

# THEY CANNOT FORGET LUMUMBA

By I. Cox

Since the foul murder of Patrice Lumumba in January, 1961, the situation in the Congo has gone from bad to worse. The imperialists of the United States, Belgium and Britain have been concocting schemes to impose a firmer grip on the rich resources of this African territory, but have reached no agreement on the division of the spoils. Within the United Nations the spokesmen of these countries have faced one crisis after another in the application of their "remedies" for the mutilated body of the Congo.

When Lumumba was alive they condoned and encouraged the secession of Katanga, and successfully prevented Lumumba from taking effective steps to build a united Congo. Because Lumumba strove to achieve this aim he was brutally murdered. These imperialists feared more than anything else a united Congo under Lumumba's leadership.

After ridding themselves of Lumumba there was still another serious obstacle, Lumumba's successor Gizenga, who continued the fight for a strong and united Congo. Exactly a year after Lumumba's murder he was "handed over" to Mobutu and others who had usurped the powers of the Congolese Government. Since January 1962 Gizenga has been held in illegal captivity on the Bolabemba island in the mouth of the Congo River, without trial, without any examination of alleged charges against him, and without medical treatment. Who knows that by the time these lines are printed he may be dead, without a word of protest from the United Nations—least of all any step to secure his release.

It is in this situation that a new book "CONGO MY COUNTRY" purporting to have been written by Lumumba in 1956-57 has appeared in Britain. It is a translation of one which appeared in Belgium late in 1961. The Belgian publishers give no proof that Lumumba wrote this book, except a photostat copy

of the first and last part of a letter apparently received by them from Lumumba in February 1957.

The Belgian publishers do not explain why publication was delayed for nearly five years. They declare that they deem it their "duty" to pass it on to "posterity". Could they not have discharged this "duty" before Lumumba's death? It would have been extremely interesting to have had a preface written by Lumumba in 1961 which would explain the enrichment of his political outlook since 1957 as a result of his unique experiences in the struggle for a united Congo. This is certainly what some people would have most detested. What we have instead is a foreword by Colin Legum, Foreign Editor of the London *Observer* who gives vent to anti-Communist spleen and does a great deal to denigrate Lumumba.

Like several reviewers in British capitalist journals, Legum expresses surprise at what he describes as Lumumba's "moderate" views in this book. During his lifetime, especially in the last year before his murder, many writers had described him as an "extremist", as "a Communist stooge", as completely inexperienced, and quite "irresponsible". In his foreword Legum asks how Lumumba's earlier concern for "social and political reforms" could be consistent with his later struggle for Congolese unity.

How blind can some people be? Although Lumumba was not a Communist, he was a militant African leader, anxious to achieve unity and prosperity for his beloved country. Is not this the aim of every genuine African liberation leader, and every Communist leader? There is nothing inconsistent in combining the struggle for "social and political reforms" with the basic fight to achieve African liberation and to advance to socialism. It is by representing the position incorrectly that there may arise the impression of a contradiction.

Assuming that Lumumba actually did write this book five years ago there is nothing strange about the rapid development in his political outlook since that time. In 1957 there was no organised political movement in the Congo. The Belgian colonial rulers saw no threat to their domination. Even after the great revolutionary upsurge in the Congo in January 1959 they were still thinking in terms of self-government fifteen or twenty years later.

It is true that in 1956-57 Lumumba had pathetic faith and trust in the good intentions of the Belgian colonial rulers. In the Congo the White Belgian colonists as well as Black Africans were denied the right to vote. Belgian rule was administered by professional civil servants and governors. It was not surprising that this system

of "paternalism" created illusions among the peoples of the Congo.

Already, six years ago, Lumumba was beginning to throw off these illusions. In his book, facts and figures are presented to expose the low starvation wages and the vast contrast with the higher standards of living of the Europeans in the Congo; and the demand is put for higher wages for Africans and the principle of equal pay for equal work.

While in theory neither Africans nor Europeans were allowed political rights, Lumumba provides ample evidence in this book that Europeans were able to impose their domination. The representatives whom the Government appointed to the provincial and works councils were out of touch with the people. Though still not won over for a system of universal suffrage, Lumumba advocated a more democratic system in which representatives were chosen by the people.

Revealing also is the exposure of the system of land robbery by which the European colonists were able to grab the best land and the biggest estates:

"The Whites have taken hold of our rights—our lands—and now wish to sell them to us for money, as if we were strangers in the country. They have become owners of our land and we, the 'natives', have become mere immigrants, because our land is now to be sold to us." (p. 101.)

In spite of this, Lumumba did not become a victim of "black racialism", but argued this could be avoided only if Belgium instituted a more democratic system in the Congo. At that time his strong belief in the prospect of good relations with Belgium was expressed in these words:

"Let us work together, White and Black, to construct Africa in harmony and mutual affection; these are the indispensable conditions for any firm union."

Lumumba's aim in 1956-57 was to achieve internal autonomy for the Congo, an autonomous republic which "would form a federation with Belgium", placed under the command of a Belgian High Commissioner, and "administered jointly by Congolese and Belgians in accordance with mutually agreed conditions".

While this reveals his political immaturity at the time it also brings out the fact that Lumumba at an early age was trying to grapple with the actual day-to-day problems of a Congo under direct colonial rule. The essence of this book consists of the positive proposals to end racial discrimination against the Africans, to raise living standards, to improve education, reform the police

and the prison system, and to establish better relations with Belgium.

It was after the first All-African Peoples' Conference at Accra in December 1958 that the Congo was drawn into the revolutionary upsurge sweeping throughout Africa. Lumumba was present at Accra, and after this experience there was a rapid growth in his political maturity. The gigantic revolt of January 1959 led to a situation in which the Belgian colonial rulers (despite all their manoeuvres to prevent it) were driven from one retreat after another, until finally forced to concede independence in June 1960.

The history of the past two years makes it clear that this was only a tactical retreat. "Independence" was a cover to conceal other methods of striving to maintain Belgian colonial domination. It was during 1959 and 1960 (after writing the book) that Lumumba became recognised as Congo's outstanding national leader. He was hated and feared by the colonialists, who were determined to prevent the creation of a united Congo under his leadership. The events in the Congo from June 1960 to March 1961 also made a profound impression on the third All-African People's Conference in March. This was the main factor which prompted its historic resolution on the dangers of "neo-colonialism".

In his foreword Colin Legum reveals himself as one of the chief apostles of "neo-colonialism". In an earlier book "Congo Disaster" written in December 1960 he revealed where he stood as between Kasavubu's aim of a federal Congo and Lumumba's consistent fight for a united Congo: "Experience may yet show that federalism is the only way to build viable societies in the larger African countries." (p. 97.)

The foreword fails to draw the attention of the reader to the betrayal of the Congo by Dag Hammarskjöld, to the return of Belgian troops to the Congo, and the attitude of the United States spokesman in U.N.O. It completely underestimates Lumumba's strength of character and his consistent fight for a united Congo, and unfortunately goes on from error to error.

It is argued that the United Nations resolution of July 14, 1960, did not empower Hammarskjöld to end Katanga's secession, despite its extremely clear terms "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 . . ."

Everyone now knows that Hammarskjöld obstructed every step to implement this resolution, and did his utmost to sabotage

Lumumba in his tireless efforts to make Congolese unity and independence a reality. Legum declares: "It was Lumumba's decision to call directly for Russian support that led to his downfall." Nothing could be further from the truth, and Legum himself contradicts it.

In his own earlier book he explains that the United Nations had used British and United States planes to fly troops to the Congo, but not Soviet planes, and that the Soviet Union was legally entitled to send Soviet planes to assist transport in the Congo, in response to a request from the Congolese Government. In his present foreword, Legum asserts that Lumumba did this "behind the backs" of his colleagues in the Government, but in his earlier book "Congo Disaster" he reported that Lumumba succeeded "in getting his Cabinet to agree to a resolution appealing to the Russians or to any Afro-Asian bloc country to send troops unless the United Nations got the Belgians out of the country." (p. 132.)

Most of the space in the foreword of twenty pages badly misrepresents events in the Congo after June 1960. For example, on page XXI of the foreword there is the text of a letter, alleged to have been sent by Lumumba to the presidents of all the provincial governments in the Congo, except Katanga. This alleged letter urges them to apply "an absolute dictatorship . . . terrorism . . . arrest of Ministers . . . revive the system of flogging" and a whole number of other despicable measures. *After* giving all these gruesome details, it is stated that no proof that this letter was authentic was ever established, and that a United Nations enquiry declared the document to be a forgery!

On occasion the truth is stumbled upon as if by accident. After Lumumba's arrest, the situation is described thus:

"There are two reasons to explain the anxiety of Lumumba's opponents to rid themselves of him. The first is that they were terrified of his power; his uncanny ability to dominate any group of which he was a member was a real threat to his rivals, and, secondly, there was a constant danger of a coup (to release Lumumba) by Lumumba's supporters . . . the authorities became greatly alarmed by signs of a new rising tide of support for Lumumba."

And a further passage:

"The simple truth of the matter is that Lumumba had an electrifying effect on the Congolese; he was capable of arousing enthusiasm in a way that could not be matched by any other leader in the Congo. That was his strength. The strength of his opponents

depended on their ability to neutralise him, or, if necessary, to destroy him.”

If further proof were required of Lumumba’s courageous fight for unity and real independence in the Congo it is contained in his last letter to his wife. In his foreword Colin Legum reproduces this letter, but does not seem to grasp one iota of its political significance. This letter breathes a spirit which has become even more powerful throughout Africa since his cowardly murder:

“I am writing these words not knowing whether they will reach you, when they will reach you, and whether I shall still be alive when you read them. All through my struggle for the independence of my country, I have never doubted for a single instant the final triumph of the sacred cause to which my companions and I have devoted all our lives. But what we wished for our country . . . was never desired by the Belgian imperialists and their Western allies, who found direct and indirect support . . . amongst high officials of the United Nations . . . They have corrupted some of our compatriots and bribed others . . . ”

Yet there was not a word of despair. His indomitable spirit expresses the advance in his political outlook since 1956-57, and the relation of the struggle in the Congo to the world-wide advance of national liberation:

**“We are not alone. Africa, Asia and the free liberated people from all corners of the world will always be found at the side of the Congolese who will not abandon the struggle until the day when there are no longer any colonialists and mercenaries in their country.”**

What deep inspiration lies in his final words before his assassins shot him dead:

“History one day will have its say, but it will not be the history that is taught in Brussels, Paris, Washington or in the United Nations, but the history which will be taught in the countries freed from imperialism and its puppets. Africa will write her own history, and to the north and south of the Sahara it will be a glorious and dignified history.”

**The real life-story of this great African leader has still to be written. But enough is already known for his courageous record to be enshrined in history for many generations to come, when the Kasavubus, Mobutus, Tshombes, Welenskys, Adoulas and their capitalist press hacks and reviewers will long be forgotten.**