factions . . .'²

The significance of this controversy lay precisely in the fact that the Africans were 'enlisted in factions'. In defending his policy against the attacks of the missions the Colonial Minister declared that it was supported by African opinion, and by an 'irresistible pressure' on the part of the *évolués*; he told the *Parlement* that he was setting up lay schools 'in reply to the pressure of hundreds of Africans who speak in the name of various groups, as my documentation can show'.³ Thus the Congolese became aware for the first time both of Belgian divisions and of the profit which they themselves could draw from them; they realized that their wishes could become a deciding factor in European quarrels, and they came to see the political value of organized public opinion. The petition of the *Conseil Supérieur* of Urundi to the Belgian *Parlement* (opposing the opening of a lay school at Usumbura)

¹ *La réforme de l'enseignement: Mission pédagogique Coulon-Deheyn-Renson*, Brussels, 1954.

² Governor-General Petillon to the *Conseil de Gouvernement*, 18 August 1955.

³ During the budget debate, 15 June 1954.

was the first indication of this awareness. Greeted by the Socialists as a 'clerical plot', the petition was by no means welcomed by the Catholic party either, least of all by those former Colonial Ministers within the party who were able to realize its anti-colonial significance.¹

Anti-clericalism

The battle over educational policy had given a fair number of Congolese the opportunity to discover that they were 'anti-clericals'. Once M. Buisseret had shown that the missions were not all-powerful, many Africans were ready to throw off a yoke which they had come to feel as burdensome. The Colonial Minister was regarded by the majority of the *évolués* as a great liberator, and enjoyed immense popularity among them. The few lay schools which had sprung up by the side of the mission schools were magnificently equipped, and the Congolese were given the impression that the missionaries could have provided them with such schools long before, if only they had not wanted to retard African progress. The *évolués* were anti-clerical rather than anti-Christian; above all, they were anti-colonial, and the unpopularity of the missionaries was but one expression of their growing nationalism. By withdrawing their allegiance from the missionaries they could affirm their independence, and the introduction of Belgian political parties gave them the opportunity. There was a great deal of Liberal propaganda in the Congo; the Liberals had found the ground prepared among the white settlers, and soon had groups of supporters among the *évolués* as well. On the whole, the Socialists had still greater success among the Congolese. Both groups preached an anti-paternalism which delighted the Africans. The old protective attitude among Belgian Socialists and agnostics had gone; they considered now that the Africans had passed beyond the stage where they needed religion. The Congolese were to be able to make a free

¹ A. A. J. Van Bilsen, 'Quatre années de politique congolaise', *La Revue Nouvelle*, May 1958.

choice; God was not to be imposed upon them. The endowment of the Congo with lay schools was a natural consequence of this change of attitude, as was the introduction of Belgian political patterns.

The Breakdown of Paternalism

The breakdown of traditional paternalism, which had begun after the War, gathered considerable momentum during the four years in which M. Buisseret was Colonial Minister. Before 1954 there had already been warning signs that change must come, but the Congo remained a model colony in the apparent stability of its régime and its slow and untroubled development. By 1958 the old alliance between Church and State had broken down, somewhat to the relief of many of the missionary leaders, and even the union between the State and the trusts had been slightly shaken, for the latter had not appreciated the Government's decision to call in American capital for the development of the hydro-electric resources of the lower Congo by the Inga scheme. These four years had seen the clear emergence of a politically conscious African *élite*; symbolically the manifesto of *Conscience Africaine* had appeared at precisely the same time as the first Congolese student graduated in Belgium, in July 1956. The Africans had come to demand a definite programme for the emancipation of the Congo; they wanted to express their opinion on the Colony's future, and to have responsibility in carrying out the plans which would be made with their consent. This political awakening had been influenced by individual Belgians with progressive ideas; M. Van Bilsen's 'thirty years' plan' had been taken up by *Conscience Africaine*, and his *Groupe Marzorati*¹ brought together Belgians and Africans for informal discussions about the future of the Belgian Congo and Ruanda-Urundi in a way which had never occurred before.

M. Buisseret's term of office was the period in which *Con-*

¹ A. A. J. Van Bilsen, 'Le groupe Marzorati pour l'étude des problèmes africains', *Synthèses*, Brussels, January 1959.

science Africaine and the Abako had both spoken out, the first African journal had appeared—and been suppressed, the *Conseil Supérieur* of Urundi had petitioned the Belgian *Parlement*, and in Ruanda the Bahutu had produced their manifesto in reaction against the traditional Batutsi monopoly of political, social, and economic influence.¹ There had been a great leap forward towards emancipation in these four years—not so much because this had been planned by the Minister, but because of the effect of the introduction of European divisions into the Congo, where the whites had hitherto presented a common front. The timing, at least, of the *Conscience Africaine* manifesto had been suggested by a number of European lay Catholics in Leopoldville to coincide with the Belgian Socialist party's declaration of policy with regard to the Congo, in order to steal the latter's thunder. It was in part a desire to decrease missionary influence which had led some of the anti-clericals among the Europeans to support the Kimbangists, a separatist African sect born in the lower Congo. The result—a sudden quasi-toleration of the sect—led the Africans to think that the Government was afraid of the Kimbangists, and no longer dared to suppress their activities. There was a lack of confidence in the Government, for the Africans were well aware of the rift between Colonial Minister Buisseret and Governor-General Petillon. The Africans had learned that their opinions counted for something in the midst of European quarrels, and African leaders able to formulate those opinions were emerging. Whatever the intentions of the Colonial Minister, the result of his term of office was a political awakening in the Congo, and for this the Africans were extremely grateful to him.

¹ The Batutsi, a pastoral people of Hamitic origin, are the feudal overlords in Ruanda; by invasion and conquest they subdued the original Bantu inhabitants, the Bahutu, who live by agriculture.

V. DEVELOPMENTS IN THE CONGO, 1958-59

The Change of Government

As a result of the Belgian elections in the summer of 1958, the *Parti Social Chrétien* took office with Liberal support, and Governor-General Petillon stepped into the shoes of M. Buisseret as Colonial Minister. He announced a policy of 'decolonization', changed the title of the *Ministère des Colonies* into that of the *Ministère du Congo Belge et du Ruanda-Urundi*, and in August appointed a parliamentary commission which was to visit the Congo, to consult representatives both of the Europeans and the Africans, and then on the basis of their findings to elaborate the broad lines of a policy of emancipation. Belgians asked themselves whether this was the beginning of the '*dépolitisation*' of the Congo. Those who had considered the general uneasiness in the Colony during the preceding years to be the result of the Colonial Minister's partisan policy rejoiced to see a 'technician' rather than a 'politician' take his place. But M. Petillon's term of office was brief. He was inclined to follow too personal a policy for the tastes of his fellow Ministers, and after a few months he was accused of anti-Flemish prejudices and was replaced by a Flemish Minister, M. Van Hemelrijck. Although he had done fine work as Governor-General, M. Petillon had not been particularly popular in recent years among the Africans, for during the period when M. Buisseret had been regarded as a great liberator of the Congo the Governor-General had appeared to want to put the brake on his policy whenever possible. Nevertheless, there was a considerable outcry among the Africans, who asked why the Congo should be affected by a purely internal Belgian question of Flemish-Walloon rivalry. They

were not particularly favourable to the Flemish section of the Belgian community; the attempt to impose Flemish in the Congo had appeared to them absurd, and, thinking in a world perspective, they would have much preferred English as a second language. But it was in fact in Flemish Catholic circles that African aspirations were going to meet with the most sympathy in the following months—possibly because the Flemish had themselves emerged from an under-privileged position and had had to struggle hard to obtain a voice in Belgian affairs.

Congolese Visits to Belgium

Outside influences had strongly affected the Congo throughout the summer of 1958. In the first place, there was an exceptional degree of contact with Belgium itself. Before 1958 there had been a handful of Congolese students in Belgium, and a few short visits for various groups of Congolese had been organized, but there was no precedent for the influx of several hundred Africans from all parts of the Congo and Ruanda-Urundi which occurred during the period of the Brussels Exhibition. These Africans were able to see the Belgians at home and to compare them with the Belgians in the Congo—always to the disadvantage of the latter. They were able to leave the C.A.P.A. (*Centre d'accueil du personnel africain*), where food and lodging had been provided for them, for the pleasure of eating in a Brussels restaurant and being served by a white 'boy'. Africans from all over the Colony lived together at the C.A.P.A., and amidst their tribal frictions they were able to become conscious of the value of Congolese unity; they were able to discover that African problems and hopes were much the same in every part of the country. They returned with new ideas, to continue the discussion at home.

Influence from the Rest of Africa

It was not only contact with Belgium which broadened Congolese horizons in 1958; the influence of French policy

was strong throughout the year. The French territories of West and Equatorial Africa were given the choice of either immediate independence or becoming autonomous republics under French leadership. De Gaulle offered independence at Brazzaville, on Leopoldville's very doorstep, and at the end of the year the Congo Republic took its place within the French community. Then in December the Accra conference of independence movements, under the sign of the independence and unity of Africa, was immensely important in increasing Congolese consciousness of belonging to the rest of the continent. The three Congolese who attended as representatives of the *Mouvement National Congolais*—Patrice Lumumba, president of the M.N.C., Gaston Diomi, *bourgemestre* of the Ngiri-Ngiri commune of Leopoldville, and Joseph Ngalula, editor of *Présence Congolaise*—returned to spread the conviction that the independence of colonial territories was a right which could no longer be denied to them, and that a term would soon be put to all foreign domination in Africa. At Accra the Congolese delegates discovered the solidarity of African independence movements, and never again could the Congo be isolated from the rest of the continent. M. Lumumba became a member of the permanent organization which was set up by the Accra conference, and on his return he announced at a large meeting held in Leopoldville that the *Mouvement National Congolais* was in wholehearted support of the view propounded at Accra that no African country ought to be a dependent territory after 1961.

Congolese Political Parties

The M.N.C. had been formed in October 1958; it stood for the political education of the masses and the preparation of an *élite* to run the country, for the democratization of the existing consultative councils in the Congo, for the fundamental liberties guaranteed by the United Nations Charter, for the unity of the country as against all regional separatism, and finally for the independence of the Congo within a

reasonable time. About the same time African political groups began to spring up in various parts of the country—the *Centre de Regroupement Africain* (or Cerea) at Bukavu, the *Union Nationale Congolaise* at Stanleyville, the *Union Progressiste Congolaise* (U.P.E.C.O.) at Leopoldville, and others. The *Union Congolaise* had been founded at Elisabethville in 1957; it grouped both Africans and also progressive Europeans who were prepared to make their future in an independent Congo. The new groups were purely African, vehicles of African public opinion. Instead of attaching themselves to the Belgian political parties, the Congolese had begun to form their own. These new groups, on the whole, took up their stand on two main points—the independence and the unity of the Congo. They saw a blind tribalism as the enemy of progress, to be combated as fiercely as colonialism. M. Lumumba had declared at Accra:

‘This historic conference which brings us together, politicians of all the countries of Africa, shows us that in spite of frontiers and ethnic differences, we are of one mind and have the same desire to make our continent a happy one, free from anxiety, and from the fear of colonial domination. Down with colonialism and tribalism! Long live the Congolese nation! Long live an independent Africa!’

Hitherto the only organized political group had been a tribal one—the Abako—for the various ethnic associations of Leopoldville and the rest of the Congo could hardly be called political groups, while the *Conscience Africaine* manifesto had been an isolated production and had never claimed to be the programme of a political party. The African groups which were formed in 1958 to work for independence were something quite new in the Congo scene. They gained impetus after the Accra conference, and in Leopoldville the M.N.C. began to attract some of the former adherents of the Abako.

Leopoldville, January 1959

But Accra and the growing power of the M.N.C. were only the latest of a series of political developments which excited African opinion and contributed to the troubled state of Leopoldville at the end of 1958. In 1957 there had been the inflammatory articles of the first African-directed journal, the *Congo*, and its suppression by the authorities. Early in 1958 the inaugural speech of the Abako leader Joseph Kasavubu as *bourgemestre* of the Dendale commune had taken a strongly political turn and criticized the whole of Belgian policy in the Congo. In November inflammatory tracts demanding independence—disclaimed by the M.N.C.—had been circulating in the native city. There were rumours that independence was to be granted on 13 January (the date for which a declaration of Government policy had been promised) and places in the future cabinet were already being assigned. According to one scheme, Joseph Kasavubu (*bourgemestre* of the Dendale commune) was to be President of the Congo Republic, Gaston Diomi (*bourgemestre* of the Ngiri-Ngiri commune) Minister of the Interior, and Arthur Pinzi (*bourgemestre* of the Kalumu commune) Minister of Foreign Affairs. The speeches of the M.N.C. delegates who returned from Accra added to the tension. The latent discontent which had earlier found its only possible outlet in the African separatist sects was now seeking a more direct expression in the political field.

However, the causes of tension in Leopoldville were social as well as political. The overpopulation and the poverty of parts of the native city were appalling. The salaries of certain categories of workers were too low to pay for adequate food and lodging for a family; while the average rent was 1,200 francs a month, the minimum legal salary for an African worker in Leopoldville was forty francs a day. In addition, there was a very large number of unemployed—estimates vary between fifteen and forty thousand. Many adolescents, having finished primary school, found them-

selves without either work or the possibility of further education. The influx of Africans to Leopoldville had been insufficiently controlled, and there had been no time to extend the excellent housing schemes carried out in some parts of the city to cover the whole area inhabited by Africans. Faced with this mass of population, paternalism was impotent; in the Katanga, where the problem had not to be faced on so large a scale, it was more adequate. In Elisabethville there is nothing to be seen comparable to the worst parts of the African city at Leopoldville. Certainly the misery in Leopoldville was less than in Brazzaville; it was not this, however, which struck the Africans, but rather the racial discrimination in such things as salaries and housing conditions in Leopoldville itself.

The Disturbances

In this situation very little was needed to set off a violent manifestation of discontent and racial hatred among the African population of Leopoldville, and the banning of the Abako meeting to be held on 4 January in the Y.M.C.A. premises in the Kalumu commune was enough. The Abako supporters who had gathered in the hope of hearing M. Pinzi report on his recent visit to Belgium grew excited and talked wildly of independence; M. Kasavubu, who was also present, failed to calm them. The police arrived and resorted to the use of firearms; anger spread throughout the native city, and the cry of independence was taken up; the pent-up fury of many months was unloosed; Europeans were attacked and churches, schools, hospitals, and social centres destroyed. The Europeans gave way to panic, the Army was called in, and the repression was violent. Casualties among the Europeans might have been much heavier had not some of them been hidden and protected from the crowds by individual Africans. They might have been lighter, however, had not Radio Leopoldville played down the gravity of the situation, and reported that all was calm in regions where rioting was

in fact in full progress. As a result, unsuspecting Europeans became involved in the riots when they could have avoided the affected neighbourhoods. Casualty figures are difficult to establish; the official figures given at the end of March by the Parliamentary Commission of Inquiry were forty-nine African deaths and forty-nine Europeans and three hundred and thirty Africans wounded. M. Kasavubu was arrested; a few days later the Abako was dissolved and MM. Pinzi and Diomi arrested. This seemed strange to the Africans, since the first reaction of the authorities had been to praise the *bourgemestres* for their efforts to keep order in their communes. Both the Abako and the separatist sect of the Kimbangists were hotly denounced in the Belgian Press. No evidence was ever offered, however, that either the leaders of the Abako or those of the Kimbangists had instigated or encouraged the riots; nor was the suggestion proved that a series of attacks on Europeans had been planned for the 13th, and had simply broken out ahead of time.

The Government's Declaration of 13 January

Ten days after the riots the Government's declaration on the future of the Congo was due; obviously it could not be entirely unaffected by the events of the 4th, and it would seem that the riots were instrumental in rallying the Government—not without much hesitation—to M. Van Hemelrijck's progressive policy. The declaration was preceded by King Baudouin's radio message. 'It is our firm intention,' he said, 'without undesirable procrastination but also without undue haste, to lead the Congolese populations forward towards independence in prosperity and peace.' The word 'independence' had been taken up in an official pronouncement; this fact alone marked the importance of the new definition of Belgian policy in the Congo. The declaration of the 13th announced the holding of elections for communal and territorial councils by universal suffrage at the end of 1959; these councils were then to elect the Provincial

Councils early in 1960.¹ A *Conseil Général* was to replace the present *Conseil de Gouvernement*, and later to form the House of Representatives, while a *Conseil de Législation* was to be set up, the future Senate. As from March 1959 each Provincial Council was to elect two representatives to sit on the *Conseil de Législation*.

African comments on this declaration were on the whole favourable, since Belgium had announced her intention of according independence, and was preparing the way for internal autonomy by a system of councils elected by universal suffrage; the Congolese noted, however, that the Government declaration remained very vague, and hoped that further information would soon be forthcoming. But the change in tone from previous declarations was striking and encouraging; never before had it been said that Belgium 'intended to organize the Congo as a democracy, capable of exercising the prerogatives of sovereignty and of deciding the question of independence for itself'.

Europeans were divided in their comments. There were sharp criticisms from a group of reactionaries at Leopoldville who had tried to set up a 'committee for public safety' after the riots, but other whites of the city signed a motion in which they declared themselves in agreement with the Government's proposals. Some of the settlers in the East were violently critical; at Bukavu, for example, flags flew at half-mast and the shops were closed when M. Van Hemelrijck visited the city during his tour of the Congo. The *Fédacol*, the settlers' federation, however, was not as such unfavourable.

¹ The towns were to be divided into communes; in some cases this had already been done for the elections of 1957 and 1958. For the elections in rural areas, the old administrative division of the *territoire* sufficed. For administrative purposes the *territoires* are grouped in districts, but for representative purposes there is to be no intermediate stage between the communes and *territoires* respectively, and the provinces (of which there are six in the Congo).

After the Riots

In Leopoldville the arrested African leaders were tried, but there was insufficient evidence on which to condemn them. Several were released at the end of February, then MM. Pinzi and Diomi early in March. On 14 March Joseph Kasavubu, Daniel Kanza, and Simon Nzeza were flown to Belgium and lodged in a Brussels hotel at Government expense, since it was 'inopportune' to release them in Leopoldville. While in Belgium, it was stressed, they were not to treat with the Government (the Congolese concluded at first that this was the purpose of their visit, and there were anxious representations from various groups asking why they, too, should not have this privilege) but to study Belgian institutions and public life in order to fit them for future responsibilities in the Congo. Meanwhile the Abako, having in vain appealed for United Nations intervention, endeavoured to set up an organization in exile at Brazzaville, under the leadership of M. Kingatolo, and busied itself sending tracts back to Leopoldville demanding autonomy for the Bakongo. By contrast, the Congolese *Jocistes* (Young Christian Workers) set on foot a subscription scheme among the Africans to compensate Europeans whose property had been damaged or destroyed during the riots. Inspired by this, a European subscription was raised to compensate Africans whose homes and property had suffered.

At the same time several new political groups sprang up in Leopoldville; the *Mouvement de Regroupement de Populations du Congo* endeavoured to regroup the Bakongo; the *Inter-fédérale*, which united the non-Bakongo ethnic groups of Leopoldville, began to be active politically, while the *Union Progressiste Congolaise*, the *Parti Démocrate Congolais*, and the *Mouvement pour le progrès national congolais* were at one in putting independence and unity in the forefront of their programmes. In March it was announced that a group of leading Congolese personalities—*bourgemestres*, chiefs, and the representatives of various movements from all parts of

the country—would come to Belgium at the request of the Colonial Minister to discuss government policy. In the Congo itself the first national congress of democratic parties and movements was held in April. As a result of discussions between the *Union Congolaise* and the *Mouvement National Congolais*, it had been agreed that the *Union Congolaise* should organize a congress at Luluabourg at which the various groups from all over the Colony could meet with each other, discuss their aims together, and, if possible, prepare a common programme of action. This was the first time that Africans from all parts of the Congo had come together to discuss their political future. In fact it was impossible to prepare a common programme at this first meeting, but a second congress was announced for later in the summer. The old regional isolation of African movements in the Congo had broken down, just as had the Colony's former isolation from the rest of the continent.

Conclusion

At the end of the War the Congo was just beginning to be less isolated from the rest of Africa, but the old paternalist pattern of things seemed unshaken. When Mrs. Robeson, wife of the American Negro singer, visited Leopoldville in 1947 she was disappointed to find that the *évolués* there did not seem to have the slightest interest in the emancipation of their country.¹ The change came only gradually; the independence of India and even the Bandung Conference aroused very little echo in the Congo. The first awakening came in the economic and social fields, with the demands of the *évolués* for assimilation to European status. They wanted protection against racial discrimination on the part of the Europeans and Belgian citizenship. At the same time they were becoming increasingly aware of outside events; the independence of the Sudan and of Ghana, the French policy in Africa, and finally the conference of independence

¹ A. A. J. Van Bilsen, 'La Belgique devant le problème du Congo', *Revue Générale Belge*, February 1959, p. 5.

movements at Accra all had their effect. The desire for assimilation was transformed into a demand for independence; Congolese aspirations had moved on to the political level. Now it was not so much that Africans wanted protection against the racial discrimination of Europeans, as that the Europeans no longer felt at home in the Congo and began to want protection against the Africans. Those with children studying at Belgian universities began to ask themselves whether, after all, it was advisable for them to return to make their careers in Africa. There was no longer any question but that the Congo would become independent; it was possible to dispute ways and means but not the fact itself.

Belgium adopted the system of paternalism because it paid; her reasoning was empirical and her policy practical. Now that it has clearly become impossible to achieve a prosperous, stable, and contented society by these methods, Belgium has changed her policy. The January declaration shows her as remarkably adaptable and flexible. Since the War it has appeared to the Congolese that she has been grudging in the concessions she has made, little by little, to the demands of the *évolués*; there has been no bold, comprehensive planning to prepare the Congo for independence. There is a considerable difference, however, between these piecemeal concessions and the tone of the declaration.

Now the Congolese have been promised their independence, and such a promise cannot be withdrawn. But a declaration has obvious dangers unless it is followed up with reasonable speed. It is still possible to decide on bold action in time, to hand over authority peacefully, to guarantee to the young nation the help of European specialists and technicians, and to Europeans who have made their home in the Congo a voice—though not the deciding voice—in public affairs. But to do this Belgium will have to move fast. It is urgent to prepare an African *élite* capable of governing the country—presumably by study in Europe—and to reduce the educational gap between the

towns and the countryside, so that the rural areas may be qualified to defend their interests in an independent Congo. A Congolese nationality must be created, for the Congolese no longer desire Belgian citizenship, while those non-Belgian whites who have decided to make their home in the Congo must be politically integrated into Congolese society. It will be necessary to work out some form of decentralization of authority, to fix a date for the election of the national councils proposed by the Government declaration of 13 January, and to define their powers. It will be useless, of course, to set up democratic institutions in the Congo if there is no effective freedom of speech. And if there is to be fruitful co-operation and some form of association between Belgium and her former colony in the future, as would seem to be to the advantage of both, all forms of racial discrimination in the Congo must cease.

The January declaration took an important step forward, and this cannot be retraced; the Congo has been promised independence. But how and when this is to come has not yet been decided. The declaration must be followed by a bold and energetic interpretation on Belgium's part, and the co-operation both of Europeans and of Africans to make a reality of the Congolese nation whose existence it heralds.

*Printed in Great Britain
by Richard Clay and Co., Ltd.,
Bungay, Suffolk.*

