

## THE CONGO (III): AFTER INDEPENDENCE

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ALMOST all that could have gone wrong in the Congo went wrong. The country was spared only the worst—*Abako* did not exploit the Katanga's secession movement to force its own demands for a federal constitution.

If the Lower Congo had laid siege to the Republic at the moment when Katanga raised its independence flag, it is difficult to see how the situation might have been retrieved.

The Congolese still have something to be grateful for in a situation that otherwise has given little cause for satisfaction and that has undoubtedly made things much more difficult for the nationalist movements in Central Africa and the Union.

It would be useless to pretend that it is yet possible to attempt a confident analysis of the events leading up to the final disaster. This contribution is a preliminary attempt at dealing with the questions that must one day be properly answered if we are to understand what really went wrong on the morrow of the Congo's independence. To resume from where this account left off in the last issue of *'Africa South'*, here briefly are the main problems that faced the Congo on the eve of its independence.

First, the new Republic was still without an agreed constitution; this was to be the first task of the new parliament.

Secondly, the elections were supposed to indicate the respective strength of the unitarians (favouring a strong, centralised type of government) and the federalists.

Thirdly, there was little prospect of a national movement's coming to power with sufficient authority to control the whole of the country.

Fourthly, the security and administration of the country rested entirely on the Belgians.

Fifthly, there was a considerable danger that the way in which the Belgians were interfering in the elections might estrange them from the Congo's new leaders.

What was not foreseen in my last article (*'Africa South'*, Vol. 4, No. 4) was the danger of a revolt in the Force Publique, and that it would be M. Tshombe rather than M. Kasavubu who would threaten the integrity of the Republic.

The election results produced no major surprises, except possibly for the Belgians. They were hoping for Lumumba's defeat; instead he emerged (with 36 seats in a parliament of 137) as the leader of the strongest single party. Although his position was not a commanding one, the MNC succeeded in winning seats in all of the six provinces, quite independently of its allies. It also was the only party to win outright control of a province (Eastern).

The political leaders and parties in whom the Belgians had put their faith—M. Jean Bolikango's PUNA, M. Boya's PNP, and the Parties of Local and Traditional Interests—did very badly; much worse than had been expected. Of the parties sympathetic to the Belgians only two registered conspicuous successes. M. Tshombe's Conakat Party won 25 of the 60 seats in Katanga's Provincial Assembly; with his allies, he had an overall majority. And M. Kalonji's breakaway MNC won 21 of the 70 seats in the Provincial Assembly of Kasai, most of them from the Baluba area.



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The only other significant result in the provincial elections was in Leopoldville. The PSA (led by Mm. Gizenga and Kamitatu) won 35 of the 90 seats; the *Abako* won 33; M. Lumumba's MNC Cartel won only three. The distribution of these seats is important. *Abako* won 7 of the 10 seats in Leopoldville itself, a remarkable performance since the Bakongo constitute a minority of the total population; they also won all 14 seats in the Lower Congo. The PSA, on the other hand, won 32 of the 34 seats in Kwilu, and only three of the 13 seats in Kwango.

Thus total control in the Leopoldville Province rests with two well-organized tribal-based parties (*Abako* and PSA), leaving M. Lumumba with virtually no strength in this important region, except through such alliances as he may be able to make.

There are two final points about the elections for the National Assembly. Although they failed to produce a substantial majority for any single party, they reduced the plethora of contesting parties to less than a dozen with any claim to substantial support. Also they showed that a majority of voters favoured the parties with unitarian ideas. Nevertheless, federalist strength in four of the provinces (Katanga, Leopoldville, Kasai and Kivu) was substantial; it could not easily be ignored when the time came finally to decide upon a constitution.

By the time the election results had been announced, there was much bad blood between M. Lumumba's supporters and the Belgians over the alleged efforts of the dying Administration to favour the MNC's opponents. Even his triumph did not altogether soften M. Lumumba; hence his calculated rudeness to the King of the Belgians at the formal ceremony of independence on June 30th. Later he repented sufficiently to explain he had intended no discourtesy; but still he did not apologise.

The Belgians, despite belated efforts to befriend M. Kasavubu (whom for months they had been denouncing alternatively as a communist agent and a tool of M. Soustelle's French neo-fascists!), were out of favour with *Abako* too. And their friends had gone down heavily in the elections.

The Governor-General, called upon to perform his last important job in finding the leader of the first independent Government, was restricted to a choice between M. Lumumba and M. Kasavubu. He really had no option but to send for M. Lumumba first.

The week of hard bargaining that accompanied the election of the first Government contributed greatly to the subsequent events. M. Lumumba cannot escape his share of responsibility.

At first he claimed the right to form a Government of his own on the grounds that he led the largest party, ignoring the fact that his support nevertheless constituted a substantial minority. His roughshod methods further exacerbated relations between himself and other Congolese leaders. Statesmanship would have shown that at that moment only a National Government could guarantee the Congo's peaceful transition to independence. But with the instincts of the 'strong man' (albeit in a weak position), M. Lumumba chose to play the role of politician rather than statesman. The result was a political free-for-all at a time of crucial importance. This period of bargaining in Leopoldville promoted sharp rivalries among the parties in the provinces, piling up more trouble for the future.

It is difficult to understand how M. Lumumba thought his tough attitude towards his colleagues could succeed. In the event, they did not; he was compelled to withdraw into seeking alliances. This was the moment for his opponents to behave with equal toughness and with an equal lack of tolerance.

M. Kasavubu at first played his famous role of Cincinnatus. No amount of bait would induce him to leave his tent; he was willing to wait his moment until the increasingly exasperated M. Lumumba should throw in his hand. It is worth recalling that at this stage the federalist-minded politician most anxious to do business with M. Lumumba was M. Tshombe. For a time it seemed as though together they could command a majority.

But just at the moment when M. Lumumba felt he was on the point of success, the Belgian Governor-General did a remarkable thing. He suddenly discharged M. Lumumba from the task of trying to form a Government and sent for M. Kasavubu.

This was the final blow to M. Lumumba's strained confidence in the Belgians. From that moment his ambivalence turned to enmity; his suspicions of Belgian policy hardened into certainty that they could not be trusted. Now there was no going back. With M. Kasavubu's subsequent failure to form a Government and his decision to accept M. Lumumba's belated offer to make him President, chances of effective Belgian co-operation with the new Congolese Government were almost gone. What finally clinched matters was the revolt of the Force Publique. But before

dealing with this *deus ex machina*, it is necessary to bring the elusive M. Tshombe back into focus.

Abandoned by Kasavubu, Tshombe was isolated; all he could count on was Kalonji's breakaway MNC. He was still tempted to take the olive branch held out by the somewhat chastened Lumumba, now as anxious to secure a National Government as earlier he had spurned it. Moreover, Kasavubu urged Tshombe to join the Government as the best method of inducing Lumumba to accede to their federal demands.

But M. Tshombe chose this moment to play for high stakes. He demanded a number of Ministers far in excess of his party's strength; much higher, in fact, than M. Lumumba could possibly concede without upsetting the rest of his coalition.

Up to this point M. Tshombe was negotiating purely on numbers in the Cabinet; there was no question of principle, federal or otherwise. Why did he insist on putting his demands so impossibly high that they could not be granted?

The ace up his sleeve was the secession of Katanga. What was in his mind when on July 11th he first proclaimed his intention of breaking away? Was he only intending to force Lumumba's hand to yield to his extravagant demands? Was he trying to compel him to negotiate for a federal constitution? Or was he already committed to riding Katanga out of the Congo as an independent State? To these questions one can return no confident answers. But there are fairly solid grounds for speculation.

Two separate points need to be cleared up—M. Tshombe's relationship to the Belgians, and the Belgian attitude to Katanga's independence.

It is convenient to regard Tshombe as a stooge of the Belgians; for all practical purposes he might just as well have been their agent. But the needs of accuracy demand a more satisfactory explanation of his actions. He is fundamentally an opportunist; this is clearly shown by the record of his negotiations with Lumumba. But his opportunism is based on definite ideas. As a tribal nationalist, he all along sought to secure the interests of the people of Katanga against 'outsiders'; hence his belief in Confederation. As a traditionalist and a business-man (admittedly not a very successful one) he wished to see close ties with Belgium. Many of the Belgian *colons* in Katanga shared these aspirations which suited their book as well as Tshombe's. It was this identity of interests that brought Tshombe and the

*colons* so close together. But was Tshombe their stooge? There is a strong case for suggesting that the Belgians were more used by Tshombe than he by them. It was the tail wagging the piebald dog.

But we must be quite clear about which Belgians we are talking about in the Katanga context. Before the Round Table Conference in Brussels in January 1960, an influential group of *colons* in Katanga, including a number of leading business people, had considered creating a secession movement in Katanga. To achieve this purpose they knew they would need African allies, and Tshombe was their choice. But there was one fundamental difference between them and M. Tshombe; the *colons* thought it might be useful to secure a strong alliance and they naturally alighted on the Central African Federation. But Tshombe was never a party to this proposition; on the contrary, he strongly repudiated it. When Sir Roy Welensky advertently leaked the news of his having been sounded out on the idea, the Belgian Government reacted angrily. Not only did they denounce Welensky, they also protested to the British Foreign Office.

The Big Business interests in Katanga (*Union Minière* and others) were divided. The majority were against the secession move when it was originated. Their own long-term profit lay in maintaining the integrity of the Congo. They threw their weight behind unity at the time of the Brussels Conference in January 1960 when the Belgian Government insisted, as one of the conditions for independence, that the country's unity had to be maintained. There is no reason to believe that the Belgians had some Machiavellian plot to surrender control over the Congo only to make away with Katanga. Up to the time of the final breakdown of law and order in the Congo, the Belgian Government resolutely denounced the Belgian groups who continued to work for Katanga's secession. It is on record that one of the last acts of the Belgian Governor-General was to crack down on the plans of the *colons* to dismember the Congo.

It was only after the failure of his negotiations with M. Lumumba that M. Tshombe began to associate himself actively with the secession plan; but he still firmly ruled out any design for linking Katanga's fortunes to those of the Central African Federation.

Throughout this sorry story M. Tshombe kept the initiative in his own hands. He was not above trying his hand at political blackmail when he tried to compel Belgium to recognize the

independence of Katanga. To its credit and good sense Belgium, however sorely tempted, did not fall into his trap, although it fell headlong into most others. Nevertheless, by lending themselves to M. Tshombe's manoeuvres, the Belgians succeeded in finally destroying what was left of their goodwill and influence in the rest of the Congo. Once having mounted M. Tshombe's tiger, they could not climb down.

The Katanga story is not a tidy one in which one can discover a deep-seated, cunning plot and a simple-minded stooge chosen to lend it verisimilitude. It is a muddled story. If M. Tshombe was the villain, he played his role as an independent-minded African with purposes of his own. The tragedy of his rôle lies in the fact that, unlike Kasavubu, he was willing to rely on doubtful colonialist elements to achieve his ends.

It must not, however, be supposed that M. Tshombe was without a large measure of African support in Katanga. Had he pursued his not unrespectable aims of achieving a federation by using different methods, he might have done much more for his own cause and for that of Africa as a whole.

The revolt of the Force Publique was the final act of folly. We are asked to believe two totally different versions of its origins. On the Belgian side, there are those who fix responsibility on M. Lumumba; on M. Lumumba's side, the blame is fixed on the Belgians.

Why should M. Lumumba have wished the Force Publique to revolt, within a day or two of his decision to enforce their discipline under Belgian officers, and immediately after his rough dismissal of a delegation from the Force who came to ask for more pay and for their own officers? Had he suddenly become afraid of a plot whereby the Force was to be used to kill him and to re-establish Belgian control?

The evidence for this charge is extremely thin. On the first day of the revolt in Leopoldville, the rebels were denouncing M. Lumumba; they were certainly not praising him. At the same time, they were demanding the dismissal of their Belgian officers. When M. Lumumba and M. Kasavubu undertook their mission of pacification, the rebels did not at once rally to their side. They remained fractious and undisciplined.

The charges against the Belgians are equally insubstantial. The Force was the last 'effective' instrument in their hands. Why surrender it? If they had planned the revolt, how account for the fact that it was immediately turned against

themselves? The suggestion is that having tried to instigate the Force against Lumumba, the Congolese soldiers rounded on the Belgians, accusing them of wanting to destroy Lumumba's Government; but they did not then rally to its defence, even though M. Lumumba at once conceded this earlier demand for Congolese officers.

The difficulty one finds in trying to piece together the evidence is that the revolt occurred at widely different places almost simultaneously. Nor did it follow the same pattern. The only consistency was the way in which the men turned against their Belgian officers.

Does this not offer us a clue to the real state of mind of the Force? There was no loyalty at all between the men and their officers. And this is a remarkable fact. In every other comparable situation, the colonial armies remained loyal to their military leaders, even when they were put into action against the independence movements. The Force showed no reluctance to follow its officers in brutally repressing *Abako* after the Leopoldville riots in 1959. The triumph of military discipline is that it usually succeeds in instilling unquestioned loyalty to the commanders. The Congo proved an exception. The reason for this must be sought in the personal relationships between the officers and their men.

Indiscipline in the Force Publique was no new thing. The soldiers had revolted against their officers in 1946. Their ruthlessness, often complained of by the Congolese though little regarded by the Belgians in the past, has been notorious.

Another clue to the Force's morale is provided by the brutal indiscipline after their revolt. Their insensate attacks on Belgians of all ages were calculated to humiliate and degrade. They displayed a bitter desire for vengeance. Nobody was spared; neither the officers, nor their wives and children, neither nuns nor priests. The only exaggeration of the events appears to have been in the number of the victims. Of the 70,000-80,000 Belgians still in the Congo, the number of victims totalled only a few hundreds. It is also worth noting that the mobs did not restrict themselves to attacking whites; they plundered and assaulted Africans as well.

The dangers in just such a blind desire for vengeance against whites were foreseen in the report of the Belgian parliamentary commission to which my last article in '*Africa South*' drew attention. That it should have been unleashed by the Belgians'

own security forces is bitterly ironic. The lesson of this for other parts of Africa is dismally plain.

Because of the speed with which independence was ushered in, there was no time to plan in advance the reforms necessary to ensure loyalty and discipline in the new State. The Congolese leaders had neither the time nor the authority to suggest what measures might be taken to prevent a breakdown in law and order. They were compelled to rely on the machinery provided by the Belgians; that the machinery was maintained in the same condition as under the colonial regime can only be regarded as providing a dangerously shortsighted reliance.

For the Force Publique nothing had changed on June 30th. Their rank was what it had always been: the pay, a meagrely £2 10s. 0d. Their most senior officer was still only a Sergeant-Major. Here was fertile ground for anybody who wished to make mischief. In all probability it will be found, when all the evidence has been sifted, that the revolt grew out of the discontent of the African non-commissioned officers and their men. Whatever other reasons or excuses might be given, the fact remains that the conditions for indiscipline were rank; and the men who were trained to disciplined ruthlessness were twice as ruthless once their discipline broke.

It is easy at a safe distance to criticise the Belgians for panicking after the experiences of the revolt. Undoubtedly their mass evacuation directly contributed to the crumbling of law and order, thus turning confusion into chaos and thereby further endangering security. I for one doubt that I would have behaved much differently from the ordinary Belgian in Thysville or Stanleyville once security had gone, which would make it hypocritical of me to judge their actions.

The rapid disintegration of security undoubtedly caught the Belgian Government off-guard. In their most pessimistic moments, they had not imagined that all they had so patiently created could have crumbled away so swiftly. Whatever the rights and the wrongs, they were faced with the fact that tens of thousands of Belgians were in danger. It would have been surprising if any Government had remained passive in such a situation. Little did they foresee what the ultimate results would be once they decided to commit Belgian troops to the Congo.

What must have looked to Brussels as a purely prophylactic action appeared to the Congolese as military aggression. The

fault lies in the loss of confidence and in the festering suspicion which had come to mark relations between the Congolese leaders and the Belgians.

The secession movement in Katanga, contrived by M. Tshombe and connived at by the more truculent of the *colons*, was the culminating folly in a situation over which the Belgians had lost control.

M. Lumumba, never the most patient or trusting of men, was faced with a crisis which would have tried the most experienced and shrewdest of statesmen. His physical presence was demanded at the same time in a dozen different places over an area as large as Western Europe. His movements were conditioned by the willingness of the Belgians to fly him from one part of the country to the other. On all sides he faced obstruction, insults and indiscipline.

His first task was to reason with, and to conciliate the Force Publique; at the same time he had to deal with a revolt in his precariously based coalition Government and to quell an insurrection in Katanga. He could see his insecurely based authority slipping through his fingers and the strength of the Republic draining away at its birth.

If he behaved erratically at times, is it to be wondered at? Whatever criticisms might be levelled against him (and he cannot be exculpated for his failure to appreciate the force of the federalists' arguments and their capacity to assert themselves), it remains incontestable that he was the only Congo leader capable at that moment of arresting the drift to disaster. The loyalty shown to him in those difficult weeks by his rival for power, M. Kasavubu, is a tribute to both men.

Given M. Lumumba's complete loss of confidence in the Belgians and reciprocal loss of confidence by the Belgians in M. Lumumba, the situation called for outside intervention. Who was to supply it?

In his weary exasperation, M. Lumumba called on the Russians; there at least was a force that would have none of the Westerners' reluctance to expel the Belgians which had become the top priority fixed in M. Lumumba's mind. But if he was driven to desperation, M. Lumumba's anxious African friends could see things more clearly. The African bloc of independent States knew precisely what was required; their Secretariat at the United Nations was ready to offer a solution; through the mediation of Dr. Nkrumah's emissaries in the Congo quick

agreement was won so that M. Hammarskjöld, responding to the appeal to summon the Security Council, had in his pocket a recipe to ensure that the Congo would not be engulfed by the Cold War. Neither Russia nor America and Britain could refuse to withhold their assent to the unanimous proposals entrusted to M. Hammarskjöld by the African States. It gave him complete mastery in the diplomatic negotiations that preceded the first Security Council meeting, and again when he had to summon it a second time.

Here for the first time Pan-Africanism operated as a major force in the international field. Its undivided strength compelled an unaccustomed unity in the Security Council. East and West had perforce to accept the prescriptions of Africa.

At this moment, the Congo story is still a long way from its end; what chapters still lie ahead cannot even be guessed at. But if there is any comfort to be gained from an otherwise comfortless chapter, it derives largely from the role of the United Nations, and particularly from the manner in which it was galvanized into purposeful action by the African States.

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