

Notes of the Month

Congo, Cuba and Peace

The hand of every European Power which has had dealings with him is stained deep with the blood of the African.

E. D. MOREL, *The Black Man's Burden*.

THIS month we approach the twenty-first anniversary of the launching of the second world war in Europe. A dangerous moment. A new generation has grown up which knows nothing of the second world war and is taught only lies by the spate of war

films. A new generation for the military butchers to delude with false slogans and send to destruction. Twenty-one years after the first world war Mussolini sent his *giovanezza* to invade Ethiopia, then the last remaining historic independent African state. That was a quarter of a century ago. Today the memory of Mussolini is the memory of the inverted corpse strung up by the anger of the Italian people, while the troops of Haile Selassie march in the name of the United Nations to defend the newly won independence of an African neighbour against the aggression of its old oppressor. We have reached the fifteenth anniversary of the end of the second world war. Fifteen years after the first world war Hitler was placed in power in Germany by the monopolists and militarists immediately after his electoral defeat by the German

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people with a loss of two million votes. Today the same monopolists and militarists, entrenched anew around Adenauer in the West German state; the Krupps and Thyssens, restored to their full possessions and power by the favour of the West; the selfsame generals of Hitler, placed at the head of the new Wehrmacht, now equipped with nuclear weapons; these proclaim anew already openly and publicly their offensive expansionist aims to re-establish the frontiers of Nazi Germany, and sedulously draw up their blueprints for their new blitzkrieg. Once again a British Conservative Premier makes the Munich pilgrimage, to be received at the airport with a welcoming umbrella, and with the selfsame docile acolyte who accompanied Neville Chamberlain on the preceding occasion, Lord Home, to provide the Missing Link.

Yes, there are plenty of ugly features in the present situation. To the old monsters have been added new ones. There is no lack of warning parallels. But yet the present situation is not the same today as then. And it is the difference that is decisive.

Mills of History

The mills grind slowly. But they grind exceedingly small. After all his crimes and bombast Hitler did end in the blazing Chancellery, tracked down by justice embodied in Soviet arms. All his lies and guile of the typical Western master of propaganda did not save Goebbels—even though his final 'Iron Curtain' formula bequeathed as his parting gift before death to organise the Western Cold War after 1945 still rattles every day today, fifteen years later, in every speech and every article of every political leader and journalist of the 'free world' to denote their fidelity to the Testament of Nazism. Syngman Rhee, to maintain whose bloodstained dictatorship all the legions of all the powers of the 'free world' invaded Korea only ten years ago, has at last been overthrown by the wrath of the Korean people and fled to take refuge under the protection of his American masters. Three decades after the sell-out of the *Daily Herald* by the T.U.C. to the millionaires, the last turn of the screw is revealing the ultimate outcome of this pioneer experiment in shareholding partnership with big business as the boasted solution of Labour's problems, now that Fifty One Per Cent Odhams is exercising its whip hand to demand the removal of the last figleaf of Labour affiliation. One quarter of a century after the assault on the last stronghold of African freedom, the living Haile Selassie triumphs over the dead Mussolini. And now

Congo, Red Congo, the Congo of Red Rubber, the Congo of the greatest crimes of modern imperialism till Nazism, of millions slain and tortured and exterminated, has risen, has proclaimed independence, and is fighting tenaciously, shoulder to shoulder with brother African states, to maintain that independence and defeat the renewed attempts of imperialism, whether through direct armed assault or subtler penetration, to overthrow the hard won independence and dissect the living body of the risen giant.

Congo Atrocities

It was unwise of the Belgian Government and publicists to dare to speak of atrocities in the Congo. Do they really think that public memory is so short? Or that the world has forgotten those crimes without equal which first awakened universal consciousness at the dawn of this century to the horrors of modern imperialism, when the intrepid endeavours of noble-hearted fighters for humanity like E. D. Morel and Roger Casement penetrated the veil of darkness and laid bare the sickening record. 'The greatest crime in all history', in the words of Conan Doyle, can stagger even present-day imagination, which has supped full of horrors and plunged deeper and deeper into the abyss as imperialism has progressed. One single fact betrays the record. At the beginning of this century the population of Belgian Congo was varyingly estimated by different authorities at from twenty to thirty millions; the lowest estimate was twenty millions. Let us now take the lowest estimate. Today the population is thirteen millions. The loss of seven millions, one third of the population, and not even by forced migration as in the colonisation and depopulation of Ireland. Seven million unnatural deaths; seven millions wiped out, exterminated, in a short space of years; more, many more, if we allow for what would have been the normal increase of population. In relation to the size of population even the record of Nazism pales besides this.

Casement 'Diaries'

In this connection a footnote on Casement may be forgiven, since his memory is forever bound up with the revelation of the truth about the Belgian Congo. It is characteristic that even a third of a century later British officialism still seeks to blacken the memory of the Irish patriot Roger Casement by continuing to maintain the slanderous charges about the alleged 'diaries' produced by those

self-vaunted masters of forgery, Admiral Sir Reginald Hall of Naval Intelligence in association with the Red-baiter Basil Thompson. In their successive conflicting versions of how and where they professed to have found these 'diaries' they have been as clumsy as the American Secret Service, in their successive conflicting versions over both the U2 and the RB47 (which latter they vainly searched for over the whole Arctic during ten days, and then when the Russians told them where and how it was brought down, pretended they had always known, in order to have the insolence to challenge the Soviet account). Latterly the secretive British authorities, till then so shy about producing any material evidence regarding the Casement 'diaries', but obviously itching from a guilty conscience, have after thirty-four years to hatch the latest brood, produced a new set of volumes as the really authentic version to permit limited inspection by selected witnesses. Unfortunately for this latest effort the Associated Press correspondent, Ben Allen, who was shown the original version of the alleged 'diaries' in 1916, has borne witness that this latest version does not correspond to the old ones which he was shown in 1916:

Mr. Allen told *The Times* yesterday that the documents on exhibition in the Record Office were certainly not the ones which were shown to him in 1916 by the late Admiral Sir Reginald Hall of Naval Intelligence, and which he was then told was Casement's diary. . . . Mr. Allen said that Hall called him aside, presented him with the diaries and urged him to circulate them in America through the Associated Press.

For several reasons . . . he was not satisfied that they were authentic. Mr. Allen said that he refused to use the material unless he was allowed to see Casement and to ask him whether he was the author. This he was not allowed to do.

Mr. Allen said that what he was shown was a thick rolled manuscript . . . The sheets were at least twice the size of any of the exhibits now on display in the Record Office.

(*The Times*, August 6, 1960.)

All this would be an old story for the masters in forgery who produced the Piggott forgeries to damn Parnell, the forged *Pravda* put out by Scotland Yard for the anti-Soviet campaign, or the forged 'Red Letter' to win a general election. The memory of Casement (however misled in his final desperate attempt to serve the cause of Ireland with the aid of another imperialism) can never be blackened from such dirty sources.

'Steeped in Blood'

The once prosperous Congo of abundance, described by early travellers, was laid waste by King Leopold's system of appropri-

tion of its natural resources and 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 Catholic 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. He 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. What must be the memories in every family of every Congolese man and woman? The amazing thing is not that there may have been incidents of violence (and 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 wronged Congolese people towards their former oppressors once they have won their independence.

Profit and Loss

'Do Empires Still Pay?' asked the naïve 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; who, 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, 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.

Balance Sheet of Empire

There could be no more classic demonstration of the economics of modern imperialism (not 'post-imperialism') than the relations of Belgium and Congo. Did the exploitation come to an end when the autocracy of King Leopold was replaced on the eve of the first world war by the direct colonial rule of the Belgian state operating through the same octopus of the *Société Générale* (older than the Belgian State) and the great overseas monopolism, the *Haut Katanga* and the rest, linked with British and later also American monopoly interests? On the contrary, the exploitation became more scientific, more intensive. During the five years 1955-59, according to *The Economist* of August 6, 1960, Congo had to pay Belgium (deficit on the balance of payments with Belgium) £472,000,000, or £94,000,000 a year, or, allowing for re-investment in Congo, a net £422,000,000, while earning from the rest of the world, in dollars, sterling or other currencies, £322,000,000, and having to cover the remainder from reserves previously accumulated. 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 1, 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.

Uranium and the Atom Bomb

In the modern period uranium and copper 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 facade of post-war Brussels has been 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 or 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.

A National Revolution

No wonder the Congo people have arisen in one of the greatest popular national revolutions of our era. No wonder the smug Belgian, British, French and American monopolists are so tenacious to use every device and stratagem and brutality to hold their rich booty even after they have been compelled to recognise the juridical right of independence. Congo is the heart of Africa. As Congo goes, so will go Rhodesia, Angola, South Africa. Here is being enacted at this moment the battle of all Africa's future. The self-satisfied experts of imperialism, blind as always everywhere to what really moves among the people until revolution strikes them in the face, prattled until the last minute of the passive torpor of the Congo people, where the skilful Belgian colonialists allowed no nonsense of political institutions or education or new ideas or rights, and where the people were supposed to be sunk in passive acceptance, immune from the currents stirring all Africa. That typical

American tourist's *vade mecum* 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 (and official statistics in these matters usually understate the true extent). The seeds of the future harvest were already sown.

People Arisen

There is no corner of the world, however remote, however held in chains and blinkers, that can be cut off from the world advance of liberation, whatever the differences in tempo of development. Gunther's wisdom on Congo tranquillity was published in 1955. That was the year of Bandung, landmark of the great Afro-Asian sweep forward. Already in that year, in 1955 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-Africa 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.

Bloodbath of 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 49 Africans killed (according to official admissions; actual figures were far higher). This bloodbath was the dawn of Congo freedom. There followed the renewed shootings of October 1959, with 20 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 inaugurating independence on June 30:

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?

Such was the fitting epitaph on Belgian Congo.

Vultures Gather

Imperialism will not lightly surrender its rich prey. As soon as the hold of Belgium was seen to weaken, all the vultures of imperialism are 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 confident that their evacuation would be a masquerade, and that by their intrigues and manoeuvres to buy up leaders and organisations they could disintegrate the national front into hopeless confusion, and then, in the name of suppressing disorder, march in again to resume armed occupation, utilising the 25,000 professional soldiers of their Force Publique under Belgian officers. 'Nothing has changed', as the magnates of *Haut Katanga* in their Brussels headquarters placidly informed *The Observer* correspondent as late as July 6, one week after the proclamation of independence. But on that day the soldiers of the Force Publique rose against their Belgian officers and united with the national cause. From that moment everything changed. The masquerade gave place to battle. Once again was demonstrated the profound truth of the merciless Marxist definition of the essence of the state as the body of armed men. The Belgian monopolists had now to rush in by airlift their own armed forces, parachutists and battalions, eleven thousand in all, to create a reign of terror. This invasion bore the character of open Belgian armed aggression, since it took place just after the sovereign independence of Congo had been solemnly recognised by the United Nations on July 7, in accordance with the old plan. Hence the Congo Government was able to appeal to the United Nations for protection of its independence against the Belgian armed aggression. 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 authorising

measures to support the legal Congo Government and ensure the withdrawal of the invaders. The sequel has been a study in the tactics of imperialism (or, for those who prefer it, 'post-imperialism').

New Colonialism

Already before the liberation of Congo the rival imperialists were staking their claims. From the side of the British imperialists Central African Federation troops were massed on the Congo border months in advance in hungry anticipation, and on March 2 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; while 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 26 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. Belgium meanwhile was seeking to ensure its continued grip on the wealth of Katanga through its puppet Tshombe. But the tactics of U.S. imperialism were the most subtle, just as over Suez in relation to Britain, seeking to give lip service to the United Nations call for Congo independence and Belgian withdrawal in order to weaken the Belgian position, and secure their gradual withdrawal, and utilise the United Nations for U.S. penetration and domination. Thus the U.N. units under Western imperialist command were used only to disarm Congolese troops, while maintaining the friendliest relations with the Belgian armed forces and puppets, repeatedly snubbing and cold-shouldering the Congo Government, and preparing the way for proposals for a U.N. mandate over Congo.

'Collective Imperialism'?

By August 12 the plan to re-establish imperialist control in Congo through a form of U.N. mandate came into the open:

Mr. Hammerskjöld's report said that a consultative group of international experts would go to work early next week to draw up programmes in 11 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 13, 1960.)

A sufficiently comprehensive list. The well-informed *Toronto Globe and Mail* on August 1 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 Hammerskjöld, 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 6, 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.

One thing these gentlemen forget. That is the wishes of the Congo people, who did not fight for their independence in order to hand it back to imperialism in a new suit.

Africa and Imperialism

A clergyman back from Congo at the beginning of August, Dr. George Carpenter, a Secretary of the International Missionary Council, reporting to the Commission of the Churches on International Affairs, remarked that all the reports published from Congo failed to give the viewpoint of the Congo people:

The news reports in the press of the western world have concentrated on the spectacular and violent aspects of the scene. They tell the story from the white man's viewpoint; for the most part they show little awareness that there is another side. . . Is fellow feeling with peoples struggling to establish their freedom to be more keenly felt and more vigorously expressed among communists than among the free peoples of the west?
(*The Times*, August 6, 1960.)

He has touched his finger on the vulnerable nerve. During these weeks reporters have swarmed over Congo and filled the columns of the press. Yet not one, so far as the Western press is concerned, has attempted to give a picture of what the ordinary people of Congo are thinking. Not one appears to have attempted to interview the ordinary man and woman of the Congo people. Not one has attempted to interview a members of the Force Publique—these men trained by the alien rulers to hold down their own people, yet in the moment of crisis responding to the most elementary national feeling, turning out their hated Belgian officers and fighting to protect their own Congo Government. How many of them have been shot down in Katanga and elsewhere by the Belgian rocket planes and guns? A veil of silence has been drawn. But it is the people

of Congo who will say the last word. United with them stand all the peoples of Africa, with their eleven now independent African states due to meet in an 'African Summit' at Leopoldville at the end of August. 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. The last word is no longer with imperialism.

Cuba and Laos

Turn to Cuba on the other side of the world from Congo. Here is revealed a new height of the democratic national revolution. In face of all the threats and provocation from the U.S. imperialist giant across the water, the armed plane assaults and economic blackmail, the Cuban people have courageously gone forward to wipe out the old oppression and dependence and wrest key resources from the foreign monopolies into the hands of the people. Visibly the dollar tycoons itch to lash out in the old way, when the dispatch of a couple of gunboats and a curt order to the Marines was sufficient to deal with any recalcitrant Latin American state and restore a docile dictator. Their press spits venom. Every speech of Eisenhower thunders threats and imprecations. And yet they hesitate. They have hesitated so far to repeat the armed aggression with which they overthrew Arbenz in Guatemala. Why? Because they have discovered that the Latin American peoples are standing by Cuba. Because the Soviet Union has warned them that any attempt at armed aggression will be followed by quick retribution. Comically they appeal to the Monroe Doctrine, which would bind them to withdraw their bases from Europe. The one-time dictators of all America, the aggressors of Korea and Formosa, the lords of a hundred bases over the world, writhe in impotent fury. But they have not yet dared to act. Cuba is small. But Cuba is not alone. In the next continent even little Laos has valiantly set on the path to clear out the American military invaders and defy the thunderbolts of SEATO. There is danger still, danger of violent action from imperialism on every side. But the balance is moving, is moving every day, on the side of the peoples and of peace. Let us hasten to do our part to speed the movement of that balance while there is time.

R.P.D.

August 16, 1960.