

Lessons of the Congo¹

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NO events in Africa's modern history have been more significant than those which have shaken the Congo since the middle of 1960. Here has been a supreme testing ground of the battle for Africa's liberation. Congo is the continent's linch-pin, Africa's great mineral heart and politico-strategic gateway. Uranium, cobalt, copper, diamonds, gold, zinc, manganese, cadmium, columbium and tantalum lie buried in its soil in measureless quantities. To the north-east of this huge, rich territory lies Sudan and the route to Egypt; to the north and the north-west, the weak young states of the French community; to the south-west, the smouldering furnace of Angola; east, the unresolved problems of Uganda and Tanganyika, and beyond Kenya, on the edge of a new crisis; southwards, the way is open to the rich copper belt of Northern Rhodesia and down, through Southern Rhodesia, to the final bastion of white domination, the Union of South Africa.

One has only to look at the map to see how the Congo is, indeed, the very heart of Africa. Genuine independence for the Congo would mean more than the loss of the immense mineral wealth owned by Belgian, American, British, French and West German monopolies; more than the deprivation to the West of vital strategic raw materials—uranium and cobalt. Politically it would open the way to the liberation from colonialism of all the remaining territories of Africa which are yet to win their independence. It is, in fact, precisely in those territories lying east and south of the Congo that some of Africa's greatest battles are yet to come.

It is understandable, therefore, that it has been the Congo which has witnessed the first major push and trial of the new imperialist method of neo-colonialism. It was the intention of the United States, Belgium and other interested Western powers that the Congo was to be granted formal independence while imperialist advisers remained the real "power behind the throne" and thus ensured that the exploitation of the Congo's riches and manpower by Western monopolies continued undisturbed.

On the very day of the declaration of the Congo's independence, that well-known American supporter of colonialism, Robert C. Ruark, wrote:

"The greatest hope of the moneyed interests was that independence would bring such chaos that a new kind of economic colonialism might be imposed, with the white man continuing to run things, but under a black figurehead, whose material wants might easily be appeased in wine, women and flashy cars, plus a Swiss bank account."²

And when this game failed, when the explosion took place, when it became clear that the patriot, Patrice Lumumba and his colleagues were not prepared to sell their souls for "wine, women and flashy cars, plus a Swiss bank account", and when the Congolese people themselves showed that they would resist this attempt of the imperialists to continue to suppress and exploit the Congo behind the back of a formal independence, then the neo-colonialist onslaught became still more insistent. Pour in the Belgian paratroops. Flood the country

¹ This article is an extract from Jack Woddis's *Africa—The Lion Awakes*, which will be published in the autumn of this year.

² *New York World Telegram and Sun*, June 30th, 1960.

with well-financed agents, their pockets stuffed with millions of dollars, ready to buy whom they could—puppet generals, ambitious politicians, petty dictators, tribal chiefs, even whole armies of soldiers. Tear the country to pieces—Katanga here, a pawn of Union Minière; Kasai there, a pawn of Forminière. Kasai, the diamond centre, with its new mockery of a name, the “Mining State”, blatantly based on its diamond wealth and on no ethnical, historical or political justification. But Katanga was to be the key, rich Katanga, which contributes 60 per cent of the Congo’s revenue. This was to be torn away from the legal Central Government and, if possibly (according to some people’s aims), linked with Northern Rhodesia’s copper belt to make one huge mineral complex—all with the blessing of Sir Roy Welensky.

To do all this openly was not easy for the imperialists. Hence, their readiness to hide behind the blue flag of the United Nations—and even to use the U.N. apparatus as the main weapon for their deadly operation.

And when all this proved too little, the patriotic leaders were murdered. Lumumba was bought by Tshombe from Kasavubu and Mobutu for a mere £40,000. Others were sold to Kalonji. French fascists trained in war combat against Algerian women and children, German Nazi foreign legionaries, veterans of the war in Viet Nam, Belgian and South African mercenaries, British soldiers-of-fortune—all rushed to place themselves at the disposal of the hangman. A flood of Belgian and American arms poured in. French jet military aircraft were flown in by a United States transport company. An unholy alliance of the Western powers, with the aid of fascist riff-raff from Europe, of the most extreme racialists and enemies of Africa, was thrown against defiant Congo—and all despite the clear instructions of the United Nations Security Council resolution of July 14th, 1960.

Role of the United Nations

History will find it hard to understand how the United Nations—called in, according to its July 1960 resolution, to assist the Central Government of the Congo, headed by Lumumba, to secure the withdrawal of Belgian forces and to protect the Congo’s sovereignty and integrity—paved the way to the overthrow of that Government, the dissolution of the parliament which had elected it, the murder of its Prime Minister by a Belgian officer (one of those who the U.N. was to have expelled from the Congo), and the tearing apart of the living body of the Congo Republic. The United Nations Security Council resolution of July 14th, 1960, was absolutely clear:

“Considering the request for military assistance addressed to the Secretary-General by the Presi-

dent and Prime Minister of the Republic of the Congo:

1. Calls upon the Government of Belgium to withdraw their troops from the territory of the Republic of the Congo;
2. Decides to authorise the Secretary-General to take the necessary steps, in consultation with the Government of the Republic of the Congo, to provide the Government with such military assistance, as may be necessary, until, through the efforts of the Congolese Government with the technical assistance of the United Nations, the national security forces may be able, in the opinion of the Government, to meet fully their tasks;
3. Requests the Secretary-General to report to the Security Council as appropriate.”

Nothing could be more explicit. And yet the idea has been spread far and wide, including amongst opponents of colonialism, that the United Nations was called in “to restore law and order”. These words never appeared in the July 1960 resolution, which did not deal with internal Congolese matters but with the aggression by the Belgians and the assistance to be given to the Congolese Government to overcome this attack.

“To restore law and order” has always been the slogan used by reaction to suppress the people. It was in the name of “restoring law and order” that Thiers slaughtered the Communards. It was to “restore law and order” that Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg and countless others were murdered by Hitler’s forerunners. It was “to restore law and order” that Field-Marshal Mannerheim, the butcher of the north, killed, as *The Times* admitted, tens of thousands of Finnish workers in 1918. Chiang Kai-shek, Franco, Mussolini, Hitler, every dictator in history has always hidden his mass repressions behind the slogan of “law and order”. And the Congo has been no exception. The fact that the July 14th, 1960, resolution was never published in the Western press shows that the imperialists never had any intention of carrying it out. In fact, they did just the opposite. Instead of assisting the legal Central Government which had called it in, the United Nations secured the downfall of that Government and the hoisting into office in Katanga, Kasai and Leopoldville of the Belgian-backed-American-financed puppets, Tshombe, Kalonji, Kasavubu and Mobutu. When it was a question of stopping Mobutu closing down Parliament or saving the lives of Lumumba and his colleagues, the U.N. claimed that it had no authority to intervene. Yet it did not hesitate to use blatant intervention when it was a question of preventing the Congolese Premier using his own radio to broadcast to his people. It acted promptly to deny the Lumumba Government access to its airfields—but allowed those same airfields to be used by the Belgians and

Tshombe to drag the beaten, bloodied body of Lumumba from Leopoldville to Katanga and death.

Why was it Possible?

But there is no space or intention here to narrate all the sordid detail of the betrayal of the Congo. The big question for Africa and the world is *why* did this happen? Why was it possible for this terrible series of events to take place?

First and foremost, the responsibility rests with the Western powers. Not Belgium alone (which is an all-too-easy Aunt Sally for those hesitant to point their finger at the ultimate criminal), but above all, the United States, which, through its dollars, military equipment and dominating political and diplomatic positions in the Western world, has been able to call the tune. No one really believes that little Belgium could have defied the might and economic power of the United States, Britain, France, Western Germany and the other N.A.T.O. powers. Only an American-backed Western alliance could have produced the present disaster in the Congo. Even President Kennedy's brother, the new American Attorney-General, has referred to Kasavubu as "a tool of the American Central Intelligence Agency".

And along with America, with its huge financial stakes in Katanga, was French imperialism, plotting from its hideout across the river at Brazzaville, hoping to pull off a deal through its puppet Abbé Youlou, ready to send in French military aircraft, to loan French officers boasting: "You can call me a fascist". The German Federal Republic was eager, too, rushing to make its airfields available, looking for a toe-hold in the Congo. And what of Britain? The big British monopoly, Tanganyika Concessions, with its shares in Union Minière, was not indifferent as to which way the "wind of change" blew. Not only has "Tanks" shares in Union Minière. The Belgians have shares in "Tanks". And the Americans have shares in both. British interests in Rhodesia are interested, too. And the British shareholders in the Banguela railway, with its links from Katanga to Angola, and to the copper belt and down to Wankie coal mines. These, too, had their eyes on the situation. Recruitment offices for Tshombe were set up in numerous European capitals. Recruitment agents went to work, too, in Salisbury, Johannesburg, and in Nairobi.

In other words, the combined forces of the imperialist powers were thrown against the Congo.

This, then, is the first and prime reason for the disaster in the Congo. But secondly, there was the role of the United Nations. There are many people and states, including some in Africa, who regard the U.N. as an impartial, neutral, above-conflict adjudicator, as a referee, the voice and conscience

of the world, a protector of the weak and oppressed, a dispenser of justice. This idealist conception of the U.N. is divorced from reality, from the actual world in which we live. The United Nations, as a body, represents the imperialist states, other smaller capitalist countries, the newly-independent states of Asia and Africa, the countries of Latin America, and the people of the socialist camp (but still excluding China).

In its deliberations the United Nations is by no means united. It represents a real world, and mirrors the conflicts of that world. Each vital policy decision, therefore, becomes a battle of contending interests, between those who stand for peace and genuine independence for nations, and those who prepare for war and regard underdeveloped areas of the world as sources of profit and as strategic bases.

But even when, after discussion and concession, some agreement is reached on paper, there still remains the question of carrying out the decision. And this is where the second major problem really lies. For even when the U.N. Security Council adopts such a correct and progressive resolution as the resolution of July 14th, 1960, the machinery for implementing it, though it is often referred to as "an international civil service", is not controlled by the United Nations but by only one side of this body. The machinery of the U.N., the U.N. "state apparatus" as it were, is mainly in the hands of the Western powers, and their supporters. Just consider these facts. Of 28 deputies to the Secretary-General, 17 are from the United States or its allies, 10 from neutral or former colonial countries, 1 from the socialist countries. Out of 34 directors, 28 are from the first-named group, 5 from the second, and 1 from the third. Since 1955, some 2,000 technical experts from the United States and its allies have been sent to various countries by the U.N.; none has been sent from Africa, and only 40 from the socialist countries. And for the U.N. Congo operation, 45 military staff officers from the United States and its allies, none from the socialist countries; 546 representatives in police and liaison units in the Congo from the Western powers, 24 from Africa, and none from the socialist countries; 220 non-military staff from the Western powers, none from the socialist countries. So much for the oft-vaunted impartiality of the U.N. apparatus.

The U.N. Secretariat and its bodies are so overloaded with Western representatives, particularly susceptible to pressure from the United States as the most influential power, that it is inevitable that this U.N. "state apparatus" should be neither equipped in personnel nor politically disposed to carry through any just resolutions of the United Nations, but would constantly seek to stall on them,

or to ignore them completely and do the opposite to what the resolutions demand.

Thus it was that the U.N. apparatus was in the hands of the enemies of the Congolese people—and this made possible the setting at nought of the resolution of July 14th, 1960.

Congolese Disunity

But is that all? Can one say that it was the fault of the imperialists and the U.N. apparatus, and leave it at that?

Not at all. For the question still remains, how was it possible for the imperialists to inflict such terrible damage on the Congolese people after the declaration of independence on June 30th? How was it possible for the imperialists to hide behind the U.N. apparatus in the Congo in order to carry out its nefarious schemes, to overthrow the legal Government, instal puppets, suppress Parliament, and tear away Katanga and Kasai? Remember, the legal Congolese Government was a coalition of parties backed by the majority of the Congolese people. It was supported by the entire socialist camp of a thousand million people. It had the sympathy and backing of peoples and governments in Africa and Asia. It was, in fact, supported by the majority of people in the world.

Why, then, did the Congo suffer such severe setbacks?

First, the Congolese people were not united. A divided people is always at the mercy of an enemy such as imperialism—and an experienced, cunning and ruthless enemy such as imperialism is well able to make use of every fissure, to expand every little rent in the fabric of national upsurge, to probe ever deeper, to widen the divisions, intimidate here, bribe there, play on individual ambitions, make use of backward-looking tribal affiliations, introduce a reign of terror when necessary and physically remove the most consistent leaders and patriots. The united front of the imperialists (for, notwithstanding their own differences, they were united against the genuine independence for the Congo) should have been met by the united front of the entire Congolese people. In contrast to other African countries, the Congolese political parties were comparatively new. No time had been available in which to build up a powerful, united national front—and in 1960 the Congolese people went to the polls to vote for one of a score of parties. Some degree of unity was achieved through the formation, under Lumumba, of the legal Government, which was a coalition of several parties. But it all took place very quickly, before the unity could be cemented by a real national front below.

There is no doubt, too, that the absence of long-standing, experienced trade unions, embracing

workers irrespective of tribal affiliation and united on a class basis, weakened the national front. Here, too, in contrast to a number of other African territories, the workers had had little time to build trade unions. Thus, there was no experienced, solid working-class organisation to help provide a firm basis for the national front. And the peasants, of course, were not at all organised. Under these conditions, with a shaky state apparatus still largely in Belgian hands, it was extremely difficult to mobilise the mass resistance of the whole people to imperialist intervention, to resort to the *levée en masse*, to rely on the armed workers and peasants as a force which would remain loyal and united behind the Central Government, and vigilant against every move of deception and treachery. Time, once again, was not in favour of the Congolese people. They had hardly run up the new national flag before the imperialist typhoon was upon them.

Disunity of the African States

Added to the disunity of the Congolese people and parties, there was the disunity of the African states themselves. Not merely disunity between the "Casablanca" states and the "Brazzaville" states—but a partial lack of cohesion, of resolution even, including amongst the more advanced African states, partly explained by the varying degrees of reliance placed by the different African governments on the U.N. operation in the Congo. This arose because some African states and leaders have maintained a blind faith in the U.N.—not in the real, existing U.N. of Hammarskjöld, the U.N. controlled by N.A.T.O. and by the United States, but an entirely imagined U.N., an impartial referee who would safeguard the Congo's independence, drive out the imperialists and uphold Congo's sovereignty and liberty. Thus, it was that as each successive deterioration in the situation took place, these African states threatened to take drastic measures, to withdraw their troops from the U.N. command, to place them at the disposal of the legal Government headed by Lumumba, to set up their own African command to rescue the Congolese people from disaster. But no unified, resolute steps along these lines were ever taken.

Why was this so? Why was it that the Congo was strangled not only by imperialist finance, imperialist representatives and imperialist puppets, but also by honest African troops from independent African states? The failure of the African states to save the Congo from disaster and to save Lumumba and his colleagues stems, ironically enough, largely from their desire to "keep the cold war out of Africa". This just desire of the African people to retain their continent as a zone of peace and not be drawn into imperialist war plans and military entanglements

has been interpreted by some African national leaders as a necessity to keep the Soviet Union out of Africa. But the U.N., as it stands at present, controlled by the Western powers, is itself an instrument of the cold war, even of hot war. The African states were reluctant to rely on assistance from socialist countries, they hesitated to act resolutely themselves to aid the Congo, they were justifiably suspicious of the intentions of Western imperialism—so where could they turn? Only—they thought—to the U.N.

Through having no hesitation, in their moment of peril, to turn towards the Soviet Union and other socialist countries, Guinea, Cuba and the United Arab Republic, safeguarded their independence and still live; but Congo, poor, bleeding, torn Congo, tragic martyr of imperialist greed, lies temporarily under the heel of the oppressor. Is there not a lesson here for the African states?

Certainly the African people have learnt much

from the experience of the Congo. They now understand. When, after the news of Lumumba's appalling end, they rose in their anger in a score of capitals, it was not alone the Belgian Embassies which were the target of their wrath. U.N. offices and American Embassies and Information Centres were likewise attacked.

Experience sometimes has to be bought at a terrible price. The disaster in the Congo is not solely a catastrophe. The people of the Congo—and indeed of all Africa—can yet turn this setback into triumph, provided that they learn the lesson of the Congo well. There can be no real or lasting peace and freedom for the African people until the last remnant of imperialism, the last imperialist puppet, the last imperialist economic root, the last imperialist soldier, has been driven out of the African continent. And to carry through that job Africa must recognise fully and clearly who are her real enemies and who are her real friends.