



Congo (L):

a common history

Belgium's colonial control in the Congo was born under the sign of a battle between this small European country, England, and the other colonial powers, and this same sign follows her eclipse in the sordid struggle that has developed in our time between North American imperialism and the remains of Belgian colonial power.

Some years before his ascent to the throne as King of the Belgians, with the name Leopold II, the Duke of Bravante wrote to a friend: "Since history teaches that colonies are useful, that they are important to the power and prosperity of a country, we are determined to obtain one."

Once on the throne of his small country, the author of these words dedicated himself to entering into competition with the other colonial powers on the old continent, without engaging in war with any of them.

Belgium came to colonialism a little late; England, France, Germany, Portugal, Spain, and Holland had divided up the colonies and were preparing to gobble up whatever territories still remained available.

As a small country, Belgium could not enter the colonial "club" by force, nor did she have adequate capital for the venture.

The epoch in which colonies were established by trade had passed and was moving inescapably toward exploration and exploitation of natural resources, demanding large-scale investments.

Belgian colonialism is essentially different from that of other colonialist countries and its most basic and characteristic feature is that it evolved in the shadow of North American imperialism, as will be explained later.

To go directly into Africa to take specific territories by force was dangerous for Belgium because it would have clashed with other rivals, especially with Great Britain, at the very height of her expansion in Africa.

The correct formula would require a considerable degree of judgment. For this a camouflage was necessary to throw the other colonial powers off the scent, at least until the deed was done and a solid base had been established in some region.

On September 12, 1876, in the disguise of an "International Geographic Conference," to which representatives of institutions concerned with this discipline in various European countries were unofficially invited, an apparently humanitarian and innocent enterprise was formed: "The International African Association," which was to have as its "principal aim the joint scientific exploration of the unknown areas [read, noncolonized] of Africa, under an international plan; the opening of new routes to bring civilization into the interior of the African continent; a formula for eliminating the slave trade"; indeed, very "humanitarian," in order not to reveal the actual plans of the monarchy, of course.

The "perfidious Albion," neither shy nor lazy, discovered the Belgian King's game and ruined it. He alleged he could not recognize a supranational organization, especially since Leopold II had not gone through the official channels of the countries represented at the Brussels Conference.

The Belgian sovereign was not discouraged and engaged the services of a British adventurer answering to the name of Sir Henry Morgan Stanley, although his real name was John Rowlands, who travelled across Africa from East to West, exploring the course of the Congo River, until he reached Banana on August 9, 1877.

With his new associate, Leopold II founded the Congolese Committee of Advanced Studies in Brussels in November of 1878, with statutes strictly prohibiting "all political proposals" in the activities of the institution.

This time the English were taken by surprise because, in reality, the Committee was the embryo of one of the most reactionary colonial ventures on the African continent.

Seven years later, in 1884, by means of very close ties with the United States, King Leopold succeeded in having that country recognize — not without just retribution — the flag of the International Association of the Congo (the name assumed from that time on by the Committee of Advanced Studies) as that "of a friendly state."

Yankee support propped up the Belgian colonial venture before the European powers, but at the same time created the germ of future contradictions. The price that Leopold II would pay for that support was to be very high; actually he would henceforth be playing the role of American imperialism's straw man in the Congo.

Already in 1881, a North American militarist-diplomat, architect of Belgian-American relations in the Congo, General Henry Shelton Sanford, advised Leopold II to occupy the region of Naidi Kwili to form there in 1887 the first Belgian-North American alliance under the name of the Sanford Exploring Expedition.

In 1904 relations between Belgium and England reached a dangerous climax over the new colony, but once more the United States intervened to consolidate Belgium's position.

For the United States, which had not had the opportunity to take over an African colony, the position that best suited it was always to support the weakest country with an eye to the future.

The Yankees had learned this tactic in America, supporting the French colonialists against the English with a view to taking the French colonies later.

For her part, Belgium was in need of money to exploit the Congo and needed the cooperation of the United States and even of the European capitalists.

Thus she obtained the participation of the French in the Matadi to Stanley Pool railroad, in Grands Lacs, and in Lower Katanga, and of the British in the Union Minière du Haut-Katanga.

But for the reasons already stated, the North Americans were the most favored.

On September 24, 1906, King Leopold conceded to the North American group named Ryan, an area of two million hectares for the development of rubber and vegetable products lying between Kimpoko and the edge of Stanley Pool and over to the bank of the Yumpi up to the Bolobo region.

Thanks to this concession, a society was established under the laws of New York state in 1906, named the American Congo Company. In the first years of its existence, this group expanded its concession up to the left bank of the Congo River, where it established a plant for rubber development and set up factories in Kimpoko, Kwamouth, and Bolobo as well as in the interior of the country, to obtain from the natives mainly agricultural products and ivory.

During a visit to Brussels in 1906, the North American, Ryan, learned that Tanganyika Concessions, Ltd. had discovered rich deposits of copper in Katanga and that the Belgian sovereign was about to begin joint exploitation with the English. Ryan wanted to participate, but Leopold II told him that the negotiations with the British were already too far along; but that instead he could grant him a mineral and forestry concession outside of Katanga.

Ryan immediately cabled the Guggenheim brothers, who then controlled the most powerful mining and metallurgical enterprises in the world, such as Kennecott Co., American Smelting and Refining Co., American Smelting



Security Co., etc., and who, as was to be expected, accepted the offer of the Belgian King.

Thus the Forminière (Congoese forestry and mining association) was constituted without delay. By a royal decree signed in November of 1906, the spoils were formally divided among the King, the Yankees, and the Société Générale de Belgique.

In its founding document, published as proof of its existence, one sees the composition of the original investors. There was only one representation lacking: that of the victim, the Congoese people, who certainly had no voice in the fiction of the so-called Independent State of the Congo.¹

With the foundation of Forminière, Union Minière du Haut-Katanga, Lower Congo Railroad Company, etc., a certain uneasiness began to arise among some Belgian politicians.

On November 7, 1906, a deputy in the Chamber of Representatives exclaimed: "The King of the Congo has become a rival as well as a partner of the magnates of the great North American trusts."

But the sad part of the case was not really this struggle between wolves, but the bitter situation of the Congoese people.

Attracted by the riches of the Congo, by its gold, its diamonds, copper, zinc, and other material resources of great value, the Belgian, American, English, French capitalists rushed in to impoverish its soil.

The well-known statement by the heroic Comandante Ernesto Guevara is most applicable: "They came and carried off all the riches, leaving only empty holes."

To get an idea of the foreign penetration in the Congo, one has only to look at the list of countries that have investments there, with Belgium at the top of the list:

¹ On November 15, 1884, the so-called African Conference met in Berlin to straighten out the problems that had arisen around the Congo. Fifteen countries attended: Germany, Austro-Hungary, Belgium, Denmark, Spain, United States, France, Great Britain, Italy, Holland, Portugal, Russia, Sweden, Norway, and Turkey.

King Leopold II maneuvered skillfully, threatening to "withdraw if the territories of the Association were not given access to the sea, leaving face to face rivals who were incapable of understanding each other."

The tactic worked out beautifully and the conversations that the delegates sent by the Association to the Conference had with their colleagues resulted in the recognition, one by one, by the participating powers, of the sovereignty of the new State.

On February 23, 1885, the Conference passed the measure constituting the Independent State of the Congo.

Only one condition was placed on the recognition: the agreement by the Congo to have open trade with all nations. Three days later, the Association accepted the resolution and signed the general act of Berlin.

(Pierre Joye and Rosine Lewin, *Les trusts au Congo*)

GROUP OR COMPANY	BELGIUM	TYPE OF EXPLOITATION
Société Générale de Belgique		Enormous financial empire with interests in Union Minière, BCK Railroad Company, and Forminière. Exercises control over the Congolese Company for Commerce and Industry, the Katanga Company, the Special Committee of Katanga, the Cotton Union, and is tied to such groups as Vieille Montagne, ACEC, Central Pharmacies, etc.
CCCI (Congolese Company for Commerce and Industry)		Allied with the Société Générale it in turn exercises control over General Stores, Inc., Belgian Commerce of the Upper Congo, Congolese Railroad Company, the Katanga Company, etc. It also participates in 60 additional societies and directly controls another 40.
Kasai Company, INTERFINA, and Belgian-Katanga		Also controlled by CCCI, the Kasai Company is concerned with the harvesting of agricultural products; the INTERFINA, oil and prospecting with two affiliates; the Upper Uele and Nile Association, and Sorongo Mining. Belgian-Katanga is involved in every type of commercial operation.
Katanga Company		Also controlled by CCCI, it was created to insure the commercial occupation and exploitation of the region. It is actually one of the chief companies of the Société Générale.
Special Committee of Katanga		Founded in 1900 through the Independent State of the Congo with absolute administrative powers. Participates in Union Minière du Haut-Katanga, in Géomines, etc.

Union Minière
du Haut-Katanga

10 million francs, its present capital is 8000 million. Established in 1906 with an initial capital of million. The concessions it holds cover an area of 34 000 square kilometers, more than the territory of Belgium and Luxembourg together. Produces tin, cobalt, (world's largest producer), concentrations of zinc, uranium, germanium, cadmium, and other precious metals. Owns subsidiaries such as COFOKA (construction), SOGEFOR (production and energy), SOGELEC (distribution), SOGECHIM (chemical/industry). The African Explosives Company, the Katanga Metallurgical Society, the Society of Metallurgical Investigations of South Katanga, the Society for the Exploitation of Katanga mines, etc.

Forminière

We have already spoken about the origin of this company. It is chiefly concerned with diamond mining and has various gold deposits in the North, in Nepoko; it participates in the Angola Diamond Company, the Congolese Cement and Asphalt Society; SOCOREP (oil); BAUXACONGO (bauxite); FORESCOM (forestry exploitation), in the Kasai Agricultural and Industrial Society; the Belgian Congo Cattle Society; the Mayumbey Society of Agricultural Colonization; in MOBESCO (financial company).

In all the groups mentioned up to now, the Société Générale plays a role. Moreover, as is clear, one and the other are intertwined and form an inextricable combination.

But as if this were not enough, there are still many other companies controlled by the group of the Société Générale such as the Congolese Real Estate and Furnishing Association, the Société Générale de Minéraux et Minerals, SOPARCO (African Association of Shares and Trade), the Cotton Union, and many others. The list is clearly endless and permits us to say that the economy of the Congo is in hands of the Société Générale.



But aside from it, other important Belgian financial groups are also in the Congo, such as the Antwerp Company, which controls Petrofina, the Congolese Petroleum Association, Tabacofina, Manutabac, and various others.

The African Finance Company, for its part, controls 25 firms.

The Empain group has been active in the Congo since 1902, the year in which the Company of the Upper Congo and the African Great Lakes Company (railroads) were founded, developing an empire in various branches of the economy.

One can also list other groups, such as Cominière, Lampert, Solvay, the Hallet and Privas groups (retail businesses), Sarma and Belgian-Colonial Mutual, etc.

The work would be too long if we continued the list of Belgian interests in the Congo; but we cannot overlook the importance of their presence because they clarify two things:

In the first place, Forminière and Union Minière du Haut-Katanga are well known and many people believe that if these two companies are nationalized, the Belgians will be eliminated from the Congo; but as one can see, that is not the case. Mobutu has been very demagogic, threatening to nationalize the two best known companies, but what is really lacking in the Congo is a complete nationalization of foreign companies, which will happen only when there is a revolution.

On the other hand, recognizing the depth of this penetration helps us to understand why the Yankees continue to fight the Belgians in the Congo when the latter appear to have fallen by the wayside.

This is really not the way things are and North American imperialism is going to fight against the remains of Belgian colonialism "block by block and house by house" to state it graphically.

The battle is underway now and includes not only the economic aspect but the psychological and ideological as well.

Just now let us enumerate the North American interests currently in the Congo.

GROUP OR COMPANY	UNITED STATES	EXPLOITATION
American-Congo Co.		Association founded by Leopold II with the participation of the Ryan-Guggenheim group to form Forminière. American capital in Forminière is 25% at present.

Rockefeller group	Has interests in Union Minière du Haut-Katanga, through Tanganyika Concessions Ltd. Participates in FILTISAP (thread and textiles); in the Congolese General Automobile and Airplane Company; in COBEGA (manufacture of packaging tins); in the production and processing of pineapple (ANACONGO), and in Esso of Central Africa.
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United States Plywood Corp.	Has interests in the Congolese Plate Company.
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Olin Mathieson	Has interests in RIDEX, Association of African Explosives.
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Bell Telephone Co.	Has subsidiaries in Kinshasa and Elizabethville.
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General Motors Co.	Has a subsidiary in Katanga under the name of Congo Motors Ltd.
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Ford Motors Co.	Subsidiary in Kinshasa.
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Union Carbide Corp.	Has a dominant interest in the Lushe Mining Association.
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GREAT BRITAIN

Lever	Huileries du Congo, subsidiary for extracting palm oil. Growers Association, exploitation of plantations for industrial use.
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Tanganyika Concessions Ltd.	Very important participation in Union Minière.
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FRANCE

Banque de Paris et des Pays Bas	Participates in the General Mining Company, in the Rushuru Agricultural Association, and, indirectly, in the Kasai Company.
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Banque Nationale pour le Commerce et l'Industrie.	Has 20 % of the capital in the Congolese Banking Association. Participates in other less important companies.
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Source: *Les trusts au Congo*.

German and Dutch capital investments are less important and it does not seem to us worth extending this work unnecessarily to include them.

In any case, these investments have little influence on the economic and political life of the country since, as can be seen, the Belgians and the North Americans continue to be the Congo's owners.

The struggle developing between North American imperialism and the remains of Belgian imperialism does not hinder, and even stimulates as a part of the new Yankee penetration, a fusion of capital from the two countries. Unofficially it is said that today Yankee interests in Union Minière are more than 40%.

It seems to follow that this is due to the fact that, on the one hand, Belgian interests fear nationalization and try to survive by allying themselves with the strongest, or else that if nationalization occurs the capital they recoup will be less and so this will be a greater guarantee of indemnization, since the Yankees are in the middle.

One more factor favoring the United States is Belgium's world position, especially after having become headquarters for NATO and SHAPE.

Moreover, Belgium itself is a semicolonial country because of Yankee capitalism, whose influence will prevent any head on clash between the two countries.

The Congolese people, for their part, are apparently ignorant of this battle, as they were when the imperialists decided to divide up the spoils.

But if the people were conscious of the important role they have in Africa, united, they would have sufficient forces to throw the Belgians and the Yankees out of their country.