

Towards independence

The years 1959 and 1960 showed all the signs of radical upheaval: demonstrations; rioting and political discussion; a sense of expectation and hope and the collapse of old relationships. These changes were not limited to narrow circles of Congolese men who had been promoted by the colonial state. Tens of thousands of ordinary Congolese began to contemplate independence and freedom for the first time. These were the years of Congo's revolution.

One major event that helped to stimulate these upheavals was the rioting in Léopoldville on 4 January 1959. Officially 49 people were killed, but many Congolese put the number closer to 500. A legal demonstration had been called but the police intervened to disperse the crowd. This led to fighting between the authorities and the demonstrators, resulting in the destruction of symbols of European power: shops, cars and mission schools. In the aftermath of the riot the commanding officer of the *Force Publique*, General Emile Janssens, was unrepentant: 'We killed them because they were thieves, because they were pillagers ... If they don't keep quiet, we are ready to recommence the sport'.⁹⁸ Europeans who had lived in the Congo – for years their private paradise – were overwhelmed with fear. The Congolese, for whom nothing would remain the same, determined to challenge colonial brutality. Europeans retreated further into their white enclaves; some even pressing for a military takeover of the colony. The Belgian government learnt the lesson; they must prepare for a

rapid withdrawal from the Congo if they were to prevent further radicalisation.

The reaction of the MNC to the rioting was to send a telegram to the Belgian parliament demanding that they send a commission of enquiry to investigate the causes of the bloodshed. The rioting and the repression that followed actually left Lumumba and the MNC almost the only political force in Léopoldville. Kasa Vubu's ABAKO was dissolved by the authorities and its leading members arrested. But the MNC, though recently radicalised by the experience of the pan-African conference in Accra, still preached reconciliation, condemning both the repression *and* the rioting. In an interview in mid-January Lumumba expressed the MNC's firm commitment to total independence but with the understanding that a *period of transition* was necessary to prepare the Congolese for the heady tasks of government. He repeated what became a familiar refrain, that Europeans in the Congo had a vital role to play in the independence of the country. In arguing this Lumumba was repeating a position that he had held for several years. In 1956 he had written: *If the Congo should obtain its independence ... why should you leave us and why should we drive you out ... so long as we continue to treat each other ... as true friends in the fullest meaning of the term.*⁹⁹

The 1959 rebellion led to three important changes in Congolese society. Firstly, it saw the radicalisation of the Congolese population living in the capital, and triggered a wider involvement in the nationalist struggle. Secondly, it broke some of the conservative habits of the Congolese elite. Prior to the rebellion the attitude of the *évolués* centred on a determination to work within the colonial administration and win certain modest reforms for themselves. Suddenly another path opened up: the possibility of orientating a political programme towards the Congolese population. While the MNC might have continued to preach reconciliation and social peace, the effect of the rebellion on Lumumba was clear:

he was further radicalised. Lastly, the rebellion had a devastating effect on the Belgian royal family, as de Witte's explains: 'the Belgian royal family – which had a very strong ideological grip on all the colonialist structures – became scared. They realised that if Belgium wanted to hold onto the Congo, they had to respond to that radicalisation. A few days after the rebellion of Léopoldville the Belgian King was the first to mention the necessity of bringing a kind of independence to the Congo. And this declaration broke the spirit of all the hard-line colonists.'¹⁰⁰

Perhaps for the first time the political scene shifted from the besuited, well-organised and respectable members of the *évolués* and their associations. Now the political centre of gravity could be found elsewhere, and not just in the capital. This lasted until 1960. In many rural areas the general questioning of colonial structures meant that villagers refused to pay taxes; new branches of ABAKO sprang up throughout Lower Congo; collections were made for those arrested on protests or for families who had lost loved ones. The entire colonial project that had been intact for generations unravelled. Hebert Weiss described the collapse of colonial authority. 'Suddenly people starting to express themselves with renewed confidence for the first time: Belgian-Congolese relations developed into a sort of game where the Congolese would "test" Belgian reactions with ambiguous attacks on authority, which if successful constituted a moral victory for the "assailant", but if resisted would prove difficult to punish or even to define in legal terms ... For instance, people refused to appear for the census, or mothers refused to appear with their children for medical examinations, or they asked that they be paid for bringing their children on the argument that the Belgians would not have insisted on doing this all these years if it did not bring them some advantage. Pregnant women also refused to be examined unless they received payment. There were also more subtle attacks on authority. People would no longer stand at attention when addressing administrators, they

would be conspicuously slow in responding to questions put to them, and any incident would be immediately magnified. Thus a quarrel between a mission driver and a local villager, which would have been stopped previously by a stern word from a European nun, now would mushroom, and on occasion end with the pelting of the mission truck.'¹⁰¹

By the end of 1959 the colonial relationship of servant and master, that had seemed so solid a year before, had almost completely broken down. The same collapse was experienced across the country. At the end of October 1959 in Stanleyville the governor wrote in his journal:

'Sunday. Two incidents. Local games had been organised in front of a hotel in town for children irrespective of race. The atmosphere rapidly deteriorated, swarms of young black men destroyed the barriers that had been erected. It was necessary to stop the games. Frustrated, kids took out their anger on the furniture, breaking chairs, turning over tables. Another incident: a telephone call informed me that in the evening a European driver had hit a Congolese girl. Immediately the temperature rose. The police intervened, but they had to withdraw under a shower of stones and bottles. Finally, the gendarmerie stabilised the situation. Nine policemen have been injured.'¹⁰²

Taxes were not paid; summonses to appear in the native courts were ignored; the local judges refused to work in their 'own' courts, and no notice was taken of colonial land regulations. For a time native authorities, so carefully developed and nurtured by the colonial government, melted into thin air.¹⁰³ What Lumumba had written from prison three years previously was much truer now: *The Congo is waking up. Her sons are emerging from their age-long sleep and trying to clear a way out into the light of day.*¹⁰⁴

The MNC was not hegemonic on the political scene. Members left and new political formations were born. There were also political groups that had become more radical. Alphonse Nguvulu who had

been one of the founding members of the MNC left the organisation in April 1959 to create with members of *Action Socialiste* the *Party of the People*, an explicitly socialist group. With the colonial authorities accepting the idea of independence Nguvulu was of the opinion

Pierre Mulele (1929–68) was born in a small village in the territory of Gungu in the Congo. Dismissed for being 'rebellious' from an apprenticeship in an Agriculture School in 1951, he was forced to join the army. Working in Léopoldville in 1953 he launched a campaign for the equal treatment of white and black civil servants. Mulele judged the MNC too moderate. After the rebellion in Léopoldville in 1959 he helped to establish the *Parti Solidaire Africain*, explaining: 'If we had at our disposal a good organisation and sufficient weapons we could have liberated the city'. Antoine Gizenga was also one of the first leaders of the PSA. After Lumumba's murder Mulele became the pre-eminent nationalist figure leading the fight against the pro-American government in the capital.

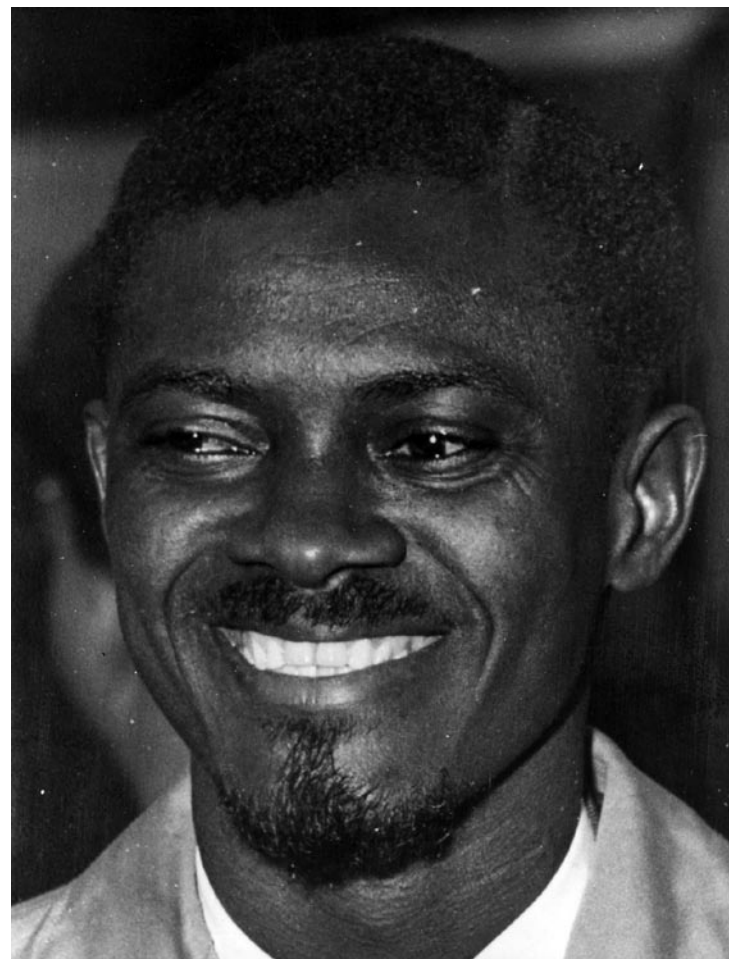
Congolese. These organisations, many explicitly socialist, exerted an important influence on the Congolese elite in the capital.

Building the party

On 13 January 1959 the Belgian King gave a national address responding to the riots. On the same day the conclusions of the

that the MNC had already fulfilled its historical mission. The organisation should be dissolved and its members must join the ranks of the socialists, the only programme according to Nguvulu capable of leading the country to real independence and progress.

One of the more radical political parties to emerge was the *Parti Solidaire Africain*. Leading members of the PSA were Antoine Gizenga and Pierre Mulele. Similar to the MNC the PSA was led by members of the *évolués*. The National Central Committee and National Political Bureau in January 1960 were made up of teachers, bank or government clerks and medical assistants. But the party was changing. By early 1960 the party was beginning to base itself in the rural areas, among a completely different class of



A moment of happiness as Patrice Lumumba becomes the first leader of an independent Congo in June 1960

farical Working Group the previous year were announced. The report had been submitted to the new minister of the colonies Maurice van Hemelrijck in December. One conclusion was very significant; according to the report a large number of those consulted

expressed a desire for 'internal autonomy'. The announcement explained that as a result Belgium would begin an 'exercise in universal suffrage'. Coached of course in words of dreadful condescension the report continued that the inhabitants of the Congo would in this way become capable of 'administering themselves'. To put this project in place Van Hemelrijck arrived in the Congo soon after the declaration. On 17 January he was received by a delegation of the MNC led by Lumumba. They expressed their agreement with the declaration of the Belgian government but only as a first step. The MNC wanted to see a Legislative Council emerge after proposed elections in December, when it would have real representatives of the people.

Lumumba rose on the tide of radicalism sweeping the country, by the end of March his tone changed again and he demanded from Belgium an exact date for independence. Lumumba told a reporter at the time that the MNC had 58,000 members. Even allowing for some exaggeration this is impressive for an organisation created less than five months previously. Matthais Kemishanga became a party organiser in Kasai very soon after he joined the MNC, and by the end of 1959 he was the provincial president in charge of propaganda. He describes the process of building the organisation: 'I joined the party in 1959, like everyone else I was a simple activist. But in June I was asked to help set up the party in Mweka and Luluabourg. I agreed. I took a train to the Mweka and days later we held a meeting. After the meeting we left for Luluabourg. In each place we passed we installed MNC committees, which would then organise the party in these areas.'¹⁰⁵

Lumumba dedicated himself to spreading the message of the MNC around the country. His extraordinary energy meant that he could work 18 hours a day, exhausting his entourage and intimidating his rivals. On 28 March a permanent headquarters of the MNC was finally opened in the commune of Kinshasa. The HQ was also going to welcome all Congolese, whether members of the

MNC or not. Where everyone – no matter their specific political allegiance – could help build the movement, answer the telephone, write a letter or offer advice. Lumumba spoke everywhere he went, explaining the character of the anti-colonial struggle, demanding that the Belgian declaration was implemented immediately. Meetings multiplied and so did the numbers attending these meetings. The first congress of the MNC – which was also the first of any modern political party in the Congo – was held in Luluabourg (today's Kananga) in April.

Kemishanga was already an active member of the MNC. He arrived late to the congress: 'It was at the first congress of a political party in the Congo that I first saw Patrice Lumumba. When the congress had started I was not in Luluabourg, so I came in late. Lumumba was speaking. A journalist had just asked a question: "Monsieur Lumumba you ask for independence, but you don't have a single doctor, lawyer, geologist or a respected journalist. How are you going to manage as an independent state?" Patrice Lumumba responded: "I am fully aware of this situation. But I have a question to ask you: You have been in the Congo for 80 years and you have not trained a single doctor or geologist. If we asked you to train ten doctors how many more years in our country will that take you?" The journalist was unable to respond.'¹⁰⁶

Immediately after the congress Lumumba left for two trips, the first was to Conakry and then onto Belgium. Conakry was the capital of Guinea and the home to perhaps the most radical leader of independence at the time, Sékou Touré. His trip was important for the contacts he made with the Soviet Union. Lumumba's attitude to communism was informed largely by his ignorance on the subject: he had long rejected what he understood as class struggle which to him was an idea which would divide the Congo. Now, as he attempted to build unity across Congo's fractious political scene, this old position must have seemed even more pertinent.

Arriving in Brussels at the end of April Lumumba met Albert De Coninck, a member of the central committee of the Belgium Communist Party. De Coninck claimed that Lumumba was heavily influenced by his meetings with Sekou Touré, and under the presi-

Sékou Touré (1922–84) was born in Faranah in central Guinea. In 1953 Touré became head of the Democratic Party of Guinea (Parti Démocratique de Guinée). When President Charles de Gaulle offered French colonies membership of a Franco-African community Touré was the only one to respond 'non', opting instead for immediate independence, famously commenting: 'We prefer poverty in freedom to riches in slavery'. Guinea gained independence in 1958. Guinea allied itself with the socialist bloc, and in 1965 broke off all relations with France.

dent's influence he wanted to create a mass trade union movement in the Congo, to help him apply pressure on the colonial authorities. Lumumba promised to invite members of the Communist Party in Belgium to an MNC congress planned for June.

Lumumba had decided that there were certain things to learn from the communists and much ideological baggage to discard. Although he was an increasingly intransigent nationalist leader, the pitch of his activism and declarations forever rising, he was still a pragmatist.

Belgian colonial authority must be shown the door (and thrown through it if necessary), but Belgian technicians and experts must stay, although even this now came with a prefix: as long as they worked for the Congo's development and not its exploitation.

These trips were also extremely important for exploding myths about Belgium. Busselen describes the effect on Lumumba: 'It was important for Lumumba to see on his trip to Brussels that there were white men working as waiters, that there were prostitutes and that there was a white working class. He saw the reality of the so-called motherland. He could also access left-wing books for the first time.'¹⁰⁷ Lumumba's first trip to Belgium in 1956 had already changed his ideas about the Europeans: *I can assure you that quite a*

*number of Congolese are in a much more comfortable situation than many Europeans in their home countries. We often have the mistaken idea that all Europeans live in the same conditions as the Europeans of the Congo, but this is a serious mistake.*¹⁰⁸

Returning to the Congo in May Lumumba seems to have grown even less patient towards colonialism. Lumumba left for Stanleyville where he was going to establish a branch of the MNC. He was shocked by the conditions in the city since he had been arrested there three years previously. In May 1959 the city seemed particularly bereft of hope, without jobs and full of bitterness towards the colonial power. The city had in fact fallen into almost total lethargy, and the riots in the capital months before had only the faintest echo. No political pamphlet, declaration or act of solidarity with the demonstrators in Léopoldville is recorded. However among the city's European population there had been a shift: certain groups had started to hoard guns, others learnt how to shoot and appeals were made to the governor for stricter security measures.¹⁰⁹

Lumumba was able to give voice to these grievances. After a few weeks in the city he became the conveyor belt for popular anger. But in Stanleyville the MNC also became the repository of social complaints. If the floodgates of colonial rule had burst open then many Congolese expressed this not only by automatically chanting independence but by complaining about low pay and unemployment and against their bullying, racist bosses. The MNC received a flow of letters

As colonial power began to crumble groups of Europeans organised themselves in European Volunteer Corps (Corps de Volontaires Européens). They were armed patrols of white civilians, hated and feared by the Congolese. In reality these were vigilante groups who were allowed to police their neighbourhoods, parading in uniform and acting with impunity. As independence approached there were attempts to outlaw these groups. On 25 March 1960 civilians were forbidden from carrying arms and from patrolling the streets.

demanding action against 'vicious' employers and 'poor pay'. But the organisation was ill-prepared to respond to these demands, and instead they sought compromises with local companies and an 'understanding' between Europeans and the Congolese. After the riots in the capital the main trade union confederation the *Fédération Générale du Travail de Belgique* (FGTB) demanded a general increase in salaries. The MNC focused almost exclusively on independence and, was unable to satisfactorily develop a programme of social reforms.

Lumumba was acutely aware of the tensions that existed between the mass of popular support for the MNC and the leadership of the party who were often overly cautious. This relationship was dialectical: both the party and the movement grew and developed in the context of these tensions. In April 1959, while in Belgium, Lumumba responded to a question about support for the party among the Congolese masses: *the masses are a lot more revolutionary than us ... They do not always dare to express themselves in front of a police officer, or make their demands in front of an administrator but when we are with them it is the masses who push us, and who want to move more rapidly than us.*¹¹⁰

Lumumba's work in Stanleyville also involved fundraising. Money raised in the city was used to buy bicycles, vehicles and to fund propagandists who worked recruiting members to the MNC in rural areas. These party militants were overwhelmingly young, and soon developed radical slogans drawn from their experiences during the recruitment drive. Young organisers also filled in the gaps in the campaign, making promises to the villagers that became part of the MNC programme, even if the leadership of the party were reluctant: the end to the forced cultivation of cotton, a suspension of taxes and an end to police abuses. Weis argued that these tensions characterised the development of political parties in the Congo, 'the rural masses tended to be radical and the leaders frequently tried to dampen these predilections on the part of their followers.'¹¹¹

Nationalism, independence and class

The inability of the MNC to adequately give voice to the complaints that came from workers, trade unionist and those who sought an outlet for their economic and social demands, reveals a problem with the politics of independence. The MNC – with Lumumba at its centre – could only reply with the battle-cry 'immediate independence'. The party did not have the political vocabulary to construct a programme of social transformation that could envisage more than 'independence'.

Even though the demand for independence was a radical slogan it contained many contradictions. Lumumba was the figurehead of this radicalising movement and saw a new state powering development in an independent Congo, with, if possible, Belgian and foreign assistance. Essentially the struggle was a democratic one; it sought elections to a new state, but the Congolese would remain employees in mostly foreign-owned companies, in a country whose very creation was an extremely recent colonial invention.

Consistent with national liberation movements across the continent at the time the objective was not to fundamentally upset the *status quo*. The world was divided into nations, and the struggle for national liberation was an attempt to establish an independent territory for capitalist or – in the cases of those states looking to the Soviet Union – state capitalist development. In this context all national classes had to unite as the project of liberation insisted on unity.

Lumumba's ideas fitted perfectly into these holes. For several years he had shunned any notion of 'class struggle', which was to him a metropolitan idea imported from Belgium. In 1956 he wrote: *Let poor Belgium keep its ideological squabbles. The Congo needs something other than petty wranglings. Let us all unite, Catholics, Liberals, Socialist, Christians, Protestants, Atheists, to achieve real peace in this country.* On socialist ideas he was dismissive: *Our country has much greater need of 'builders' than of squabblers, pamphleteers*

and purveyors of communist slogans.¹¹² His position on many things changed, but on these questions it did not: an independent Congo must remain united. One easy way of arguing for unity in a society divided by class, was to deny the very existence of classes.

Frantz Fanon (1925–1961) was born on the Caribbean island of Martinique. He moved to Algeria to work as a doctor in 1953, just before the start of the war for independence. He became the foremost thinker and activist of national liberation. *The Wretched of the Earth* is Fanon's most famous work. In the book he describes the experience of national liberation and noted how Cuba, which gained independence in 1902, remained entirely dependent on the US. He was scathing about the 'African bourgeoisie' who had led their countries to independence; they have 'learnt nothing from books. If they had looked closer at the Latin American countries they doubtless would have recognised the dangers which threaten them.'

*it is work ... We must redouble our efforts. We must drink one bottle of beer in place of two ... We must mobilise ourselves to create a national economy.*¹¹³

Other nationalist leaders had discovered that once independence had been won old repressive and colonial structures would have to be used to maintain the fiction of class unity. Lumumba's contemporary Frantz Fanon could see the dangers inherent in the African national liberation struggle. He explained how the national

For Lumumba – in his rhetoric at least – the class struggle simply did not exist.

There was no serious attempt to organise among trade unionist, or to build a political project on the ability of workers and the 'rural masses' to destabilise the colonial economy, through strikes and occupations. The resting place for the independence struggle was in the nation state, which occupied a space in a fiercely competitive world system. This much Lumumba knew. He understood that the real battle to build up the Congolese state would come after independence; in preparation he explained that the Congolese would have to *tighten their belts*. Lumumba was

beating a familiar drum: *Tomorrow,*

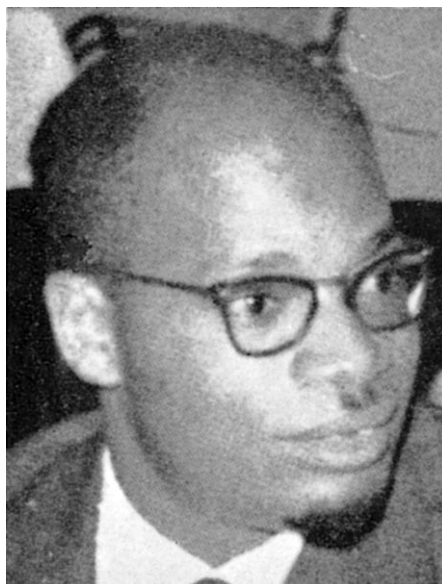
bourgeoisie – the Congolese *évolué* – degenerates after independence into the exploiting class that they had supplanted. He wrote how the class of nationalist leaders becomes 'a sort of little caste, avid and voracious ... only too glad to accept the dividends that the former colonial power hands out to it.'¹¹⁴

The struggle for economic growth, and the accumulation of mining capital in the Congo, would force the new elite into an exploitative relationship to the poor and working class as the only way of powering development. In the new nations emerging on the continent, this is exactly what happened. Colonial oppression of the poor continued after independence under the fiction of class harmony, or for those so-called radical states, 'African socialism'. The result was as John Molyneux explained: 'the seemingly radical, fluid structures of the nationalist revolution settle into the Stalinist mould of the bureaucratic one-party state'.¹¹⁴

Fanon, observing at close hand the struggle for Algerian freedom, described the process that transformed national liberation into 'the curse of independence, and the colonial power through its immense resources of coercion condemns the young nation to regression. In plain words, the colonial power says: "Since you want independence, take it and starve."¹¹⁶ The Congo was caught in this vice; between a cowardly *évolué* and the limitations of national development in the post-colonial world.

The MNC splits

Lumumba was used to being the target of envy and jealousy. There were serious rumblings in his own party; he was accused of vanity, 'congenital narcissism' and mad personal ambitions. Joseph Ileo, a co-founder of the MNC, began to orchestrate Lumumba's removal for crimes of 'vanity'. Ileo led a split in July 1959, which was described as the revocation of Lumumba's presidency. He took with him most of the leading members of the organisation. But it was a split without any popular backing. The membership stayed



Albert Kalonji

with Lumumba. Lumumba did not waste anytime and he sought to build the MNC which now came with the postfix 'Lumumba'.

The two factions both calling themselves the MNC organised separately, recruited members and held separate congresses. In October congresses were held by the two factions almost simultaneously, Lumumba's in Stanleyville and Ileo's in Elisabethville. Albert Kalonji, recently released from prison, briefly tried to reconcile Lumumba with the group assembling in Katanga. Kalonji was an important player in Congolese politics. He had been born in 1929 and educated in a Catholic mission and then trained and worked as an agricultural assistant for the colonial state. He became involved in the journal *Présence Africaine*, and in the late 1950s attended 'cultural and political' events in Brussels and Paris. As a founding member of the MNC with Lumumba he spoke from the left, condemning colonialism in increasingly

hysterical tones and declaring that the USSR would come to the aid of the Congo. In August 1959 he was arrested for inciting a strike and having distributed a 'seditious' publication. Having failed to reconcile Lumumba and Ileo he turned up in Elisabethville and was elected president of the MNC. But the MNC-Kalonji was an empty shell: in Léopoldville its base had more or less disintegrated. Its leading figures, Ileo and Adoula had done nothing to build the organisation.

As president of the rival faction of the MNC Kalonji started to organise in the Kasai among the Baluba. The abandonment of once-loyal comrades must have induced a certain dizziness in Lumumba. Lumumba understood what these splits really meant, writing in January 1960 *Me, I advocate UNITY, the Kalonji ... and Ileo advocate DIVISION. From the moment of its formation in October 1958, the MNC opted for unity. At the conference held in April 1959 with different political parties in Luluabourg, we affirmed this position ... The entire doctrine of the MNC is based on the unity of the Congo.*¹¹⁷

For most members of the *évolué* political parties were seen as a method for controlling resources and accessing wealth. With the first disagreement people left and formed new organisations. Even Lumumba, who was a leader with an impressive ability to mobilise and to speak, had only started to build a political party. Busselen

Ethnic divisions in the Congo were constantly being manipulated by colonial authorities. The division between the Baluba and the Bena Lulua was not some ancient tribal animosity, but the result of European patronage. Europeans of *Forminière*, the diamond mines, favoured the Baluba, identifying them as excellent workers. But Bena Lulua were denied similar opportunities. Despite the fact that both groups had emerged out the same community they started to see each other as competitors in the allocation of land and jobs. As the Congo moved towards independence political parties in the Congo organised themselves along these ethnic cleavages. So CONAKAT became the main party of the Bena Lulua and BELUBAKAT represented many members of the Buluba community.

argues that: 'most of the political class was minor clerks and intellectuals eager to mimic the white man. They could see that the colonists were leaving and they wanted to take their place. Parties were identified as the tool for securing positions in a new state. The tragedy for Lumumba was that he had no real organisational structure to defend him in 1960.'¹¹⁸

Lumumba's second arrest

Promises issued by the Belgian government at the beginning of 1959 had come to nothing. Lumumba was not alone in doubting the promises of the Belgians; it became clear to him through the course of 1959 that only struggle could free the Congolese. He declared that the MNC would boycott the elections planned for December. The MNC would have to steel itself to organise the fight for independence. Lumumba saw himself and the ideas he espoused in the context of the continent's radical movements for liberation. In the first issue of the new newspaper of the MNC *Indépendance* the pictures of Lumumba, Sekou Touré, Nkrumah and Kasa Vubu were printed to demonstrate this continuity. Lumumba was developing his politics and organisation in a pan-Africanist mould.

To organise the party further the MNC resolved to hold a congress in Stanleyville in October. Lumumba's address at the closing rally displayed his growing impatience and anger: *Dear brothers no collaboration is any longer possible with Belgium ... Dear Brothers we do not pursue any personal ambitions ... If we had wanted money ... we would not be doing what we are doing today. And now my brothers we are asked to vote in December! But for your oppressed brother, who suffers, who wants immediate independence do not vote! ... All our women, all our children, the strength of the country, all our energies, we mobilise them in the service of the Congolese revolution. The Belgians have decided! They have established two military bases, one in Kamina and the other in Kitona ... why all these bases, it is to intimidate us ... Belgium*

*will kill us ... And that will be in the name of religion and of the civilisation that they have bought us.*¹¹⁹

Shortly after the closure of the conference on 30 October Stanleyville erupted in rioting. Dozens were seriously injured and 26 killed. These events were not entirely linked Stanleyville suffered from serious unemployment and growing anti-colonial sentiment, but the MNC had given this discontent political direction. Lumumba was arrested, accused of having 'worked-up' the population into a frenzy of anger and disobedience. The governor Pierre Leroy accused Lumumba of 'haranguing' the population of the city on a daily basis. An arrest warrant went out for Lumumba on 30 October; he hid for two days before being found.

Round Tables

As early as 1956 Lumumba had envisaged some sort of commission made up of Congolese and Belgian officials to discuss the possible autonomy of the Congo. But now in very different circumstances a similar idea began to emerge. In Elisabethville the MNC-Kalonji made the demand of a Round Table discussion on the future of the Congo. ABAKO and the PSA took up the slogan. The new minister of the colonies August de Schryver announced that a 'round table' conference would indeed take place but only after the elections in December.

The elections were a source of considerable controversy. Most parties opposed them; the MNC-Lumumba had also decided to boycott them. Lumumba believed that they were sham elections to colonial institutions that would only serve to reinforce the colonial state. But in November the MNC reversed their earlier decision to boycott. The MNC did extremely well, in Stanleyville the party won 80 per cent of the vote. But the results were uneven. In the areas where the party – and Lumumba in particular – had made little effort to build they scored abysmally.

The party's electoral triumph in December was followed in

January by a sentence of six months imprisonment for its president. But calls for Lumumba's release became deafening, from both those Congolese politicians assembling in Brussels for the Round Table Conference and from Belgian politicians and ministers. He was transferred to Katanga on 22 January, arriving in the capital Elisabethville onboard an aircraft belonging to Sabena. He was photographed emerging from the plane, with a slightly dazed expression, barefooted and still in his filthy prison clothes. He was then transferred to the prison in Jadotville and eventually flown to Brussels on 26 January, bruised and blooded from his ordeal. Lumumba spoke of his liberation from prison two weeks afterwards: *I was thrown on the plane. My neck was twisted. I have been manhandled; all my things are still in prison. I arrived in Elisabethville leaving the plane like a criminal, where some Europeans amused themselves by photographing me.*¹²⁰

He was greeted by supporters at the airport in Brussels. Mobutu was there, as well as Kalonji. But perhaps the most memorable well-wisher was an old Belgian woman who had stood patiently waiting with a bunch of flowers. When she saw Lumumba she rushed up to him and forced the bouquet into his arms and kissed him with the words, 'I am only one poor woman but there are millions of others like myself. In their name I want to salute a freedom fighter.'¹²¹

The Round Table Conference opened on 20 January 1960 in Brussels. Every delegation had been allocated a Belgian advisor, to guide the delegation through the discussions: only the MNC-L opted for a Congolese one. When Lumumba arrived the atmosphere was electrified. Within days of his release the date of 30 June 1960 was agreed for independence. The Belgian state had been forced to concede immediate independence: the battle cry from the street. It is worth pausing here to note how remarkable this was: four years beforehand the government had envisaged a 30-year plan towards independence, which had shrunk dramatically to five

years in 1959 and then six months in January 1960. This was, by any account, an extraordinary change. But there were challenges; the country had fewer than 30 African university graduates in the entire territory, and only three out of some 5,000 management-level positions in the civil service filled by Congolese. Where were the Congolese technicians and bureaucrats who could run the new state? The MNC-L insisted on a rapid programme of training for the Congolese provided by Belgium.

After the date for independence had been agreed substantive issues were discussed. The main debate centred on those who supported federalism and those defending a unitary state. Lumumba insisted on a centralised state, with its capital in Léopoldville and that Belgium should not be allowed to define the future structures of independence. He seemed already worried about the possibility of Belgium dividing up the state before independence had even been won.

But the discussion on federalism revealed another more serious agenda. The main issue was Katanga whose Congolese representatives had indicated that they wanted autonomy. Katanga was the powerhouse of the Congolese economy, contributing more than two-thirds of the national income. The leading political figure in Katanga was Moïse Tshombe. *Observer* journalist Colin Legum described him in the following terms: 'Tshombe, the 42-year-old leader of the *Confédération des Associations Tribales du Katanga* (CONAKAT) was never part of the nationalist movement. In the days of colonialism he stuck close to the Belgians, and had he been as good a businessman as his father (who left him a string of businesses) he would have prospered. But he lost his patrimony and went bankrupt three times. However he never stayed down for long. Like many unsuccessful businessmen he became a leading figure in the politics of commerce: he was President of the African Chamber of Commerce Association.'¹²²

Tshombe and Lumumba clashed during the Round Table

discussions. Lumumba feared that federalism for Tshombe was a cloak concealing his ambitions to head an independent Katanga at the service of foreign powers. Tshombe insisted that all mineral wealth should remain the property of provincial states and should be controlled (and presumably distributed) by them. Lumumba asked: *What is the purpose of independence, if tomorrow the Congo is ripped apart by us?*¹²³ Again Lumumba won the day. Katanga belonged to the Congo and the wealth of that province would be controlled by the national state. Lumumba was already clear that Tshombe's federalism was a disguise for separatism. When Tshombe returned to the Congo he dismissed the conference as 'useless'.

However, there were important outstanding issues. The Belgian government argued the question of the two military bases recently established in Kamina and Kitona and the exact role of the *Force Publique* would only be resolved after independence. Despite the arguments the mood at the conference was positive. Lumumba was still hopeful about a smooth transition to independence which would see the cooperation of the Belgian government. Legum reported from the conference, 'When I talked to Lumumba at the Round Table Conference in Brussels in January 1960, he was still eloquently optimistic about his relations with the Belgians, despite his recent imprisonment and ill-treatment as a prisoner.'¹²⁴

Lumumba returned to Léopoldville at the end of February with one clear victory already. The Round Table Conference had gone his way. Now his main task was to organise for the elections in May. The Belgians started their campaign against Lumumba. Between May and June, the Belgian authorities were determined to supervise the elections themselves. Directly influencing the national press to warn of Lumumba's alleged communism, they financed rival politicians to ensure that only compliant parties would get elected. Those political organisations that based themselves on ethnic and regional fiefdoms secured funding from Belgium. These loyal ethnic-based parties reflected the pattern of

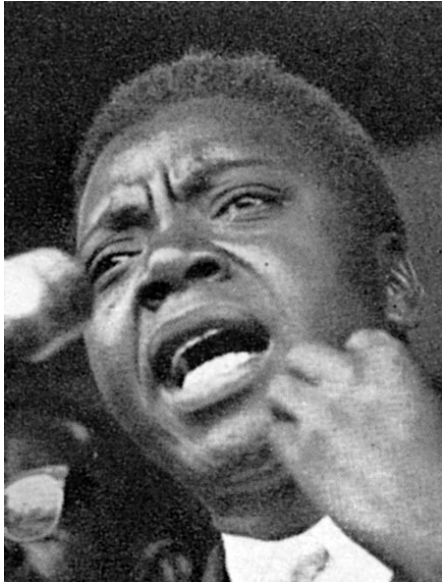
colonial rule since the late 19th century. For Brussels these parties were the best chance after 1960 for maintaining the Congo as an acquiescent and dependent state. In many cases Brussels' strategy worked; in Katanga for example, from a total of 325 rural council seats, 276 seats were captured by ethnic or local candidates.¹²⁵ But the MNC won through. On the national stage the MNC secured 33 seats, by far the largest number of seats for a single party. On 23 June the first nationally elected government of the Congo was established, with Lumumba's allies taking a clear majority in the 137-member national assembly.¹²⁶

However, Lumumba was compelled to distribute power to his rivals, including Joseph Kasa Vubu, who became the first president. The result was a coalition government. With independence only days away the economic outlook was bleak: 'On the eve of its independence the Government was faced with large current deficits ... The flight of capital and the loss of international confidence, because of the events of 1959, meant the new Government would come to power with no liquid assets at all.'¹²⁷ Lumumba urged his supporters to prepare themselves for a long period of hard work. Although Lumumba had seen to what extent Belgium was prepared to interfere in a post-independent Congo, he could have had no idea of the lengths to which they would go to ensure that the country remained under their control.

Political elimination

The decision to eliminate Lumumba was made long before his physical elimination in January 1961. It was the explicit, if secret, policy of the Belgian government after the Round Table Conference. Lumumba had aroused the disgust of the Belgian government, colonial administrators and the Europeans still residing in the Congo. But what had he done to earn such enmity?

For more than a year before the conference he had become the militant and tireless organiser for the MNC. Moving around the



Moïse Tshombé

country Lumumba argued for independence and quickly became strident in his condemnation of colonialism. He no longer proclaimed a 'Belgian-Congolese' community or praised the work of colonialism. But his radicalism, so often misunderstood, did not come about from some sudden conversion to communism. Although Lumumba had contact with Soviet embassy officials on his travels, he was no more a communist than the leader of CONAKAT, Moïse Tshombé. Part of this radicalism came about from his experience of imprisonment in 1956–7; he suffered more from the abuses of colonialism than any other member of the *évolué*. However most of all he was transformed by events in the Congo after his release, and by a growing rejection of the colonial project by workers, the unemployed and the rural poor. Lumumba became the conduit for these popular demands.

Lumumba had become the embodiment of the movement

for independence. His daughter Juliana comments: 'my father's political life lasted just three years, he developed with incredible speed. Everything that he finally demanded, "immediate independence" he was not the first to demand but he became the incarnation of independence; he became the representative and the symbol for immediate independence.'¹²⁸ During Congo's revolution time became a remarkably fluid concept. Lumumba was inspired by a movement that was developing rapidly around him, and he helped provided it with a voice, slogans and the first outlines of an organisation. His son François Lumumba describes how his father 'entered the consciousness of the Congolese and added an irrepressible dynamism to independence'.¹²⁹

Belgium's decision to grant independence so quickly was connected to this political change. De Witte argues that they 'saw that there was a process of political change in 1959, and they wanted to move quicker than this radicalisation hoping that at the time of the election – and this was the opinion of the Belgian ruling elite – that 80 per cent of the Congolese parliament would be filled with docile pro-Belgian MPs while only 20 per cent would be radicals. But they miscalculated the extent of the radicalisation.'¹³⁰ The objective of granting independence to curtail radical political change was common in many African countries during this period. In most instances the strategy succeeded, but in the Congo it failed.

When Lumumba finally arrived at the Round Table Conference, bandaged from his brutal treatment in Elisabethville, he dominated his Congolese colleagues but also the European politicians who still regarded themselves as his natural superiors. He was uncompromising and refused to allow Belgium to retain any powers after independence, rejecting the absurd notion that the Belgian King could become the head of state in an independent Congo. He also ridiculed Tshombé's notion that provincial wealth should be controlled by the provinces alone. He aroused the jealousy of his

Congolese counterparts but also the anger of Belgian politicians. Even in the dying hours of colonialism the Belgian government remained unapologetic. To them Lumumba was still a loquacious native who obstinately refused to accept his place.

When Lumumba returned to the Congo after the conference the idea of his political elimination was already being hatched by Brussels. But their hands had been tied. Lumumba had emerged internationally as the pre-eminent leader of Congolese independence. Another strategy had to be prepared. From now on they sought to make alliances against Lumumba, with what they regarded as moderate forces antagonistic to the MNC-L.

A plan was drawn up between Harold d'Aspremont-Lynden, Minister for African Affairs for the Prime Minister Gaston Eyskens, and the advisor on African affairs Professor Arthur Doucy on 1 March 1960. The first point of this plan was the choice of advisors who would direct the Congo before and after independence, but point three was the most important, it concerned the elimination of Lumumba by organising political forces opposed to him:

3. Political Action: Man to eliminate is Lumumba ... regroup moderate forces by province ... : Katanga: Conakat ... Kasai: Kalonji ... It would be necessary to make available to these parties technicians, propaganda and funds. The total could cost a maximum of 50 millions ...¹³¹

Point Four concerned the choice of a reliable Congolese ally for the Belgians. But for the moment Brussels failed.

Independence: 30 June 1960

Congolese independence was declared on 30 June 1960, and celebrations across the country lasted for days. The Independence Day ceremony was held in the presence of King Baudouin of Belgium who patronisingly sought to grant the Congo freedom in the name of the Belgian state. The day did not turn out as anyone predicted. Officially the event was due to take place in the parliament building in front of the Belgian elite, newly-elected members of the Congolese parliament and foreign dignitaries and reporters. Like many such ceremonies at the time, it was seen simply as the official announcement of a negotiated independence, involving speeches, handshakes and the lowering and raising of flags. The *Guardian* reported on 1 July, 'The crowd around the wide square of the *Palais des Nations* was as small, and as unenthusiastic as an independence crowd could be. There were only about 4,000 there, due, perhaps, to the confusion caused by hasty arrangements. But the shouts of "*Le Roi*" from loyal Belgians as the King entered the Parliament Building was the first cheering note for him.'¹³²

Lumumba's wife, Pauline, refused to attend the ceremony. Their daughter, Juliana, explains: 'In the morning before the ceremony they had an argument. As my father was leaving the house for the palace, my mother started to throw his things off the balcony. That's my mother, she has a terrible temper'.¹³³

Lumumba had not been scheduled to speak, and the government was to be represented by its President, Joseph Kasa Vubu.

The King rose to announce the official end of Belgian rule in the Congo, but he did much more. His speech turned into a historical justification for the crimes of colonisation, he argued that the last 80 years had seen development and the fulfilling of the white man's burden. The King pronounced: 'The independence of the Congo is the crowning glory of the work conceived by the genius of King Léopold II, undertaken by him with firm courage, and continued by Belgium with perseverance. Independence marks a decisive hour in the destinies not only of the Congo herself but – dare I say – of the whole of Africa. For eighty years Belgium has sent to your land the best of her sons, first to deliver the Congo basin from the odious slave trade which was decimating her population, later to bring together the different tribes which, though former enemies, are now preparing to form the greatest of the independent states of Africa. [These] pioneers deserve admiration from us and acknowledgement from you. They built communications, founded a medical service, modernised agriculture, and built cities and industries and schools.' To compound the insult, King Baudouin continued, 'It is now up to you, gentlemen, to show that you are worthy of our confidence.'¹³⁴

When the King finished there was a respectful round of applause before Kasa Vubu replied, acknowledging the 'wisdom' of the Belgium state. Lumumba followed, fully aware of the significance of the event. Lumumba sorted the pages of his speech that he had hastily prepared the night before:

Men and women of the Congo,

Victorious fighters for independence, today victorious, I greet you in the name of the Congolese Government. All of you, my friends, who have fought tirelessly at our sides, I ask you to make this June 30, 1960, an illustrious date that you will keep indelibly engraved in your hearts, a date of significance of which you will

teach to your children, so that they will make known to their sons and to their grandchildren the glorious history of our fight for liberty.

For this independence of the Congo, even as it is celebrated today with Belgium, a friendly country with whom we deal as equal to equal, no Congolese worthy of the name will ever be able to forget that it was by fighting that it has been won {applause}, a day-to-day fight, an ardent and idealistic fight, a fight in which we were spared neither privation nor suffering, and for which we gave our strength and our blood.

We are proud of this struggle, of tears, of fire, and of blood, to the depths of our being, for it was a noble and just struggle, and indispensable to put an end to the humiliating slavery which was imposed upon us by force.

This was our fate for eighty years of a colonial regime; our wounds are too fresh and too painful still for us to drive them from our memory. We have known harassing work, exacted in exchange for salaries which did not permit us to eat enough to drive away hunger, or to clothe ourselves, or to house ourselves decently, or to raise our children as creatures dear to us.

We have known ironies, insults, blows that we endured morning, noon, and evening, because we are Negroes. Who will forget that to a black one said 'tu', certainly not as to a friend, but because the more honorable 'vous' was reserved for whites alone?

We have seen our lands seized in the name of allegedly legal laws which in fact recognized only that might is right.

We have seen that the law was not the same for a white and for a black, accommodating for the first, cruel and inhuman for the other.

We have witnessed atrocious sufferings of those condemned for their political opinions or religious beliefs; exiled in their own country, their fate truly worse than death itself.

We have seen that in the towns there were magnificent houses

for the whites and crumbling shanties for the blacks, that a black was not admitted in the motion-picture houses, in the restaurants, in the stores of the Europeans; that a black travelled in the holds, at the feet of the whites in their luxury cabins.

Who will ever forget the massacres where so many of our brothers perished, the cells into which those who refused to submit to a regime of oppression and exploitation were thrown?

All that, my brothers, we have endured.

But we, whom the vote of your elected representatives have given the right to direct our dear country, we who have suffered in our body and in our heart from colonial oppression, we tell you very loud, all that is henceforth ended.

The Republic of the Congo has been proclaimed, and our country is now in the hands of its own children.

Together, my brothers, my sisters, we are going to begin a new struggle, a sublime struggle, which will lead our country to peace, prosperity, and greatness.

Together, we are going to establish social justice and make sure everyone has just remuneration for his labour {applause}.

We are going to show the world what the black man can do when he works in freedom, and we are going to make of the Congo the centre of the sun's radiance for all of Africa.

We are going to keep watch over the lands of our country so that they truly profit her children. We are going to restore ancient laws and make new ones which will be just and noble.

We are going to put an end to suppression of free thought and see to it that all our citizens enjoy to the full the fundamental liberties foreseen in the Declaration of the Rights of Man.

We are going to do away with all discrimination of every variety and assure for each and all the position to which human dignity, work, and dedication entitles him.

We are going to rule not by the peace of guns and bayonets but by a peace of the heart and the will.

And for all that, dear fellow countrymen, be sure that we will count not only on our enormous strength and immense riches but on the assistance of numerous foreign countries whose collaboration we will accept if it is offered freely and with no attempt to impose on us an alien culture of no matter what nature {applause}.

In this domain, Belgium, at last accepting the flow of history, has not tried to oppose our independence and is ready to give us their aid and their friendship, and a treaty has just been signed between our two countries, equal and independent. On our side, while we stay vigilant, we shall respect our obligations, given freely.

Thus, in the interior and the exterior, the new Congo, our dear Republic that my government will create, will be a rich, free, and prosperous country. But so that we will reach this aim without delay, I ask all of you, legislators and citizens, to help me with all your strength.

I ask all of you to forget your tribal quarrels. They exhaust us. They risk making us despised abroad.

I ask the parliamentary minority to help my Government through a constructive opposition and to limit themselves strictly to legal and democratic channels.

I ask all of you not to shrink before any sacrifice in order to achieve the success of our huge undertaking.

In conclusion, I ask you unconditionally to respect the life and the property of your fellow citizens and of foreigners living in our country. If the conduct of these foreigners leaves something to be desired, our justice will be prompt in expelling them from the territory of the Republic; if, on the contrary, their conduct is good, they must be left in peace, for they also are working for our country's prosperity.

The Congo's independence marks a decisive step towards the liberation of the entire African continent.

Sire, Excellencies, Mesdames, Messieurs, my dear fellow

countrymen, my brothers of race, my brothers of struggle – this is what I wanted to tell you in the name of the Government on this magnificent day of our complete independence.

Our government, strong, national, popular, will be the health of our country.

I call on all Congolese citizens, men, women and children, to set themselves resolutely to the task of creating a prosperous national economy which will assure our economic independence.

Glory to the fighters for national liberation!

Long live independence and African unity!

*Long live the independent and sovereign Congo!*¹³⁵

Lumumba finally finished the speech – to ‘loud and long’ applause – and returned to his chair. The programme was interrupted for an hour as the King threatened to leave. The King, as the personification of Belgian power, had correctly taken the speech as a personal insult. This was an insult that the Belgian establishment would never forgive. The Belgian press called for revenge. Never had the dignity of the Belgian state been so insulted. Even Benoît Verhaegen, the acclaimed academic of the Congo, declared that the speech was an ‘unpardonable error.’¹³⁶

For those who opposed colonialism, the day had been a triumph. In New York, Malcolm X told his followers that Lumumba’s independence-day speech was the ‘greatest speech’, and that it had been made by the ‘greatest black man who ever walked the African continent.’¹³⁷ Lumumba had turned 30 June 1960 into a day of victory, showing to the world how independence in the Congo was really won.

Independence was not simply a day of official celebrations in the capital, attended by foreign dignitaries and Congolese politicians. It was a moment of national rejoicing that expressed exactly the popular struggle for independence that Lumumba had spoken about in his speech. Asse Lilombo was 13 years old and lived in



A prime ministerial wave from Patrice Lumumba

the Province of Léopoldville: ‘It was a big feast, a party of liberation. We had been liberated from slavery. The women were dressed up. There was goat and beer. The party lasted days. It was not only a party of independence; it was a party of liberation. We would be responsible for ourselves. We would manage our country ourselves.’¹³⁸ Mbara Emmanuel Bastin was in a Protestant mission school at the time of independence. Since 1959 he had been known by his family as ‘Emery’ after Lumumba. Bastin remembers a moment of extraordinary celebration: ‘a procession of the students from local primary schools was organised, one from the protestant school, and another from the Catholic one. Then there were the games ... Everyone knew that we were leaving a state of slavery. Everywhere enormous demonstrations were organised to mark the passage to independence and everywhere we heard the name of Lumumba: Lumumba the “father of Independence”. When Patrice Lumumba spoke the radio vibrated right into the heart of the

country. You put the radio on the table and it vibrated as if his voice had an extraordinary power.¹³⁹

Political parities, class and ethnicity

Patrice Lumumba was the first prime minister of independent Congo. The MNC, though not explicitly radical in its programme of reform, was pledged to create a unitary, multi-ethnic state, which would promote the redistribution of wealth to the poor. The other major players on the political scene were ABAKO, led by Joseph Kasa Vubu, CONAKAT run by the rich middle-class *évolué* Moïse Tshombe, which hoped to see the Bena Lulua dominate Katanga either in a federal Congo or, if necessary, as a separate state and Balubakat, also in Katanga, was led by Jason Sendwe. Balubakat were suspicious of CONAKAT and the Bena Lulua, and meant that Tshombe could not speak unanimously for Katanga.

The process of independence in the Congo in 1960, but also across the continent, was simply one that saw the *deracialisation* of the colonial state. Citizenship ceased to rest on a racial membership. But this left the system of rural governance almost entirely unreformed, and consequently ethnic divisions firmly entrenched. It was these ethnic divisions that dominated the political scene in the Congo in the months after independence.

While the Congo was moving towards independence, there were many people trying to frustrate it. One observer was reported in the Belgian newspaper *La Releve*, 'Independence was never intended to be anything but "purely fictitious and nominal"'. Financial circles believed, our political circles were more naïve than anything, that it would be enough to give a few Congolese leaders the title of "Minister" or "Deputy" with decorations, luxury motor-cars, big salaries and splendid houses in the European quarter, in order to put a definite stop to the emancipation movement which threatened the financial interests concerned.¹⁴⁰

The Belgian economy was intimately connected to its colonial

possession in central Africa; the country had extensive public and private investment in the Congo while at least a third of Belgium's trade was imports from Africa. By the end of the 1950s, the *Union Minière* earned an annual profit of 4 billion Belgian francs. After Tshombe's declaration of independence for Katanga, *Union Minière* had enough petty cash to deposit 1.25 billion francs into his bank account. The Congo cornered another mineral market: cobalt mining in the late 1950s represented three quarters of global production. For those Belgian companies with a large stake in the Congo, there was no talk of leaving the country without a struggle.¹⁴¹

The struggle for real independence

Within days of Lumumba's speech, the first of the mutinies of the *Force Publique* took place. The soldiers had hoped independence would actually mean something, that it would improve their pay and their rank. When these changes did not happen, they took the decision to kick out some of their white officers themselves. There was violence. One of the triggers for the mutinies was a speech made by General Emile Janssens to his soldiers on 5 July, explaining to them the true nature of independence: 'As I have always told you order and discipline will be maintained as they have always been. Independence brings changes to politicians and to civilians. But for you, nothing will be changed. ... None of your new masters can change the structure of an army which, throughout its history, has been the most organised, the most victorious in Africa. The politicians have lied to you.'¹⁴²

After delivering this sermon he proceeded to write on a blackboard facing the assembled men: 'Before independence = after independence'. All hell broke loose. Later in the day soldiers began to demand that Janssens must go, to be replaced by a Congolese commander. They started to riot. Lumumba summoned Janssens, who tried to insist that Belgian soldiers should be bought in from

bases in Kamina and Kitona to teach the rebels a lesson. Lumumba refused. He did the opposite and immediately gave each soldier a promotion in rank. On 6 July he dismissed Janssens. The old name *Force Publique*, associated so closely with colonial violence, was also replaced. From now on the army would be known as the Congolese National Army (*Armée Nationale Congolais*).

Quickly the Belgian chief of staff was replaced, and Victor Lundula appointed commander-in-chief, with Joseph Desire Mobutu, a former soldier in the *Force Publique*, becoming his deputy. The mutinies were brought under control. Mobutu had managed to persuade the majority of rebellious soldiers to return to their barracks. Though there was little violence, the mutiny terrified the European population. There was a mass exodus of state officials and white employees. But the rebellion in the army was also a key event for Lumumba. Instead of siding with Janssens and allowing the rebellion to be suppressed, Lumumba responded quite differently. He saw the mutiny as a social movement, and the refusal of soldiers to obey the orders of their white officers as a strike. This was a critical moment and Lumumba gave space for the movement to develop. Against those like Mobutu who argued that officers must be appointed from above, Lumumba defended the right of soldiers to elect their own officers.

For the Belgians the rebellion was a frightening confirmation of their fears about Lumumba. If they had begrudgingly conceded the argument for independence, maintaining control over the *Force Publique* was the one way of ensuring real power in the new state. Following the 5 July mutiny Lumumba was compelled to ask Europeans living in Matadi to leave. The women and children were removed by boat, many men stayed. These men, who had armed themselves in the run-up to independence, now opened fire on the Congolese. At least 19 dockers, workers and the unemployed were killed in the ensuing violence, and many more wounded.¹⁴³ Fearing further attacks, Congolese soldiers confiscated weapons



The leader of the breakaway province of Katanga, Moise Tshombe, reviews his new Presidential guard in Elisabethville in February 1961. The uniforms were copied directly from the French Republican Guard

from Europeans that they claimed were being held illegally. On 9 July Belgian paratroopers from the base in Kamina were dropped into Kabalo to protect Europeans who were attempting to flee. Lumumba condemned the intervention, which he saw as an effort to sabotage his government. *We have just learned that the Belgian Government has sent troops to the Congo and that they have intervened ... We appeal to all Congolese to defend our Republic against all those who menace it.*¹⁴⁴ As he spoke more Belgian troops were landing in other cities and towns in the Congo. But these events were minor compared to what happened next.

Moise Tshombe launched an armed uprising against the new state for the independence of Katanga on 11 July, with Belgian, French and British backing. The diamond-rich South Kasai also resolved to secede; this decision was taken by Lumumba's rival



Joseph Kalonji. Lumumba was furious, he clearly saw a plot to destabilise the Congo through the dismemberment of its richest provinces. Following events confirmed Lumumba's suspicions about the role of the former colonial power. On 12 July Lumumba

Independence in Katanga was proclaimed on 11 July 1960. The new leader of Katanga, Tshombe, refused permission to both Lumumba and Kasa Vubu to travel to Elisabethville. But Tshombe's declaration of independence lacked widespread support even in Katanga. Supporters of the Prime Minister in the breakaway province organised themselves into militias to fight the secession. Jason Sendwe's BALUBAKA-BAT joined the fray against Tshombe. An agreement in 1961 for reintegrating Katanga into the country failed. Reluctant to intervene when Lumumba asked them, eventually UN troops routed Tshombe's forces and ended the secession in January 1963. The mineral-rich province had served its purpose.

attempted to land at the airport in Elisabethville. Belgian officers controlling the town and airport turned off the lights making it impossible to land the plane.

Before independence, the Congo and Belgium had signed a Treaty of Friendship, Assistance and Technical Aid. Among its clauses was the agreement that no Belgian troops could intervene in the Congo, unless explicitly asked for by the new state. Ignoring this treaty, the Belgians switched allegiance to Katanga and recognised it as a legitimate state, providing an army and a commander-in-chief. The ex-colonial power worked for the break-up of the state. But behind the decision to back Katanga over the democratically-elected central

government were powerful Belgian business interests. De Witte lists some of the mouths at the table: 'd'Aspremont Lynden was Lord Chamberlain at the court. He was also a commissioner of the *Société Générale de Belgique*, and administrator of the *Compagnie Maritime Belge* and the *Compagnie du Katanga*. Together with the Honorary Lord Chamberlain, Prince Amaury de Mérode represented the royal house on the college of twelve commissioners which was the ruling body of the *Société Générale* ... Deputy

Prime Minister Lilar was a former President of *Titan anversois et des Ateliers de Léopoldville*. The president of the Belgian chamber, Baron Kronacker, and Ministers Sceyven, Wigny and Albert De Vleeschauer were administrators of a whole series of colonial enterprises.¹⁴⁵

While the Congo struggled to maintain its independence, Belgium was suffering from a political crisis at home. New tax rises of 10 billion francs, together with laws restricting trade unions were announced. By December 1960 strikes by electricity workers, port-workers and civil servants became a general strike that saw as many as 600,000 workers involved. Troops stationed in the Congo were brought home. It was only with difficulty that the strike could be broken.¹⁴⁶ Not only was the Belgian elite faced with the loss of its prized colonial possession, but they saw their interests threatened at home. De Witte explains how the tragedy was that 'the strikers were unable to link themselves to Lumumba, that other opponent of the Belgian government: their trade union leadership focused only on "economic" demands and made this impossible'.¹⁴⁷

Lumumba wrote *Belgium intends to have Katanga, the richest province, because she cannot exist without Katanga and the Congo, as she has said*.¹⁴⁸ He was correct. Katanga accounted for 12 per cent of the nation's population but nearly 60 per cent of the productive resources. Officially a majority of shares in Katanga's mines were held by the state in Léopoldville. It was impossible for Lumumba, or anyone else, to permit the secession. Lumumba interpreted the secession as a Belgian-Katangan plot to split the new state up and prevent it from operating. He called on Belgian troops to withdraw, but they refused. He then asked Belgian diplomats to leave Congolese territory. He asked the UN to force the Belgians to withdraw; he hinted that it might be necessary to invite Soviet assistance. Western powers became scared. Although Lumumba was not a communist, he was seen as a potentially dangerous



figure on the nationalist left. Tshombe was a completely different case. He could be trusted. Like Brussels he saw the Congo divided along ethnic lines, and he argued that it must continue to be run according to these divisions. He had also developed close ties to the Belgian business establishment whose interests were embedded in Katangan soil. The possibility of perpetuating foreign control of the highly profitable industries after independence in the Congo became a reality with the Katangan secession.

Kasa Vubu and Lumumba made a succession of appeals to the United Nations soon after the secession. Appealing initially for technical aid, they subsequently asked for direct help in ridding Congo of Belgian troops. By any reckoning the UN responded with remarkable speed, reflecting the Congo's importance in the world. UN Secretary General Dag Hammarskjöld asked the Security Council to decide on responding to the appeals for assistance against Belgian intervention. The Council agreed on military aid to the Congolese government, with the condition that force would only be used in self-defence. On 14 July the Security Council voted to send forces to the Congo. UN troops landed in Léopoldville. But over the crucial question of forcing the Belgians to withdraw the Security Council remained divided. The Russians pressed for a deadline for withdrawal, with the Americans voting against. Britain, France and China abstained. Hammarskjöld requested forces from African states and later extended the appeal to European and Asian members.

Even the conservative *Daily Telegraph*, not a natural ally of Lumumba, questioned the motives behind the secession: 'Mr. Tshombe, the self-styled President, is today far more under the domination of Belgian officials than he ever was as an obscure provincial politician before independence ... Mr. Tshombe's principal speeches are being written for him by a Belgian, Mr. Thyssen, a local businessman and politician. Count Harold D'Aspremont Lynden, Chief of Cabinet to the Belgian Prime Minister, who ostensibly

heads a technical aid mission, provides a link to Brussels. Colonel Champion is all but Military Commander of Katanga.'¹⁴⁹

The UN in the Congo

On 14 July 1960 UN forces started to arrive in Léopoldville. Within four days there were 4,000 UN troops in the country. Though there were now plenty of troops on Congolese soil there was still no agreement whether the official mandate for 'the restoration of order' meant that Katangan secession must be suppressed. The UN mission divided. General H T Alexander, the commander of Ghana's contingent in the Congo and the British Chief of Ghana's Defence Staff, initially started to disarm members of the *Force Publique*. Lumumba stepped in, preventing further demobilisation, as for him the new Congolese National Army might need to be used against the Katangan secession.

On 20 July the Security Council met again. Dag Hammarskjöld issued the following warning: 'The United Nations has embarked on its biggest single effort under United Nations colours, organised and directed by the United Nations itself ... our attitude will be of decisive significance, I believe not only for the future of this Organisation, but also for the future of Africa. And Africa may well in present circumstances mean the world.'¹⁵⁰ The General Secretary was right, the Congo crisis was the first major mission that the UN had embarked on, and the eyes of the world were on the Congo. The mission determined the future role of the organisation which became at best an irritant to great powers and at worse an instrument under their control.

The Council issued a clear statement calling for an immediate Belgian withdrawal. But the problem had not been resolved. The Belgians willingly left Léopoldville by 23 July, but their forces remained very much in place in Katanga. Ghana and Guinea grew impatient. They threatened to place their troops under the authority of the central government, so they could force Katanga



Lumumba and the United Nations Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld met in New York on 25 July 1960. Hammarskjöld would perish in an air crash in neighbouring Northern Rhodesia (Zambia) in 1961 while on a mission to bring peace to the Congo

to obey the Lumumba-Kasa Vubu government in Léopoldville. As a consequence the UN had to decide whether to intervene in Katanga, or if a new resolution was required. In an attempt to sidestep these difficulties, Hammarskjöld visited Brussels to see if he could secure the entry of UN troops to Katanga without causing a stir. By 2 August he stated that a UN contingent would arrive in the breakaway province in three days time.

The rebel government of Katanga promised to resist. Hammarskjöld was worried about the possible use of force and believed that he needed new authority; he rushed back to New York. Katangan defiance had scared the UN away. Lumumba too was growing impatient: the body he had hoped would restore the legitimate authority of his government was vacillating wildly, and he resolved

to look for African help. Yet another meeting took place at the Security Council and repeated the demand for Belgian forces to leave. Strangely the Council agreed to send troops to Katanga but ordered that they must not be used to influence internal events. This was peculiar, both recognising the authority of the Lumumba government over Katanga, but then refusing to back the possibility of force to assert this sovereignty. Back in the Congo Hammarskjöld was determined to get troops into Katanga without disturbing the balance of forces. He managed to enter the province with a nominal UN force, but refused to take a representative of Lumumba's government with him. Lumumba began to see the UN not as an ally in the crisis but as obstacle to its resolution.

External support

Lumumba now had two options. He could challenge the secession with help from outside the Congo, from African states, or look to his supporters within. From the outside he had Ghana, and the expanding ranks of the non-aligned countries increasingly describing themselves as part of the Third World. Though full of good intentions, these states delivered little. Lumumba also hoped help would come from America.

Lumumba left the Congo to solicit support from America on 22 July; but he came away with the conclusion that there was nothing to be gained from the West. President Dwight Eisenhower refused to see him, regarding him already as man lost to the Soviets. Those who spoke to him explained that they expected business to continue as usual. For years America had been buying their uranium from Belgium, and why should anything change? Lumumba responded that Belgium did not produce any uranium. America, Britain and France were hostile to him. Faced with the hardening of the secession, the failure of the UN and Western hostility, Lumumba considered turning to the Soviet Union, which had offered technical aid and military assistance. Lumumba



Patrice Lumumba photographed at London Airport on his return journey from the United Nations in August 1960

understood the risks; to pull the Soviet Union on side threatened his domestic support. Cornered, Lumumba had few choices.

But he was not isolated; he had the overwhelming support

of young nationalists and all those who had been inspired by the struggle for independence. He also had Jason Sendwe's regional support. Lumumba had enormous moral authority; he was respected more than any other politician. But each day politicians stirred up the Congo's ethnic politics, making Lumumba's hope for a unitary state harder to hold. Lumumba decided to mobilise his supporters. De Witte captures the spirit of Lumumba's strategy to make Congolese independence and freedom live. He turned towards those he was beginning to see as his most trusted allies: 'Once it became clear that the UN had taken sides with Belgium, America and Moïse Tshombé to protect the secession of Katanga, which provoked the demise of the Congolese government ... Lumumba, tried to mobilise his forces. He held mass rallies of tens of thousands of people, in which he tried to explain to them that they had to organise themselves, against that neo-colonial control of Katanga ... in his public speeches, he always invited a mixed couple onto the stage, and would say: "You see these people we consider them friends, we don't want to send them away. We want the Belgians to stay, at least the Belgians who are not racist." So during the meetings, through these examples, he tried to educate people not to be anti-white, but to see things from a political perspective.'

Lumumba opened the space for the Congolese population, and at the same time stuck to a fundamental commitment to real political autonomy. De Witte claims that Lumumba's determination put in motion a revolutionary process but that there was no time in the storm of the crisis to organise a mass movement.

Possibilities were closing off fast. Though the army was now controlled by Lumumba's trusted comrade, Joseph Mobutu, events would soon break the friendship. Over the course of the two months of independence Mobutu would win the friendship of the Americans. Before long he started to receive payment from the CIA and was in contact with Western military attaches. Lumumba's natural supporters were among those urban workers

loyal to his idealism but they too were weak. By the late 1940s, only 536,000 people from a population of 14 million were classed as workers. Trade union organisation was also far from solid.¹⁵¹ Lumumba made no attempts to mobilise the forces of organised labour, relying instead on the power of the spoken word. This was not enough.

But all was not lost. In the middle of August the new Congolese National Army was deployed in Kivu Province and in Northern Kasai. They were ordered to crush Kalonji's secession and then move on to Katanga. The detachment in Kivu were meant to make their way directly to Katanga and link up with sympathetic groups, including Sendwe's Balubakat, and attack troops loyal to Tshombe. Initially the action was successful. A reporter from an Elisabethville paper wrote: 'In our opinion, Katanga was in its greatest danger when, towards mid-August, it was threatened in the north by two thousand Lumumbist soldiers ... and by the advance of the National Army in Kasai.'¹⁵²

But the National Army was dragged into ethnic fighting in Kasai between the Baluba and the Bena Lulua. What was originally an offensive to end the secession of Kasai and Katanga saw a series of massacres in which the Congolese National Army was involved. Abandoned by his friends and comrades Lumumba was almost completely alone. He reacted in the only honest way he could by opposing Belgium's aggression and in wanting to crush the secession of Katanga and Kasai. These decisions turned Lumumba into an unlikely revolutionary. In his 1956 book he had rejected independence as premature, and now he was almost a lone figure defending the Congo from imperialist aggression. The struggle against the disintegration of the Congo in 1960 became his real university. If Lumumba's life can be characterised by a series of sharp breaks – each pointing to a more daunting challenge ahead – then the months after June 1960 was the greatest he had faced.

Tshombe and Kalonji's fiefdom

As the UN sought to establish order in the capital, the Belgians did the same in Katanga. Tshombe received everything he needed and requested: assistance in running the mines, with royalties paid directly to him and not the central government, and technical services to help run the province. Business continued undisturbed. The payments Tshombe received were a direct breach of the agreements that were made at the Round Table Conference and accepted by, among others, Tshombe himself. These resources gave Tshombe the money to pay for a foreign army to defend Katanga, and the confidence to even threaten the UN with force.

What were the forces organising themselves in Katanga? It was common knowledge that Katanga and Tshombe's party receive the backing of the Belgians. It was also an open secret that the neighbouring Central African Federation of the Rhodesias and Nyasaland backed the regime and even encouraged Tshombe to join them. But the situation inside Katanga was complex, there were serious rivals. Principally Jason Sendwe's Balubakat was strong in the region. He defended independence and the ideal of a unitary state, though Tshombe was a deft manipulator of ethnic loyalties, and played these to his advantage.

Divisions began to grow between Lumumba and Kasa Vubu. It had always been a difficult partnership, and Kasa Vubu now used Lumumba's alleged communism to engineer a break. The attack on Katanga by government forces was postponed. Belgian troops took the opportunity to help support the second breakaway state in South Kasai. The autonomous Mining State of South Kasai was declared on 8 August 1960 with its capital at Bakwanga (today's Mbuji-Mayi). Albert Kalonji was proclaimed president of new state and became the head of the government, appointing himself emperor the following year. This state also received the support of the Belgians and mining companies in the area. The Congo was splintering fast.

External forces

Another meeting of the Security Council took place on 21 August 1960 which saw a resolution offering further strong support for Dag Hammarskjöld. This resolution was opposed by the Soviet Union who began to question the objectivity of the Secretary-General, and the lack of any serious attempt to resist secession. During August, the situation continued to deteriorate, with commentators expecting a major clash between Katangan and Congolese forces.

Lumumba's patience snapped. He turned to the Soviet Union, requesting planes, trucks and weapons to crush the movements in Kasai and Katanga. There was no question of Khrushchev disagreeing. Within days of the request arriving at the Kremlin, everything that was asked for began to arrive. Larry Devlin, the CIA Station Chief in the Congo, recalled the arrival of the Soviet support: 'I had a little Congolese sitting at the airport counting any white man who came off a Soviet aircraft in batches of five. Roughly 1,000 came in during a period of six weeks. They were there as *conseillers techniques* [technical advisors] and they were posted to all the ministries. To my mind it was clearly an effort to take over. It made good sense when you stopped to think about it. All nine countries surrounding the Congo had their problems. If the Soviets could have gotten control of the Congo they could have used it as a base, bringing in Africans, training them in sabotage and military skills and sending them home to do their duty.'¹⁵³ Kasa Vubu broke from Lumumba; Mobutu also rejected the turn to the Soviet Union.

The army chief of staff rejected the authority of Soviet 'advisers' who began to lecture the army. The United States was horrified; this confirmed all their fears about Lumumba. By mid-August 1960, the Americans began to hatch a plan to replace the prime minister with a coup. In September President Khrushchev made a personal appearance at the UN General Assembly and attacked

the Secretary-General. The session saw the admission of 17 new African states; they would play a role in the Congo crisis that was dividing the world body.

The cause of Katanga was defended by lobby groups in Britain, American and France. Katanga they argued was a sea of civilisation in an otherwise barbarous Congo. These arguments won many supporters in the Western business and political world. This lobbying was far less successful among African states, but still they could not decide on united action. One group of African states revolted against the UN, supporting Lumumba's plan to invade Katanga. But another remained solidly committed to the concept of UN action and sought to persuade the world-organisation to abandon negotiation in favour of direct action to end the secession.

The fall of Lumumba

Though Lumumba and Kasa Vubu had worked together presenting a united voice of condemnation against the secession of Katanga and Kasai, by September 1960 they broke. On 5 September Kasa Vubu took the first step and attempted to remove Lumumba, and appoint a new government. Lumumba rushed to parliament for support; it backed the Prime Minister, maintaining that the President had acted illegally. The political impasse was the opportunity that Mobutu and his Western backers were looking for. On 14 September, Mobutu took control in a bloodless coup, effectively removing Kasa Vubu and Lumumba. This 'peaceful revolution' as Mobutu described it, was targeted at civilian politicians who would now be given a cooling-off period. He explained that a group of the Congo's first university graduates would replace the elected government; they would form his 'College of Commissioners.' The coup leader gave Soviet personnel 48 hours to leave.

Life in Léopoldville began to reflect the collapse of political hope. According to Lumumba: *The capital of the republic is a scene of disorder, where a handful of hired military men are ceaselessly violating*



As civic order rapidly broke down in Léopoldville and many parts of the country in July 1960. Belgian settlers fled across the River Congo by ferry for the safety of Brazzaville in the former French Congo

law and order. The citizens of Léopoldville now live under a reign of terror. Arbitrary arrests, followed by deportation, are a daily and nightly occurrence ... The majority parties in Parliament are forbidden to publish

*newspapers. All loyal army personnel and government officials, who wanted to have no truck with the unlawful activities and the policy of national demolition pursued by the head of state and his handful of supporters at Léopoldville, have been dismissed from their posts, maltreated and turned out into the streets. Hundreds of loyal soldiers who oppose Mobutu are sent back daily to the villages: others are now in the Bina concentration camp.*¹⁵⁴

Andrew Cordier was Dag Hammarskjöld's new UN representative in Léopoldville. On 5 September he closed the airport and the following day he shut off the radio, which Lumumba had been using to reach his supporters. Cordier directly supervised shutting down the radio; Sallie Pisani has described what happened. 'Cordier asked the station manager how he could cut short all of these incendiary messages. The station manager quipped ... "Well, you could always just steal the crystal from the transmitter" ... Cordier left the station with the crystal.'¹⁵⁵ This immediately handed Kasa Vubu and then Mobutu an advantage. Unable to access the radio Lumumba could not appeal to his supporters and inform them about what had happened. The UN again had acted against the interests of the Congo; the action was bitterly resented across the world. It was now clear to many observers that the UN was working for the Belgians and the secessionists. This outcome suited the US perfectly. The Congo had not fallen to the Soviets. The country was for the time being in safe hands. Short of the elimination of Lumumba, Washington could not have asked for more.

As the Congo fragmented before his eyes, Lumumba's family was faced with its own tragedy. Early in November Pauline gave birth prematurely to their fourth child, a girl called Marie-Christine. As it was impossible to get proper care for the child, who was dangerously ill, the Red Cross had arranged for the mother and daughter to be sent for treatment in Geneva. They arrived too late and the child died in Switzerland. Lumumba requested permission from

the UN to take her body to Stanleyville for a funeral and then burial in his home region. Permission was refused.

Patrice Lumumba was trapped. Unable to communicate with his supporters, he was confined to his Léopoldville residence. He must have known that his life was at risk. Even stripped of his political power he was still considered a threat. On 6 October, the Count d'Aspremont Lynden, responsible for African Affairs in Brussels, cabled Elisabethville, making it clear that Belgian policy now required the physical elimination of Lumumba. D'Aspremont Lynden had been the first to talk about elimination before independence. Rajeshwar Dayal took over from Andrew Cordier as the new head of the UN mission in Léopoldville. Dayal continued Cordier's work and refused to support Lumumba, turning him into a prisoner under house arrest. Finally Lumumba fled the capital on 27 November hoping to reach Stanleyville, where a government in exile was being formed.

The choice of Stanleyville was obvious. It was a city that Lumumba knew well, it was where many of his supporters and comrades were based. The city represented Lumumba with another opportunity to fight for the Congo.¹⁵⁶ Kemishanga was with Lumumba during his attempted escape to Stanleyville. Kemishanga was now a loyal ally of Lumumba and had been elected an MNC deputy in the national elections before independence. But what had started as a clandestine escape attempt turned into a slightly ponderous journey that included a small convoy of cars, frequent delays and impromptu speeches by Lumumba when he was recognised in the passing villages. Once the convoy had crossed into Kasai – where the MNC was well organised – they assumed there were safe. Lumumba was with his wife Pauline and youngest son Roland.

They headed to Lodi, a village on the Sankuru River. Kemishanga directed them away from the Luluabourg road, where he thought they would be found. It was late when they reached the



The day after their arrest at Port Franqui, Lumumba and Joseph Okito and Maurice Mpolo were flown from Luluabourg to Léopoldville. They are seen here being transported from the airport to be imprisoned in Thysville. 2 December 1960

river. Lumumba and Kemishanga crossed the river in a canoe and then tried to commandeer a ferry for the other members of the group still stranded on the other side. But valuable time had already been wasted and the army had been alerted to their presence. A truck carrying soldiers arrived. Kemishanga remembers Lumumba's last speech. *I know that you have been asked to kill me. But if you kill me you will not be able to sleep next to your wives. Today you obey Kasa Vubu and Mobutu but I warn you that after my death they will be your enemies. If you kill me, I will not die. If you throw me into the river, the fish will eat my flesh. The Congolese will eat the fish, and then I will be in the bellies of the people and I will never be far from my people. I will be in the belly of each Congolese. You wear stripes today, but who gave you the stripes that you wear?*

Kemishanga recalls that the soldiers looked as though they

would be swayed by his words: 'But their chief took them aside and drugged them, gave them a dose of cannabis.'¹⁵⁷

Lumumba's words were not enough. Reinforcements arrived and the party was rounded up and taken to Mweka, the regional town. There was a Ghanaian contingent of the UN stationed in the town, and Lumumba immediately appealed for their intervention to prevent his removal to Léopoldville. This was denied; they had not received orders to protect him.

Lumumba was then flown to Léopoldville. Again the UN refused to intervene. Brigadier Indarjit Rikhye, the head of the UN military mission, saw him cut and bleeding, glasses broken, but 'We could not intervene', said Rikhye. They also had no authority. Lumumba was beaten in front of TV cameras. He was then sent to Thysville military barracks several hundred miles from Léopoldville. Knowing that their proxy in Katanga Moise Tshombe would carry out their orders, the Belgians insisted that Lumumba was sent to Elisabethville. Fully aware after his arrest that death was probably inevitable; Patrice Lumumba wrote a final letter to his wife. Only four months after his speech on Independence Day:

My dear companion,

I write you these words without knowing if they will reach you, when they will reach you, or if I will still be living when you read them. All during the length of my fight 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 myself have consecrated our lives. But what we wish for our country, its right to an honourable life, to a spotless dignity, to an independence without restrictions, Belgian colonialism and its Western allies – who have found direct and indirect support, deliberate and not deliberate, among certain high officials of the United Nations, this organization in which we placed all our confidence when we called for their assistance – have not wished it.

They have corrupted certain of our fellow countrymen, they have contributed to distorting the truth and to besmirching our independence. What else might I say? That dead, living, free, or in prison on the order of the colonialists, it is not I who counts. It is the Congo, it is our people for whom independence has been transformed into a cage where we are regarded from the outside sometimes with benevolent compassion, sometimes with joy and pleasure.

But my faith will stay unbreakable. I know and I feel to the depth of my being that sooner or later my people will get rid of all their interior and exterior enemies, that they will rise up like a single person to say no to a degrading and shameful colonialism and to reassume their dignity under a pure sun.

We are not alone. Africa, Asia, and free and liberated people from every corner of the world will always be found at the side of the Congolese. They will not abandon the fight until the day comes when there are no more colonizers and mercenaries in our country. To my children whom I leave and whom perhaps I will see no more, I wish that they be told that the future of the Congo is beautiful and that it expects from them, as it expects from each Congolese, to accomplish the sacred task of reconstruction of our independence and our sovereignty; for without dignity there is no liberty, without justice there is no dignity, and without independence there are no free men.

No brutality, mistreatment, or torture has ever forced me to ask for grace, for I prefer to die with my head high, my faith steadfast, and my confidence profound in the destiny of my country, rather than to live in submission and scorn of sacred principles. History will one day have its say, but it will not be the history that Brussels, Paris, Washington, or the United Nations will teach, but that which they will teach in the countries emancipated from colonialism and its puppets.

Africa will write its own history, and it will be, to the north and to the south of the Sahara, a history of glory and dignity.

Do not weep for me, my dear companion. I know that my country, which suffers so much, will know how to defend its independence and its liberty. Long live the Congo! Long live Africa!

Patrice¹⁵⁸

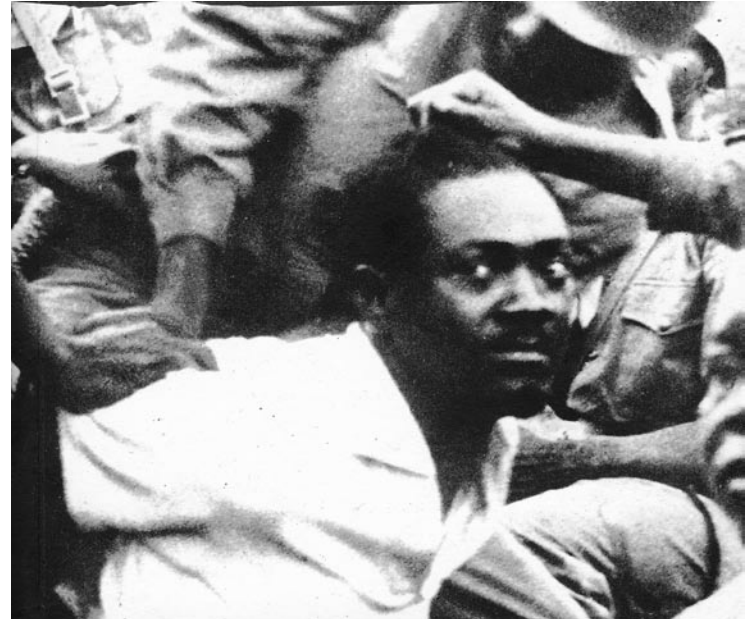
The letter was meant for all Congolese. François Lumumba explains 'When he is addressing Pauline he is addressing the

Joseph Okito had been a provincial advisor sitting on the regional council in Kasai between 1957–9. Though appointed by the colonial authorities he was uncompromising in his defence of the rights of the Congolese. He joined the Lumumba faction of the MNC and was elected senator on the MNC list and finally appointed vice-president of the Senate. After independence Okito accompanied Lumumba on his visit to the USA and Canada. He attempted to reach the safety of Stanleyville in November but was arrested. Described by one commentator as 'the gentle, brilliant man who had so often pleaded with his senators when they rambled off the subject'.

Congo. When he is talking to his children, he is talking to all the children of the Congo. He is telling all the children of the Congo to have confidence in the future of the country.'¹⁵⁹

Finally death came. On 17 January Lumumba was flown to Elisabethville with two fellow prisoners Maurice Mpolo and Joseph Okito. Already beaten and tortured he was dragged by Katangan forces commanded by a Belgian, to *Villa Brouwe*. Here he was tortured again, as Tshombe decided how to kill him. Later in the evening they were thrown into a military vehicle and driven to a nearby wood. A Belgian officer assembled and commanded three

firing squads, while another Belgian organised the execution site. Patrice Lumumba and his two comrades, Mpolo and Okito, were shot one after the other. Tshombe was present. Then Gerard Soete, a Belgian police officer, unearthed the bodies from their shallow grave, chopped each body into pieces and then dissolved them



Patrice Lumumba photographed shortly before his execution

with canisters of acid. When there was no more acid remaining the body parts were burnt. The bloody deed was done and independence had finally been broken. The Belgian government's investigation into the assassination of Lumumba in 2001 reported that 'the Belgian government deemed a speedy independence necessary in order to protect Belgian interests'.¹⁶⁰

The murders were officially announced on 13 February 1961, seven and half months after independence. Lumumba was only 36 years old. The hope for a democratic and independent Congo was, for the time being, extinguished, and foreign interests could rule again. The physical obliteration of the bodies was perhaps a wish that Lumumba and his comrades would be completely forgotten and to eradicate any trace that they had ever existed. Not only were these violent murders but also an effort to rewrite history,

to dissolve any memory of the hopes of a real independence. The day after the announcement of Lumumba's murder the Indonesian poet Sabarsantoso Anantaguna

wrote:

Maurice Mpolo was born in 1928 in the province of Léopoldville, Mpolo worked in the colonial capital as a clerk in various private firms. In 1951 he joined the Territorial Police, but accused of arrogance and insubordination he was removed less than two years later. In the independent elections in May 1960 he was elected a deputy for the MNC. Mpolo was a fervent nationalist, who advocated radical economic reforms in an independent Congo.

The news came early in the morning.

Lumumba is dead

Lumumba is dead

Anger split the whole world asunder.

A worker shouts:

who can murder my age –

the rails of the trains

the length of the light of the

sun

we are all Lumumba

Lumumba.

Freedom that's Lumumba

Lumumba

The news came early in the morning

Lumumba is dead

Lumumba is dead

the earth shook

the revolution marches on.

Long live Lumumba.¹⁶⁰

US strategy

Who was responsible for Lumumba's downfall? Although the act of Lumumba's murder was carried out by Belgian and Katangan forces, an unholy alliance of Western interests lay behind his demise. We can name some of the guilty parties: Belgium, the United Kingdom and the United States. British Prime Minister

Harold Macmillan had joined in the fray, calling Lumumba a 'communist stooge'. Western powers had used the threat of Soviet intervention to justify their action against Lumumba; they sought to prevent the mineral-rich Congo falling into the hands of the communists. Was this a real threat? There is no question that the period was marked by vicious Cold War rivalry that was played out to devastating effect on the continent. But Lumumba was no

communist, rather a nationalist

who sought meaningful independence

in a world that refused it. His

insistence on political autonomy

was almost regarded as juvenile and

he was denounced as unstable and

mad. The Tanzanian radical Abdul-

rahman Mohamed Babu was clear

about the extent of Soviet involve-

ment at the time of independence,

'when the Congo stormed into

independence in 1960, the only

contact the Soviet Union had with

that country was through a Czecho-

slovakian trade representative who

was so ill-informed about what

was going on in the country that

he gave the Kremlin a completely

wrong picture of the situation.'¹⁶²

But a wave of Soviet 'technical

advisers' did fly into the Congo,

estimated by Devlin to be approximately 1,000 over six weeks.

This will have been part of a cynical Soviet strategy to penetrate

Central Africa.

But Washington rejected Lumumba principally for his 'extreme

nationalism'. They refused to cooperate with him when he arrived

All over Africa nations claimed their independence at an astonishing speed.

Following defeat at Suez Britain rapidly decolonised. France resisted for

a little longer, but in 1958 granted a

whole group of African countries a form

of independence and only remained in

Algeria for a bloody fight. New powers

were preparing to play a role in a

decolonised Africa. The United States

retained something of the allure of

freedom, because of the country's un-

deniable opposition to the French and

British project of re-capturing the Suez

Canal after its nationalization by Presi-

dent Nasser of Egypt in 1956. At the

expense of the British, French and Bel-

gians American influence was growing

on the continent.

in the US and helped force him to turn to the Soviet Union. There is no evidence that the Congo was, as Devlin described, a 'Cuba in the making'.¹⁶³ Devlin actively assisted Mobutu, promoting him as a prodigal son. The intention was to prevent Soviet intrusion, and ensure Lumumba's downfall. Devlin worked with Mobutu during his September coup and regarded Lumumba as a dangerous obstacle: 'We came to the conclusion that he was rather unbalanced. From one moment to the other he could change. We saw him as someone who thought he could use the Soviets and the Soviets in turn were trying to use him, and we felt that they were much more experienced and qualified at this act than Lumumba. It was his first coup on 14 September 1960. I agreed that we would help him ... the objective was to prevent the Soviets from gaining undue influence in the country. They had one minister who was definitely a KGB agent. I hoped that by using the "service" intelligence methods we could avoid a hot war, particularly an atomic hot war.'¹⁶⁴

What, of course, is extraordinary is that if Lumumba could be dismissed as 'rather unbalanced' for even entertaining the possibility of Soviet assistance then why was Tshombe, who was openly dependant on Belgian military forces, left to his own devices? But as a loyal member of NATO Belgium was a friendly foreign power, the Russians were not.

There was never any possibility that the Congo would be left to work out its own independence. Cursed by mineral wealth the country could not be left alone. Uranium from the Congo was regularly bought through Belgium by the Americans and it had already been used to make the atomic bombs dropped on Japan at the end of the Second World War. But now cobalt was discovered and memoranda sent back to the US stating that it was an essential metal needed for the space race between the Americans and the Soviets. American interests had for many decades been central to the political economy of the Congo. In the early 1950s, a company owned by the Rockefeller family had taken control of a

one-fifth share in *Union Minière*, the business that ran the uranium mines.¹⁶⁵

So American intervention was crucial. President Eisenhower sanctioned the assassination of Lumumba. 'The President would have vastly preferred to have him taken care of some other way than by assassination, but he regarded Lumumba as I did and as a lot of other people did as a mad dog ... and he wanted the problem dealt with.'¹⁶⁶ Devlin was given instructions to assassinate Lumumba, they came from the president. 'I was told that instructions came from President Eisenhower. The president had implied that something must be done and his words were taken as an indication that he wanted an assassination.' Devlin received a consignment of poison to carry out these orders: 'I received a cable to the effect that an officer would be coming to see me. I was told that the man would identify himself as "Joe from Paris". As I left the embassy for the café across the street ... seated ... was a ... man I knew quite well. He got up and started to move towards my car ... I took him to a safe house. And once we got moving he said: "I'm Joe from Paris". When we got there he told me that he had brought instructions that I must assassinate Lumumba. He gave me a packet of poisons, various sorts ... one ... came in toothpaste.'¹⁶⁷

In the end the Belgians were better organised. But the implication implicit in Devlin's confession is that the Americans would have carried out the assassination, perhaps using a Congolese proxy, if the Belgians had not beaten them to it.

Pan-Africanism and the UN

The UN also played an important part in Lumumba's fall. The organisation was not immune from the imperial objectives of some of its powerful member states, nor was it simply an empty vessel to be filled by the unequal weight of its affiliates. The international organisation was an important actor in the events that

were unfolding in the Congo. While it is clear that soon after independence, the US, France, Britain and Belgium discussed the definitive elimination of Lumumba, no longer simply his political elimination, similar views and plans were held by senior members of the UN hierarchy. Lumumba himself was clear about the role of the organisation: *Belgian colonialism and its Western allies have found direct and indirect support ... among certain high officials of the United Nations.*¹⁶⁸ The UN's hands were bloodied.

There were other false friends. Lumumba had placed enormous faith in pan-Africanism. In the first week of August 1960 he visited a number of African states, already independent, and who seemed to be offering him practical assistance. He returned to Leopoldville convinced that the promises made by various heads of state would be upheld, and that pan-Africanism would cease to be a slogan and become instead a plan of action for the defence of the Congo. Ghana and Guinea promised to place their troops under his control if the UN failed to expel the foreign forces and end the secession. A pan-African conference was planned for the capital on 25 August. Thirteen independent African states sent their representatives, but mostly only ambassadors attended. Delegate after delegate praised the behaviour of the UN and refused any practical help to the central government. For Lumumba the conference was another illusion destroyed.

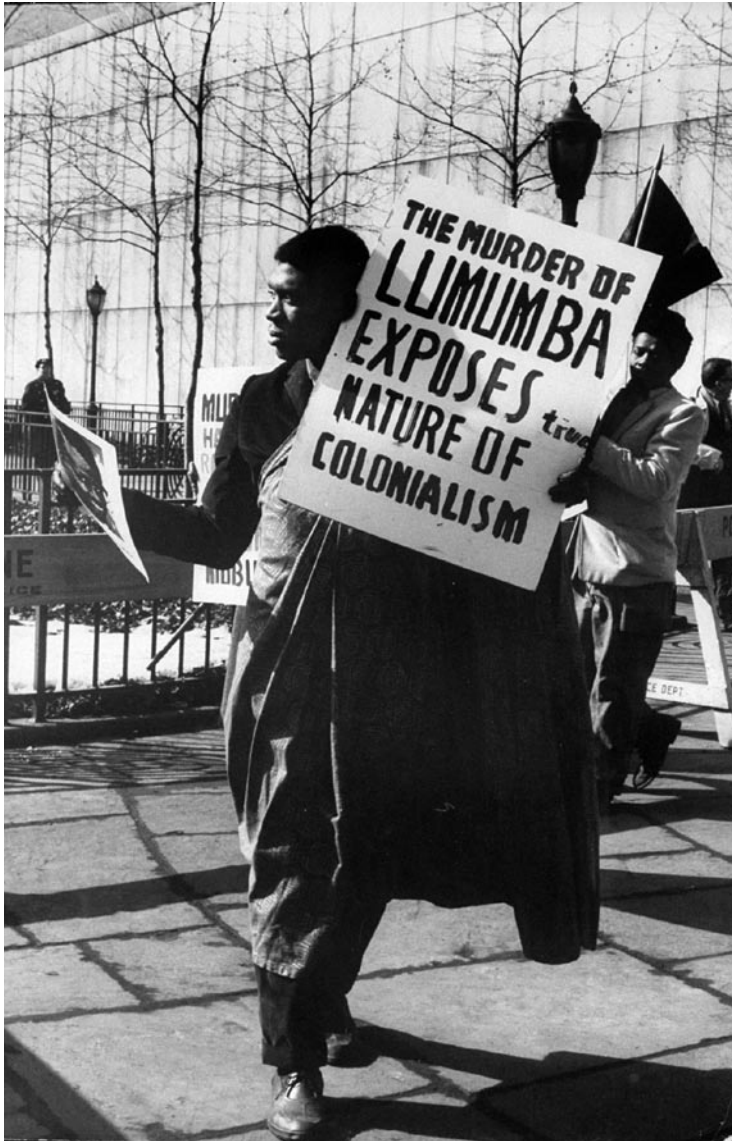
Kwame Nkrumah, a confidant of Lumumba's since 1958, sent a stream of fatherly communiqués to Lumumba preaching conciliation and compromise long after these had ceased to be possible. On 12 September he wrote: 'You cannot afford, my Brother, to be harsh and uncompromising. Do not force Kasa Vubu out now [Kasa Vubu had already 'removed' Lumumba in a coup on 5 September]. It will bring too much trouble in Léopoldville ... Be as "cool as a cucumber" ... Patrice ... if you fail, you have only yourself to blame ... Your policy "to do away with your enemies now" will fail; you must adopt "TACTICAL ACTION."¹⁶⁹

It must have been particularly galling for Lumumba to receive 'cucumber' advice from his respect comrade and fellow pan-Africanist. Lumumba wrote angrily to Nkrumah on 11 September explaining to his friend the role that Ghanaian troops were playing in the unfolding crisis: *At 4.30 p.m today, 11 September, accompanied by my soldiers, I personally went to take over the radio station. The Ghana troops, however, opposed my decision with hostility and went to the extent of seizing arms from my soldiers ... Instead of helping us in our difficulties; your soldiers are openly siding with the enemy to fight us.*¹⁷⁰ But Nkrumah's role in the crisis illustrated a fundamental weakness in the politics of pan-Africanism, which infected Lumumba's own political decisions. Nkrumah repeatedly cautioned against mobilising the population, and pressed instead for resolutions through the UN.

But the UN had taken a position against Lumumba. So as his friends insisted on confidence in the international body, Lumumba was languishing under house arrest from the same UN in Léopoldville. By October he abandoned all hope of a solution through the organisation. De Witte's is correct in apportioning blame: 'All this has to do with the pressure of so-called "pan-Africanism" and from people like Nkrumah, who was very conservative.'¹⁷¹ Nkrumah's pan-Africanism sought to effect change through diplomatic channels, long after these channels had been exhausted. The revolutionary rhetoric that had attracted Lumumba to pan-Africanism when he had first visited Ghana in 1958 seemed increasingly vacuous. In the end Lumumba turned to his second option: mobilising his own supporters in the Congo. But by the time he had escaped from the capital valuable time had been lost.

Lumumba: liberation hero

Patrice Lumumba's murder was met with an explosion of protests. In Shanghai, a demonstration estimated at half a million held a rally against the murder. Demonstrators in Belgrade shouted,



African Americans demonstrate outside the United Nations building in New York at the news of his assassination in February 1961

'Lumumba will live for ever'. For President Tito the murder of Lumumba 'had no precedent in latter day history'. In Yugoslavia as many as 30,000 smashed their way into the Belgian embassy in Belgrade. In Warsaw demonstrators attacked the Belgian Embassy forcing the Ambassador to flee for his life. A session of the Italian Chamber of Deputies in Rome descended into chaos as demonstrators broke up the proceedings, then threatened to march on the Belgian embassy. In their thousands Syrian students join workers demonstrating in the city's streets.¹⁷² There were also protests in London and Paris.

In the meeting rooms of the UN in New York there was a potent sense of shame and seething anger. The journalist Philip Deane wrote: 'In small private wakes for Patrice Lumumba, the Afro-Asian delegates ... swallow their drinks as if there were a bitter taste in their mouths ... They may not all have felt such concern for Lumumba alive and active ... but ... in the lobbies and corridors and bars of the United Nation's glass palace, you can hear growing almost hour by hour a menacing myth that could destroy the world organisation itself.'¹⁷³

But in much of the Congo there was silence and disbelief. Those new leaders who were now in control of the Congo sought desperately to keep the news from breaking out. There could be no funerals, the bodies of Lumumba, Okito and Mpolo had been destroyed. Pauline Opango, Lumumba's wife, marched at the head of a procession of about 100 people in Léopoldville. Only in Lulua-bourg, the city that had seen the first proud congress of the MNC in 1959, was a general strike organised to protest against the killings. 'But in Stanleyville, where the armed nationalists had begun the apparently unstoppable reconquest of the country, the announcement of the death of Lumumba, Mpolo and Okito produced no immediate visible reactions. On the contrary, a deathly, supernatural calm fell over the city, as if Lumumba's death could not be true, as if Lumumba's personality had already taken on the mythical



Pauline Lumumba photographed with her youngest son Roland and her brother-in-law shortly after the assassination of her husband Patrice

proportions it would assume in the decades to come.' A great Mass was held in the town on 16 February for Lumumba. Twenty-five thousand people attended and then returned home peacefully.¹⁷⁴

The Belgian press barely concealed their howls of approval.

La Libre Belgique who had led the propaganda campaign against Lumumba when he was alive stated on 14 February that he 'was a cruel man, unable to govern, even to govern himself ... he sowed fire and blood wherever he went. ... Politics was nothing other than an exciting game ... The game turned out badly for him.'¹⁷⁵

Three of Lumumba's children were already in Egypt where they had been invited by President Nasser. François, Patrice and Juliana were told the news of their father's murder by their host family in Cairo. François explains that although the children knew the situation was serious when they left the Congo, they were convinced that they would see their father again, 'we had the conviction that our father would live'.¹⁷⁶ They learnt of the news at the same time as the rest of the world. Juliana remembers: 'We were already in Egypt, in Cairo and it was one month after his murder, as it was for everyone. Our Egyptian father brought us together to tell us that our father was dead. It was curious because we heard people in the street demonstrating, everyone crying our name ... we could hear "Lumumba, Lumumba". I was often ill as a young child, but a car was sent for Patrice and François so they could be shown to the demonstrators, protected by soldiers, of course, who always guarded us. They moved around the city. I remember how strange it was to hear our name chanted by the crowd.'¹⁷⁷ François remembers how they were 'invited onto the podium' during the demonstrations and how they became symbols for the struggle against imperialism.