

THE BATTLE FOR THE CONGO AND THE NOVEMBER AGGRESSION

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ON NOVEMBER 22nd, 1964, Belgian and United States troops boarded military aircraft on the British-occupied island of Ascension, off the coast of Angola. They flew to Stanleyville in the Congo and there joined in the savage war of destruction spearheaded by the fascist scum of white South Africans and others on Tshombe's payroll, against the people of the Congo and the Revolutionary Government headed by Christopher Gbenye.

It was the most blatant act of aggression by regular foreign troops in Africa since July 1960, when the United Nations Security Council ordered the Belgian government to 'withdraw its troops from the territory of the Congo'. It was also a continuance of the all-out struggle which the combined forces of international imperialism have been waging for control over the Congo ever since Patrice Lumumba, in the presence of King Baudouin, launched the new Republic with an announcement to the world that he and his people would insist not only on the appearance but also on the reality of independence. From that day onward the Congo has been a crucial battlefield in Africa's struggle for liberation.

The people's struggles in the Congo, and the rising tide of national resistance all over Africa, had forced the Belgian colonialists to recognize that direct colonial rule was no longer viable. Following the example of Britain and France, the Belgians hoped confidently that under the cover of a purely nominal independence they would be able to continue dominating the country as before, controlling its economy, its civil service and police, and extracting vast profits from its resources and cheap labour for the benefit of the Union Miniere and other powerful monopolies.

These hopes were rudely shattered. Lumumba was no puppet, and

under his courageous leadership the Congo people stood upright, after generations of colonialist oppression, to assert their will to freedom. The uncompromising Independence Day speech at Leopoldville was followed by purposeful measures to establish the sovereignty and integrity of the Republic. The Belgian officials who monopolized the top places in the police and other state services were replaced by Africans. Lumumba acted swiftly to strengthen ties of friendship between the Congo and other independent African states, and with the Asian and socialist countries. The authority of the Congo was secured at the United Nations.

These determined measures produced a state of shock, almost amounting to panic, not only in Belgium but in all the imperialist countries. The powerful anti-African financial interests, with their close ties with the state machinery, in Wall Street, London, Paris, Johannesburg and Salisbury, with their vast stake in African wealth and exploitation, awoke to the threat posed to the enormous profits they were harvesting not only in the wealthy Congo itself but in all African territories, not least the strongholds of colonialism in the south. In normal conditions of the capitalist jungle, these interests are forever at one another's throats. But, faced with this crisis, they joined forces in a joint 'rescue operation' of collective imperialism, an alliance of beasts of prey to crush the reality and the spirit of Congo independence and drown it in blood. A tremendous barrage of lying propaganda was launched against the Republic, and against Lumumba in particular. Vast sums of money, and every resource of intrigue and corruption, were set in motion to disrupt and undermine the newly-established government and its inexperienced cadres whom the Belgians had systematically deprived of opportunities for education and administrative positions.

The key move of the colonialists was to fragmentize the Congo; in particular to use their creature Tshombe to break away mineral-rich Katanga as an 'independent state'—in reality as a neo-colony. In 1960 as in 1964, Tshombe did not hesitate to enlist the worst enemies of African freedom and dignity to slaughter his fellow-countrymen. Mercenaries were recruited from amongst Belgians, white South Africans and Rhodesians, Nazi adventurers left over from the second world war, French Foreign Legionnaires and O.A.S. thugs, their hands dripping with the blood of Algerian patriots.

With indecent haste, the Belgian imperialists dropped the pose of conferrers of independence on the grateful Africans. The Belgian Government poured its troops, equipped with the latest NATO arms, into the Congo. The sinister, utterly unscrupulous American Central

Intelligence Agency (C.I.A.) spread its tentacles everywhere. Millions were poured out to corrupt politicians, to spread economic disorder and social unrest, in an all-out effort to smash the Republic and to destroy Patrice Lumumba and the spirit of revolutionary African liberation which he personified.

THE APPEAL TO THE UNITED NATIONS

Lumumba, faced by this direct military aggression and imperialist intervention, was in a painfully difficult position. The only regular armed troops at his disposal were the *Force Publique*—recruited and trained by the Belgian colonialists for the purpose of suppressing the Congolese people and their national liberation movement. Although the Belgian officers had been replaced, the loyalty and discipline of this force, and its reliability in a war of patriotic defence against Belgian troops, were extremely questionable. As soon became abundantly clear, Colonel Mobutu, its head, was already taking his orders from the C.I.A. To whom then was Lumumba to turn? The independent African states were, at that time, far fewer in number (of thirty-five African states today, only nine achieved independence before 1960) and few were in a position, either politically or militarily, to help stem the imperialist aggression. (It is worth recalling that even the Ghana army was then still officered by British army men.) The socialist countries would, no doubt, have been prepared to stand by the Republic—had they been asked to do so. Lumumba himself, in one of his last public statements, declared: ‘The Soviet Union proved to be the only one of the great powers which, from the very beginning, supported the people of the Congo in their struggle’.

But the Lumumba government issued no such appeal—and when one considers the extent to which President Kasavubu and other colleagues of the late Prime Minister were already involved in United States intrigues, it is not difficult to understand the reason why.

On the advice of the other African governments Lumumba then took the only other alternative which then seemed open to him—he appealed to the Security Council of the United Nations for assistance to repel Belgian aggression. If the United Nations’ deeds had matched its words and professions, if it had even been an organization whose executive machinery was prepared to carry out the clear-cut and unambiguous decisions of its leading bodies, this appeal would have saved the situation. But the United States and other colonialist powers dominated the administrative apparatus of the United Nations headed by the secretary-general, the late Mr. Dag Hammarskjold, and these powers were determined by hook or by crook to get rid of Prime Minister Lumumba and to re-establish foreign domination over the Congo.

The decision of the Security Council, backed by the Afro-Asian and the socialist countries, was precise in its wording and clear in its intentions—to assist the Republic of the Congo to repel the Belgian aggressors. The Belgians were told to get their troops out of the Congo. The secretary-general was authorized *in consultation with the Lumumba government* to provide that government with such military assistance as it needed, and until ‘with the technical assistance’ of the United Nations it could build adequate defences of its own. And that was all. But the colonialists distorted and far exceeded this mandate; and the United Nations force was used not to implement the resolution but to sabotage its purpose. Instead of being placed at the disposal of the Lumumba government, United Nations troops acted as an independent force to intervene in Congo affairs against their host, Lumumba, whose

‘We can do our best to help all those inside the Congo itself like Mr. Tshombe who, as he has shown again and again, stands for the same things as we do.’

Lord Salisbury (of the British South Africa Chartered Company) in the *Daily Telegraph*,
December 8th, 1964

request was their only authority for being there. The results were tragic. When, at the last moment (it is impossible not to feel that things would have turned out very differently had he done so sooner) and as a last resort, Lumumba tried to mobilize his real strength—the mass support he overwhelmingly enjoyed—he found his entry to the radio station barred by United Nations troops.

The end of the tragic story is well known: the illegal dissolution of Parliament by Kasavubu and Mobutu at the behest of the C.I.A., the illegal deposition of Lumumba, his kidnapping and assassination. (How ironic that the criminals responsible for this foul deed are today among those championed by Washington, Bonn, Paris, Brussels, London and Pretoria as members of the ‘legal government’!) In his brilliant exposure of this disgraceful episode in United Nations history, *To Katanga and Back*, a relentless searchlight has been cast on all these shabby proceedings by one United Nations official who remained loyal to the original Security Council resolution—Dr. Conor Cruise O’Brien.

These outrageous crimes of the Belgian, United States, British and other colonialists aroused a continual and mounting storm of criticism and opposition at the United Nations. Time and again the African, Asian and Socialist delegates exposed and angrily denounced the use of United Nations authority to cover blatant neo-colonialism. The Soviet Union refused—and still does—to pay a penny towards the

infamous 'United Nations' adventure in the Congo. It was such pressure which led to the abandonment of the 'Katanga secession' plan, the recall in July 1961 of the Congo Parliament, and the eventual departure, in 1964, of the 'United Nations' military force.

But, by then, neo-colonialist, especially United States, economic penetration, corruption and indirect domination had established their ascendancy. The colonialists no longer needed the fiction of Katanga 'Independence', and the man who had identified himself with that sorry cause, Moïse Tshombe was retired from the limelight and from the Congo. He left, with plenty of money (his choice of a place of exile is illuminating!) for fascist Spain, and it seemed justifiable to hope that we had seen the last of him in public affairs. It was a mark of the desperation of the neo-colonialists and the bankruptcy of their agents in Leopoldville, that they should, in the latter part of 1964, have brought back this discredited politician in the role of 'Prime Minister' of the Congo.

Neither the various puppet administrations at Leopoldville nor their United States and other imperialist backers had come an inch closer to the solution of the many problems of this key African country. The pace of exploitation, of the shipping abroad of the wealth of the nation, was accelerated, but the conditions of the masses deteriorated. The progressive measures initiated under Lumumba, such as Africanization, were reversed; Belgian and other colonialist personnel flocked back into what was once again developing into a haven of white domination; dollars for 'aid' streamed into the pockets of politicians and civil servants. While corruption and extravagance flourished in high places the conditions of the starving masses went from bad to worse. On the borders of the Congo the tide of the African Revolution rose higher and higher; the neo-colonialist regime in Brazzaville was overthrown and the shaky military dictatorship in the Sudan was on its last legs. The Congo itself was seething with revolt; the masses of the people remained loyal to Lumumba's colleagues Gizenga and Gbenye; Kasavubu and other imperialist agents clung to office only by virtue of foreign support and the so-called 'United Nations' forces were about to depart. Only extreme measures could stem the tide of popular revolt around the revolutionary Gbenye government—and the C.I.A. men calculated that only a Tshombe could be ruthless and unscrupulous enough to carry them out.

His return, in the role of 'Prime Minister' was paraded as a move for 'national unity', and Mr. Gizenga was released from his long detention on a remote island and allowed back to the capital under close surveillance, to give some colour to this manoeuvre. But few were deceived. The Organization of African Unity, in session at Cairo,

refused to allow Tshombe to attend; the democratic revolutionary government forces headed by Gbenye were making a triumphant advance, routing the demoralized and undisciplined remnants of the *Force Publique*, occupying many important areas including the city of Stanleyville.

Quickly shedding the pretence at patriotic national unity, Tshombe resorted to the methods which had made him so universally hated in 1960 and 1961 of employing fanatically anti-African white terrorists as mercenaries, and even appealing for open United States and Belgian government military intervention against the people of the Congo.

Within three months of Tshombe's return from Spain all the key posts in the administration were once again being handed back to Belgians. Even the special correspondent of the London *Times* in Elizabethville revealed that, in the civil service,

Nominally the Africans remain in charge, but planning and execution are being handed over more and more to Europeans, mainly Belgians. Mr. Tshombe has, for example, authorized the employment of Belgian police officers to reorganize the Elisabethville police force and, it is reported, the police forces of other provinces as well.

The Times, October 22nd, 1964.

Not unsurprisingly, *The Times* correspondent does not blame the Belgians for 'this sort of close relationship' with Tshombe. They have 'a legitimate interest', he comments cynically, 'in seeing that their goose goes on laying its profitable copper eggs'. But he acknowledges that the Belgians 'are not coming back to train the Congolese but to take over responsibility from them'. And he is even more worried at the effects, particularly on the relationships between the Congo and its African neighbours, of the continued presence of the mercenaries, 'the majority from South Africa and Southern Rhodesia'. It is 'widely believed' he writes 'that they will remain in the Congo on one pretext or another' after the recapture of Stanleyville. These beliefs have been confirmed. According to the Johannesburg *Star* the recruiting office in the centre of that city was still open in December 1964—the newspaper obligingly also provides a Benoni telephone number where enquiries can be made—and adds that:

There are plenty of volunteers anxious to join up with the South African mercenaries who already form the bulk of the Congo's 'foreign legion'. The word has gone out that more white soldiers are needed.

It is no accident that Tshombe should look for, and find, willing volunteers among the whites of Southern Africa, inculcated from childhood with fanatical anti-African race prejudice, and only too eager to join in the jolly sport of shooting down blackskins. Mr. Christopher

Gbenye, head of the Revolutionary Government of the Congo, charged in a statement from Paulis, Northern Congo, that more than 10,000 men, women and children had been slaughtered by this 'army of savage white mercenaries'. It can hardly be supposed that the Belgian,

'Mr. Tshombe is Prime Minister of the Congo today largely by the grace of Belgian civilian and military assistance and South African volunteers.'

Special Correspondent in Elizabethville of
The Times (London), October 20th, 1964

American and British personnel, official and unofficial, who are more than adequately represented in the Congo, could have remained in ignorance of these appalling atrocities. None of them uttered a word or protest.

Yet all of a sudden, in the middle of November, a tremendous barrage of propaganda was launched in the imperialist press, television and other media, about the threat to the lives of the few hundred Europeans and white Americans said to be held as 'hostages' in the territory under the control of the Revolutionary Government centred at that time at Stanleyville. This propaganda furnished the excuse for the direct aggression of November 22nd, in which United States and Belgian troops were flown from the British-controlled island of Ascension to reinforce Tshombe's white mercenaries attacking revolutionary Stanleyville.

THE AGGRESSION OF NOVEMBER 22nd

It is revolting beyond words that under cover of this allegedly 'humanitarian' mission, three big imperialist powers should join in an act of blatant aggression and intervention in an African state. Where were all these fine humanitarian sentiments, one may ask, when Verwoerd's fascist mercenaries were massacring helpless men, women and children in Congo villages? Or are we to take it that Labour Britain, the United States, self-proclaimed leader of the 'free world', and Belgium, care nothing for the lives of dark-skinned people, but are prepared to rush in with troops the moment a far smaller number of fair-skinned people are said to be in danger?

As Dr. O'Brien (*The Observer*, December 6th, 1962) pointed out:

Many Africans regard the 'Congo-Belgian-American mercy mission' as the use of a humanitarian pretext for the extension of the rule of the Belgians and their associates, through the complaisant Government of Leopoldville, over the whole of the resources and the strategic space of the former Belgian Congo. The condemnations of this intervention by African Governments and by the Commission of the Organization of

African Unity in no way exaggerates the bitterness of African opinion on this; if anything, they understate.

Dr. O'Brien concludes his article by suggesting that the 'Europeans and Americans', 'having rescued some hundreds of whites from the blacks', should now 'set about rescuing several millions of blacks from whites'. But it is very questionable indeed whether any whites at all were 'rescued', whether they were ever in any danger, and whether in fact the deaths of whites that took place must not be squarely laid at the door of the so-called 'rescue operation' itself.

In his statement released in Nairobi by the Kenya Press Agency on December 8th, Mr. Gbenye placed the blame for the death of foreign nationals and prisoners of war fairly and squarely on the shoulders of the mercenaries and interventionists. He denied that any people at all had been 'held as hostages' and declared that the Revolutionary



Government had 'always safeguarded and will safeguard the security of persons' of all races and nationalities.

Up to November 22nd at 6 a.m. not a single drop of blood had been shed (in the area controlled by the revolutionaries). Since the arrival of Belgian paratroops and commandos on November 22nd a real massacre has taken place.

Mr. Gbenye related what had actually happened in the 'negotiations' with Belgian and U.S. representatives—which stands in direct contrast with the versions of the same events put out by the colonialists. As long ago as August, he himself had held diplomatic discussions with Mr. Spaak and Mr. Devlin, Washington's special envoy.

Further discussions were held in Nairobi between his envoy, Mr. Thomas Kanza and Mr. William Attwood, the U.S. Ambassador, under the chairmanship of President Jomo Kenyatta.

At 11 p.m. on November 21st I received a message from Paul-Henri Spaak that it was my duty to ensure the security of Belgian nationals living in the regions of the Congo already liberated. At 3 a.m. on November 22nd I replied to Spaak that it was my duty to ensure the security of all inhabitants of the Republic under my control without making any difference of race or religion.

At 6 a.m. on November 22nd, hardly three hours after my reply, the Belgian and American aggression started. The U.S. and Belgium bear the entire responsibility for the consequences.

Hundreds of foreign nationals, prisoners of war and Congolese nationals would not have met their deaths if the unjustified aggression of the U.S. and Belgium had not taken place.

Thus not only was the 'mercy mission' claim put forward as the pretext for the imperialist aggression, completely unjustified in itself. But in fact the aggression itself brought about precisely what it was supposed to prevent—namely, the death of a number of Belgians and other foreigners.

Moreover, the picture of the actual military operation presented to the public in imperialist countries was completely false as well. They put forward a version from which one would imagine that there was no actual fighting, but that they successfully accomplished their allegedly humanitarian mission of removing whites to Elizabethville without difficulty. In fact heavy fighting took place in Stanleyville during the joint attack by Tshombe's mercenaries and the regular Belgian and U.S. troops against the liberation forces. More than ten American planes were shot down and over 500 mercenaries were killed.

Mr. Gbenye said that over 300 prisoners of war fell in fact under the bullets of the mercenaries themselves. This figure is not surprising when he points out that, in their indiscriminate fury of slaughter 'more than ten thousand Congolese men, women and children have been massacred by the army of savage white mercenaries'.

But the International Red Cross, so perturbed about the supposed danger to a relatively small number of whites has said nothing at all about this mass slaughter by Tshombe's hired killers.

LEGAL SUBTERFUGE

The imperialist powers tried to justify their direct intervention and aggression in Stanleyville by the subterfuge that they were in the Congo on the invitation of the 'legal government'. The dubious 'legality' of the Leopoldville junta has been thoroughly and ably exposed by Kgang Dithata in the *African Communist* (No. 18, July-September 1964), who pointed out that Kasavubu had no authority to dismiss Lumumba and suspend Parliament, and every step subsequently taken by him has been illegal in terms of the Constitution.

But even more telling in African eyes is the fact that the Tshombe gang is openly acting not as an African government, but as an open and unashamed agency of foreign imperialist interests. Hardly had the motley gang of United States and Belgian government troops together with the hired white assassins from South Africa and Rhodesia entered Stanleyville, when Tshombe was off by plane to France, Germany and Belgium to report on his satisfactory carrying out of orders and to seek fresh funds.

The *fact* of the matter, legal quibbling aside, is that the Tshombe outfit and its hired gangsters are, and behave like, a savage horde of foreign vandals, massacring entire villages of men, women and children, raping and looting at will. And this is true whether their skins are pink or brown, whether they consist of the so-called Congolese Army (formerly the *Force Publique*) or the loot-crazy mercenaries. The accusation of 'racialism' flung by the colonialists at the African leaders who object to foreign intervention in the Congo is far more applicable to themselves; their press and propaganda assumes with supreme chauvinistic arrogance, that the whites in the Congo are above criticism and must be 'rescued' regardless of the cost in African lives. A far different—and profoundly revealing—aspect is presented by Peter Stenager, a white reporter writing from Leopoldville to the Johannesburg *Sunday Express* on December 13th, in an article the main purpose of which is to praise the 'courage' of the South African mercenaries (several of whose names and addresses are given). After boasting of the superior aggressiveness of the South Africans, and complaining over their treatment and poor pay, he continues:

But for the mercenaries' discontent over wages there have been compensations in Stanleyville. **Richly stocked and unlooted by the rebels during**

their occupation of the town (my emphasis, A.L.) it has been ransacked by mercenaries and Congolese regular troops—unpalatable as this fact may be. The rich cellar of the Stanley Hotel, where most of the Rhodesian and South African men are billeted, has been plundered. Drinks are on the house every night. Meals are free, so is lodging. Every room occupied by mercenaries is stacked with transistor radios, electric shavers, portable record players, records, jewellery, clothing, cigarette lighters, cigarette cases, cigarettes, cigars. The shops of the town are ransacked. The spoils of war have been enjoyed to the full. . . . Several safes—including the strongroom of the bank in Kindu, have been blown. . . . About R60,000 (£30,000) was taken. . . .

Many of the mercenaries are besotted and obsessed with loot. Many are now stealing from each other, and tempers are flaring. Even guns are being drawn on each other.

This graphic picture of the 'forces of law and order' painted by a reporter who is by no means biased in favour of the Revolutionary Government, tells its own story. Could there be any greater contrast between the so-called 'rebels'—who were really concerned with life and property and left the 'richly-stocked' town 'unlooted', and the savage gangsters 'besotted and obsessed with loot', now fighting among themselves like dogs over the spoils?

Just to round off the ugly picture, Mr. Stenager concludes his report with news of fresh 'mopping-up operations' when the mercenaries and Tshombe troops went into an African village near Stanleyville 'suspected of harbouring rebels'.

As I flew out of Stanleyville to file this report, hundreds of prisoners were being brought in for 'interrogation'. Tomorrow the executions, followed by the bodies being dumped in the river, will begin again.

No wonder he reflects that a 'feeling of insecurity' prevails in Stanleyville, a feeling that 'a counter-attack by rebels in mass force could take place again'. The 'feeling of insecurity' will persist in Stanleyville, and every other city of the Congo, until the colonialists' rabble of drunken, thieving, murdering, raping savages, white and black, are indeed defeated by a massive counter-attack by those whom this otherwise vivid and truthful reporter miscalls 'rebels', but who are obviously the only sane and patriotic force in the country which can end the nightmare agony of the Congo and bring tranquillity, national reconstruction and civilized, law-governed, progressive government to this suffering heartland of Africa.

As I write these lines, on the eve of the new year, 1965, there is heartening news of fresh advances by the patriots; and all Africa will hope, and do all we can to ensure, that the new year indeed sees our brothers and sisters in this strife-torn land enter into the legacy of Lumumba, of peace and independence. And also that the criminals in

Leopoldville will at last face the justice and retribution they so richly deserve.

But justice and retribution cannot stop short at the Tshombe gang. Justice demands that their principals—the sinister plotters in the United States, and in Brussels, London, Bonn, Paris and Pretoria—must also answer for the crimes of their tools and agents. These pious humbugs must be taught that crime does not pay; and that the life of a simple peasant in Stanleyville—or for that matter in Vietnam—is just as precious and valuable as that of a fairskinned gentleman who abuses African hospitality, even if he wears a missionary's dog-collar.

THE KATANGA OF AFRICA

The battle for the Congo is not the concern of the Congolese people only; it has become the vital and immediate concern of the people of all Africa. As President Ben Bella pointed out in such striking words:

The whole Congo today has become a Katanga, the Katanga of Africa which menaces Tanzania, menaces Brazzaville Congo, menaces Zambia, menaces Uganda, menaces Angola. . . . If we do nothing about it today the Congo will fall, tomorrow Brazzaville Congo, the day after tomorrow Burundi and Tanzania and after that Zambia, and after that, why not Conakry, Bamako, Cairo, and why not Algiers. . . . The fight for freedom is a common one.

The open imperialist aggression of November 22nd may well prove to have been one of the costliest operations since Suez, in terms of the complete exposure and unmasking of colonialism and neo-colonialism in Africa. The mass demonstrations of the public in many African countries and of African students abroad, like the unequivocal denunciation by the Organization of African Unity, and the fierce condemnations by African, Asian and socialist countries at the United Nations, serve warning on the imperialist powers that Africa will no longer tolerate this alien regime, resting entirely on foreign financial and military support, in the midst of the Continent. In fact to tolerate it means suicide for national independence everywhere; for if the colonialists are allowed to get away with this aggression with impunity there is no African territory which can count itself safe from similar intervention in the future. And we are not prepared to stand by while the former masters of the continent, who have never resigned themselves to their departure, plot and prepare for the recolonization of Africa.

It is not only, therefore, for principled reasons of African solidarity but also because of the imminent threat of imperialist aggression and intrigue in each African state, that every possible aid must be given to the brave revolutionary patriots of the Congo to rid themselves of the regime of traitors and puppets at Elizabethville. The threads run from

the Congo to Angola and Mozambique, to Salisbury and Johannesburg, and to the capitals of the NATO countries, to which Tshombe went running immediately after the November aggression to beg for still more money. They are threads which form part of the web being spun to entrap us all.

There is a further and deeper lesson in these grim events at the close of 1964. It is a humiliating pill to swallow for all Africans that such an act of aggression can still take place without response from our leaders and our countries save that of protest and denunciation. It was altogether proper that we should have protested—and neither history nor

'I have noticed in visits to Stanleyville that most of the aggression seems to be carried out by the South Africans and Rhodesians under Major Hoare.'

Peter Stenager in the Johannesburg
Sunday Express, December 13th, 1964

the Nigerian people will easily forgive those like the representative of that country at the United Nations who undermined the African protest. But protests alone will not avail us against foreign aircraft and mechanized invaders. The African countries must unite and pool their resources. They must embark on speedy and effective measures to modernize, industrialize, and develop their countries on socialist lines. They must be ready to defend Africa, rid its soil of racialism and colonialism, and deal a devastating counter-blow against any aggressor.