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by R. PALME DUTT

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STAND BY CONGO

by

R. Palme Dutt

THE victory of independence of the people of Congo is one of the great national popular revolutions of our time. But this independence is today threatened by every kind of assault of imperialism. The powerful monied interests, Belgian, British and American, which have made colossal fortunes out of the wealth and exploitation of Congo, are not willing easily to relinquish their prey.

Every kind of offensive, direct and indirect, is being conducted against Congo independence. A criminal deception of public opinion is being conducted.

It is urgent that the true facts should be known, and that public support in all countries should be aroused for the defence of Congo independence. Their cause is ours. Their cause is the cause of peace.

Heart of Africa

Congo is the heart of Africa. The mighty River Congo runs right through tropical Africa. The area of the Republic of Congo (the old "Belgian Congo") is 900,000 square miles. This is seventy-seven times the area of Belgium, or equal to all Western Europe.

The wealth and natural resources of Congo are immense. Four-fifths of the world copper supplies; four-fifths of the world supply of industrial diamonds; three-quarters of the world cobalt supplies; zinc, tin, radium, uranium all abound in this "geological miracle" mainly centred in Katanga and Kasai.

It is not surprising that the wealthy Western monopolists, who have made hundreds and hundreds of millions of pounds of profit from the wealth and exploitation of Congo are unwilling to surrender their grip and seek especially to hold on to Katanga and Kasai.

The strategic importance of Congo is no less significant. On its frontiers are the former French Congo and French Central Africa, now independent; Sudan, Uganda, Tanganyika, Rhodesia, Angola. As soon as Congo independence drew in view troops were massed on the borders in Rhodesia, Uganda and Angola.

The Congo freedom struggle is the heart of the African freedom struggle. Victory for Congo independence opens the way to victory for all Africa.

This pamphlet incorporates material giving the background information on Congo, drawn from the Notes of the Month in the September *Labour Monthly*.

September 1st, 1960

R. P. D.

Red Rubber

For over three-quarters of a century colonialism has dominated Congo. Until 1908 Congo was treated as the private property of King Leopold of Belgium; then it was taken over directly by the Belgian State.

There is no more terrible record in the whole history of colonialism than the record of Belgian colonial rule in Congo. One simple fact betrays that record. At the beginning of this century the population of Congo was estimated at 20 millions. Today the population is 13 millions. This means the loss of 7 millions, one-third of the population, and not even by forced migration as in the colonisation and depopulation of Ireland. Seven million unnatural deaths; 7 millions wiped out, exterminated, in a short space of years; more, many more, if we allow for what would have been the normal increase in population. In relation to the size of population even the record of Nazism pales besides this.

The truth about "Red Rubber" under the Leopold regime was laid bare by the intrepid endeavours of noble-hearted fighters for humanity like E. D. Morel and Roger Casement. The once prosperous Congo of abundance, described by early travellers, was laid waste by King Leopold's system of appropriation of its natural resources; and by murderous violence to compel the population to supply the insatiable demand for rubber and ivory, in order to maintain the luxury of the palace favourites in Brussels, the corrupt politicians and the smug concessionaires in Paris, London and New York. Morel quotes the report of a Belgian merchant:

"There is not an inhabited village left in four days' steaming through a country formerly so rich: today entirely ruined. . . . The villages are compelled to furnish so many kilos of rubber every week. . . . The soldiers sent out to get rubber and ivory are depopulating the country. They find that the quickest and cheapest method is to raid villages, seize prisoners, and have them redeemed afterwards for ivory."

Letters of European agents employed by the Concessionaire companies found their way into the papers. One such agent confessed to having killed 150 men, cut off 60 hands, crucified women and children and hung the remains of mutilated men on the village fence.

A Scottish missionary, Dugald Campbell, wrote of what he saw in Katanga.

"The crowds were fired into promiscuously, and fifteen were killed, including four women with a babe on its mother's breast. The heads were cut off and brought to the officer in charge, who then sent men to cut off the hands also, and these were pierced, strung and dried over the camp fire. The heads, with many others, I saw myself. The town, prosperous once, was burnt, and what they could not carry off was destroyed."

Morel quotes the American missionary Clark:

"It is blood-curdling to see them (the soldiers) returning with the hands of the slain, and to find the hands of young children amongst the bigger ones evidencing their bravery. . . . The rubber from this district has cost hundreds of lives, and the scenes I have

witnessed, while unable to help the oppressed, have been almost enough to make me wish I were dead. . . . The rubber traffic is steeped in blood, and if the natives were to rise and sweep every white person on the Upper Congo into eternity, there would still be a fearful balance to their credit."

Prophetic words. The amazing thing is not that there may have been incidents of violence (all the reporters are agreed that the main violence after liberation has come from the Belgian paratroopers who, in the words of *Time* correspondent, "got out of hand", "beat up any stray Africans they encountered", and were "trigger-happy"); the amazing thing has been the nobility and tolerance of the mass of the wronged Congolese people towards their former oppressors, once they have won their independence.

Balance Sheet of Empire

Did the exploitation come to an end when the autocracy of King Leopold was replaced, shortly before the first world war, by the direct colonial rule of the Belgian State? The Belgian State continued to operate through the big monopolies of Belgian capitalism, such as the Société Générale, which is actually older than the Belgian State. The key role is played by the huge monopoly, the Union Minière du Haut Katanga. This is not only a monopoly of Belgian capitalists. British and American interests are heavily involved. The British monopoly Tanganyika Concessions, with an issued capital of £9 million, holds a large slice of Union Minière capital, in addition to substantial royalties on the minerals produced. The Chairman of Tanganyika Concessions is Captain Charles Waterhouse, formerly extreme right-wing Tory M.P. ("I glory in the word 'Empire'", 17/12/53) and leader of the "Suez Rebels". The Board of the Company includes the Earl of Selborne, Conservative Peer and former supporter of Franco; and Sir Ulick Alexander, closely connected with Court circles.

The exploitation of Congo by modern monopoly capital has been even more scientific and intensive than before. During the five years 1955-1959, according to *The Economist* of August 6th, 1960, Congo had to pay Belgium a net £422 million or £84 million a year. This was obtained from Congo's surplus with other countries; especially the United States. Thus the vast dollar earnings from Congo resources and labour all went to build up the prosperity of the Belgian economy. Other estimates have given a higher figure for the net return to Belgium from Congo; thus the *U.S. News and World Report* (August 1st, 1960) has estimated the total over the past five years as \$1,700,000,000, or £750,000,000, equivalent to £150,000,000 a year for a country with a population of 9,000,000, and an area one-seventy-seventh of its Congo colony.

"Do Empires still pay?" asked John Strachey in his *End of Empire* last year. He proceeded to offer the conventional current official answer, that, even if there was exploitation in the past, all this no longer applies to any significant extent to modern "post-imperialist" capitalism. The Marxist analysis, he accordingly claimed, of the prosperity of the Western imperialist metropolitan centres of the "free world" as based

on a foundation of colonial plunder, exploitation and impoverishment no longer corresponds to the facts of the modern world.

This opinion is evidently not shared by the Belgian Minister of Finance, Van Houtte. As soon as the revolt of the Congolese Force Publique revealed the collapse of the dreams of the Belgian monopolists to continue domination of the Congo under new forms, he immediately announced to the panic-stricken Belgian parliament that the loss of Congo would bring the menace of financial catastrophe and devaluation of the franc, and make it necessary to introduce at once emergency measures of "financial austerity", increased taxation and all-round cuts in the standard of living of the Belgian population. Clearly Mr. Van Houtte had failed to study his Strachey.

Uranium and the Atom Bomb

In the modern period uranium and copper in Congo have displaced the old rubber and ivory (alongside diamonds, palm kernels, coffee, cotton and continuing rubber and ivory) as the main source of profit. The American atom bombs of Hiroshima and Nagasaki and after, and the first hydrogen bombs, were based on Congo uranium. The uranium mines of the Belgian Congo were operated by the Union Minière du Haut Katanga, the controlling interest in whose shares used to be held by the British monopoly, Tanganyika Concessions. In April, 1950, the British Government sold 1,677,961 of the ordinary shares of Tanganyika Concessions (or nearly half the total of 3,831,412 ordinary shares issued up to that date), which it owned at the time, to an Anglo-Belgian group, which in turn sold 600,000 of these shares to an American group associated with the Rockefeller monopoly interests. According to the posthumously published memoirs of Senator Vandenberg, one of the conditions of aid to Britain in connection with the Marshall Plan was that the United States should obtain a share in Congo uranium.

Thus the brassy neon-lit prosperity of the show façade of post-war Brussels was built on the foundation of the atom bomb and the exploitation of the Congo workers who, in the uranium mines, for mining the highest priced raw ore in the world—selling for several thousand dollars a ton—were paid wages of less than three shillings a day.

The veil of secrecy over uranium has covered the subsequent financial transactions and the still unsettled question of the future disposition of the shares after the formation of the Congo Government. But it will assuredly be healthier for the world when the Congo people become masters of their own resources.

Congo People's Revolution

No wonder the Congo people have arisen in one of the great popular national revolutions of our era. The self-satisfied experts of imperialism proclaimed until the last moment that the Congo people were satisfied and politically passive. The Belgian rulers claimed that their method of allowing no political rights, no political parties, no trade unions, no higher education, was triumphantly successful in preventing unrest. That typical American tourist's guide to the

continents, Gunther's *Inside Africa*, could still declare as late as 1955:

"The great bulk of Congolese do not think at all in nationalist terms, i.e. of freedom from Belgian rule, because they are not educated enough to know what nationalism is. The Belgian system works well, and organised discontent does not exist. . . . The Congo is almost completely tranquil politically. . . . Practically no danger exists of any African uprising. . . . The Belgian government is a very sound government indeed."

Even this shallow American author had nevertheless to record the fact that official statistics recognised 3,800 political prisoners. This would be equivalent to 15,000 political prisoners in Britain. Hardly "political tranquillity".

In fact the Congo people have won their independence through many years of hard and bloody struggle. Revolts and punitive expeditions were ceaseless. In the 1943 revolt seventy-three rebels were sentenced to death. By 1955, the year of the great Afro-Asian Conference at Bandung, all the groups in Congo (no parties were allowed) united in a common manifesto demanding independence, even though the goal then seemed distant and was set to be won in thirty years. With the development of the organised Congo National Movement around the leadership of its President, Patrice Lumumba, the tempo quickened. At the Accra All-Peoples' Conference in December, 1958, Lumumba was head of the Congo delegation and was elected to the Executive Committee of the All-Africa Secretariat. The Accra Conference pledged support of all African peoples for Congo freedom.

It was at the immediately following demonstrations in Leopoldville in January, 1959, gathered in defiance of bans to hear and acclaim the report of the Accra Conference, that the bloodbath followed, with Belgian armoured cars firing on the people and forty-nine Africans killed (300 according to the Congo people's movement's report).

This bloodbath was the dawn of Congo freedom. There followed the renewed shootings of October, 1959, with twenty Africans shot dead, and the arrest and imprisonment of Lumumba in November. In vain the scribblers of imperialism try to pretend that Belgium made a "too hasty" "gift" of freedom to Congo, like Attlee's "gift" of freedom to India (not to mention George III's "gift" of freedom to the United States). In the words of Lumumba at the ceremony of independence on June 30th:

"We have endured contempt, insults and blows endured morning and night. We knew law was never the same for the whites and the blacks. The fate of the political prisoners was worse than death. Who can forget the hangings and shootings in which perished so many of our brethren? Who can forget the gaols into which were flung those who had escaped the bullets of the soldiers?"

Imperialist Plans

Imperialism will not surrender easily its rich prey. As soon as the hold of Belgium was seen to weaken, all the vultures of imperialism came hovering to bury their claws in the flesh of the hoped for victim

before the young bird has gathered strength. In the hour of collapse of the old colonial system and frontiers the imperialists dream of a new partition of Africa.

Already the Belgian monopolists had been originally confident that their evacuation would be temporary, and that by their intrigues and manoeuvres they would create disintegration and confusion, providing the basis to intervene and resume armed occupation.

In particular, they had prepared to ensure their continued grip on the wealth of Katanga through the puppet Tshombe.

From the side of the British imperialists Central African Federation troops were massed on the Congo border months in advance in hungry anticipation. On March 2nd Premier Welensky startled the world with an interview in the *Daily Express*, stating that negotiations had begun for the incorporation of Katanga in the Federation. Later, trial balloons were floated suggesting the amalgamation of Katanga with Tanganyika.

The French imperialists through the Foreign Minister, Couve de Murville, reminded the Belgian Government on February 26th that France still maintained its rights under the 1908 Franco-Belgian Agreement by which France was given the first option to purchase Belgian Congo in the event of its relinquishment by Belgium.

But the tactics of the United States imperialists have been the most subtle, as previously over Suez, to utilise the crisis to seek to weaken the Belgian monopolists' hold, and develop their own penetration under cover of the flag of the United Nations.

Belgian Armed Invasion

The original calculation of the Belgian imperialists had been to use their picked army of 25,000 men, the Force Publique under Belgian officers, to intervene in the name of "restoring order" after the proclamation of independence and re-establish Belgian armed rule in fact. Hence their initial confidence that the proclamation of independence would be only a formality. "Nothing has changed", as the magnates of the Union Minière du Haut Katanga in their Brussels headquarters placidly informed the *Observer* correspondent as late as July 6th, one week after the proclamation of independence. In the same report the *Observer* recorded its conclusion:

"In the Katanga and in the Congo as a whole the Belgians mean to stay boss. They are tackling the problem as they behaved when they were the masters—with subtlety, toughness and a determination to hang on to their own" (*Observer*, July 10th, 1960).

But on July 6th the soldiers of the Force Publique rose against their Belgian officers and united with the national cause. From that moment everything changed. The Belgian monopolists had now to rush in by airlift their own armed forces, parachutists and other armed battalions, 11,000 in all, to create a reign of terror. The correspondent of *Time* magazine on July 25th described the role of the Belgian paratroopers:

"The paratroopers soon got out of hand. Storming their way into Leopoldville after capturing the airport they beat up any stray Africans they encountered—they were trigger happy and

arrogant. *Time* correspondent Lee Griggs was shot at by a paratrooper who then apologised because 'in the dark I thought you were an African'."

Let the *Daily Telegraph* correspondent report what happened at the port of Matadi after all Belgian civilians had been evacuated, so that there was in fact no possible basis for the pretence of "defending Belgian lives".

"Matadi, since July 11th, when Belgian forces invaded it, killing 19 and wounding 32, has been in a state of war. It still is, and its population is in the grip of fear. They cannot forget their terror when the Belgians launched a heavy attack on them with four Belgian naval ships firing from the River Congo. Belgian troops were fighting them in the streets and Belgian aircraft strafing them from the skies. The Belgian naval fire set one of the huge petrol reservoirs, containing 10,000 gallons, on fire. The tanks stood among other reservoirs near the attacks on the edge of the town. It burned for a week causing panic among the population" (*Daily Telegraph*, July 21st).

Katanga and Kasai

In Katanga, the richest province of Congo with 60 per cent of its resources, and the main basis of exploitation and profits, the Belgian monopolists had financed a puppet separatist organisation in order to establish its leader Tshombe as the head of the puppet government. Who is Tshombe?

"The power behind Tshombe is the potent Union Minière which financed his election campaign and supplied Tshombe with an adviser when he attended the Brussels Conference last February." (*Time*, July 19th.)

Belgian martial law was proclaimed in Katanga under the Belgian military chief Colonel Weber *before* Tshombe was established as the head of an "independent" government.

"Mr. Tshombe, political head of state, must take orders from this broad-shouldered young soldier (Col. Weber). Col. Weber commands all military forces in Katanga. He placed the province under a state of emergency last night several hours before Mr. Tshombe declared the region independent." (*Daily Telegraph*, July 13th.)

The *Observer* correspondent stated that the Tshombe government would not last a day if Lumumba were able to address a public meeting in Elizabethville, the capital of Katanga.

The Congo soldiers in Katanga, loyal to the Congo Government, were ruthlessly attacked, shot and imprisoned by Belgian troops.

"Sixteen Congolese soldiers and two members of the Belgian parachute forces were reported killed today in what is believed to be the biggest military encounter since the Congo's post-independence struggles broke out.

Belgian parachute troops, who had surrounded a camp in which 250 members of the Congolese Force Publique had entrenched

themselves about 200 miles west of Elizabethville, sent in an aircraft firing rockets—after the battle in which twenty Africans and six Belgians were injured, the Belgians took about 200 prisoners" (*The Times*, July 23rd).

Such is the "independent" regime of Tshombe (that is, the Belgian imperialists) in Katanga, whose "rights" the Western imperialists have been so scrupulously concerned to respect and maintain. Pressed on this question in the House of Commons on July 25th Mr. Lloyd, then Foreign Secretary, said: "There is such a thing as self-determination."

Alongside Tshombe in Katanga Belgian disruptive manoeuvres have also operated in the Kasai diamond area adjoining Katanga, to establish a so-called "Mining State" under a puppet Head of State, Kalonji, allied to Tshombe and similarly controlled by Belgian advisers.

According to reports, on the first approach of Government forces, his puppet "State" collapsed and Kalonji fled.

These disruptive manoeuvres of Belgian imperialism should not be confused with the genuine questions of the future constitution of Congo, whether federal or otherwise; these questions can only be settled by the free choice of the Congo people themselves, not by Belgian imperialism acting through puppets, financed, armed and controlled by the Belgian imperialists.

United Nations Resolutions

The Congo Government appealed to the United Nations against this Belgian open armed aggression. The United Nations Security Council had unanimously recognised the sovereign independence of Congo on July 7th. With all the Afro-Asian States promptly responding, alongside the Socialist States ranged with them against imperialism, the United Nations Security Council had no alternative but to vote a resolution calling for the withdrawal of the invaders, and authorising military assistance to support the legal Congo Government. The resolution adopted on July 14th declared:

CONSIDERING the request for military assistance addressed to the Secretary-General by the President and the 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.

The text of this resolution is important. Newspapers in Britain signally failed to print this text. The reasons for this suppression became obvious from the outcome.

Sabotage of the United Nations Resolutions

The United Nations Resolution of July 14th, reaffirmed by the resolutions of July 22nd and August 9th, called for the withdrawal of Belgian troops, and for United Nations military forces "to provide the Government of the Republic of Congo with such military assistance as may be necessary" in order to secure this objective, and to protect the independence of Congo against aggression until such time as the Congo Government's own forces were sufficiently strong for this purpose.

The resolutions recognised the Congo Government as the only legal government of the whole of Congo. They told the United Nations Secretary-General to act "in consultation with the Government of the Republic of the Congo".

But from the outset the practice of the imperialists has been to turn the United Nations resolution upside down. The resolution of the United Nations of July 14th (whose text the newspapers here refused to print) has been completely distorted both in practice and in every speech and article, as if it were a resolution to send the United Nations military force to Congo in order to "restore order" against the Congo Government's forces, described as "insurgents" or "mutineers".

While the United Nations resolution called for the withdrawal of Belgian armed forces, in practice thousands of additional Belgian armed forces were brought into Congo for weeks after the United Nations resolution. The Belgian Government publicly declared that the question of withdrawal did not apply to the Belgian bases in Congo. The Belgian Minister of Defence declared in the Belgian Parliament on August 19th "the future status of the bases will be the subject of further negotiations".

By the end of August the U.N. General Secretary complained that Belgian armed forces were still in Congo, contrary to their reports of withdrawal, and in addition to 1,500 Belgian "technicians" at the Kamina base. It was further reported that Belgian troops were being "withdrawn" to the neighbouring Ruanda-Urundi territory, available at any moment to re-enter Congo; and that Belgian officers were being "loaned" to train troops for the puppet Tshombe "government".

The United Nations armed forces have been used, not to give military assistance to the Congo Government against the aggressors, but to disarm the Congo Government's troops and thus in practice assist the aggressors. They have been used to take over from the Belgian paratroopers against the Congo soldiers and people.

"They have relieved Belgian paratroopers. They are doing a good job and they have disarmed the Force Publique, and police in their area" (*Daily Telegraph*, August 3rd).

They have been used to take over sovereign control of the Leopoldville airport, and of the Kamina military base, and to deny control of these keys of power to the Congo Government.

The role of the United Nations intervention has been distorted in such a way as to bolster up the puppet government in Katanga. When

the order was given for United Nations troops to enter Katanga, and Tshombe declared that he would not permit it, the order was immediately cancelled, until Tshombe's wishes and conditions could be satisfied. The United Nations Secretary-General Hammarskjold on arrival in Elizabethville saluted the flag and anthem of the puppet Katanga government and fraternised with the Belgian invaders, while repeatedly boycotting Premier Lumumba. All this was done supposedly in the name of "non-intervention" in the "dispute" between Premier Lumumba and the puppet Tshombe, that is, between the Congo Government and the Belgian colonialists.

This is a repetition of the old farce of Spanish "non-intervention" over again, when the Western Powers were so anxious to refuse arms to the Spanish Democratic Government in order that there should be no intervention against the aggression of Hitler and Mussolini. "Non-intervention" on the side of the aggressors at the expense of the legal democratic government.

The fact that African contingents had been included in the United Nations forces has been used to conceal from public opinion the true character of the policy that has been operated in practice. For the top command has been throughout in the hands of representatives of the European and American imperialists, holding the key military and political posts and giving the orders. No wonder that the governments of the African States have repeatedly expressed their anger, and demand the fulfilment of the United Nations resolution.

New Colonialism

Under cover of these distortions of the purpose of United Nations intervention the plans to re-establish imperialist control in Congo, through some form of United Nations Mandate, have come into the open.

"Mr. Hammarskjold's report said that a consultative group of international experts would go to work early next week to draw up programmes in eleven different areas of Government responsibility. These were: agriculture, communications, education, finance, foreign trade, health, national security, labour, the magistrature, natural resources and industry, and public administration" (*The Guardian*, August 13th, 1960).

A sufficiently comprehensive list. The well-informed *Toronto Globe and Mail* on August 1st had already spelled out the aim:

"Mince words as it may, maintain the fiction of Congolese sovereignty as it may, the United Nations has taken over a country . . . Dag Hammarskjold, Secretary-General of the U.N. is proposing a five-year occupation."

And of course that organ of philanthropic imperialism, the *New Statesman*, on August 6th, leaped with joy over the plan:

"New horizons can be glimpsed for the United Nations. It will for the first time assume direct responsibility in the colonial and ex-colonial world. Such a scheme would be much more acceptable to colonial peoples than the best-intentioned imperial efforts. The Congo, even though independent, would become a U.N. ward."

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Hands off Congo

The Congo people are not alone. United with them stand all the peoples of Africa, with their eleven (soon fourteen) independent African States extending already over two-thirds of Africa. United with them stand all the peoples of the new world of national liberation and the mighty socialist world—the new majority of the world. United with them stand the working-class movement and all supporters of democracy and peace throughout the world.

We here in Britain have the most direct responsibility. Britain is one of the permanent members on the United Nations Security Council. We must demand that the British government should take a public stand against this sabotage of the United Nations Resolution and in support of the Congo Government, to ensure the withdrawal of all aggressive imperialist forces from Congo and to support the unity and sovereign independence of Congo.

The Congo Government and people today are fighting in the forefront of the African freedom struggle. Congo is the heart of Africa. As Congo goes so will go Angola, Rhodesia, South Africa.

The Communist Party proclaims wholehearted solidarity with the Congo Government and people in their valiant struggle against all the assaults of imperialism. Their cause calls for the most active support from all workers and socialists, from all democrats and all who want peace.

HANDS OFF CONGO!

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