

Freedom for Africa

By the same author (with Michel Sentis)

The World at the Turning
(Grosvenor Books, London)

Charles Piguet

Freedom for Africa

1960: Encounters with a continent in transition

*Translated from the French by
Philippa Faunce*



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PREFACE

This book is a personal account rather than a historical record, as I was directly affected by all the events related here. It is only a page in the history of that crucial period in Africa, when one after another, its nations gained independence. The pivot of my story is the year 1960 in Zaire, the geographical heart of the continent. Colonial rule in the Belgian Congo collapsed with such speed that it is probably the most spectacular phase in the whole period of transition. Less than six months elapsed between the conclusion of the agreement and actual independence.

In parallel to the political changes, I myself received an accelerated, on-the-job training in Africa. This was through several rapid visits to West Africa and the United States, in connection with my work with Moral Re-Armament. Less a structured organisation than a network of people from all races and nations, Moral Re-Armament was heavily involved in Africa at that time, mainly because a number of young Africans had aligned themselves with it. My work and training were effected in close partnership with them.

Ch. P.

1. TURNING POINT

1960 was the turning point for the new Africa. Within a few months, seventeen countries achieved political independence. For countless young Europeans like myself, as well as for those directly affected, it was a euphoric year. With the horrors of World War II still fresh in our memories, we were witnessing a convulsion in the annals of a continent which gave us immense hope for the future.

Three quarters of a century earlier, in 1885, the nations of Europe and the United States had convened in Berlin under Bismarck's chairmanship to share out the African territories. This conference gave a form of legal confirmation to the imperial conquests; but it also had a secondary purpose, commendable in itself, namely to bring to an end the friction between the colonial powers, whose explorers were constantly involved in clashes over territorial claims in the jungles of the Dark Continent.

In Berlin, the ambitions and sensibilities of the various powers were skilfully juggled, and the continent sliced into portions with scant consideration for the local populations. Africa's human component, insofar as the Europeans were aware of it, played no part in the equation. So it was that whole tribes, peoples bound together by a common language and social structure, found themselves cut in half by boundaries which might at times have been drawn with a ruler.

King Leopold II of Belgium had aspired to raise his country to the status of a colonial power ever since his youth. But having failed to obtain his Parliament's support for the idea of adopting the independent State of the Congo as a colony, he opted instead to make it into his own private property.

Once independence was achieved the African countries, within the framework of the Organisation for African Unity (OAU), formed in 1963, were wise enough not to re-open the debate over the borders created by their former Gallic, Germanic and British

masters. They knew that borders can only be changed by war, that much is clear from history, and there were more important things to do than stir up insoluble conflicts between countries at a time when their internal affairs so urgently needed attention. So they inherited cosmopolitan nations: tribes cut in two, populations speaking numerous languages, people whom no national loyalty or common religion could unite.

The Europeans believed that Africa was fortunate, because when they “voluntarily” withdrew, they bequeathed to it the great gift of democracy - one man, one vote - which provided the solution to every problem. One look at the history of Europe, whose endless wars across the centuries culminated in setting the whole world ablaze, quickly dispels this illusion. Predictably, disenchantment soon took hold. Democracy suffered a similar fate to the Ford-Galaxy cars which were presented as gifts to every new Zairian MP at Independence on 30th June 1960. The very fabric of countries disintegrated, like the vehicles, whose dented frames could be seen in ditches, stolen, dismantled and sold off, piece by piece. “Black Africa gets off to a bad start” announced a knowledgeable expert on the cover of a best-selling book at that time.

But Africa had not spoken its last word. Like all other peoples on the planet, it claimed the right to carve its own destiny from the fluctuating fortunes which are part of all human existence: antagonism, hatred, collective rivalry, corruption, coups d’Etat, wars; but also greatness of spirit, spectacular U-turns, imagination, faith, generosity, courage, and a sense of the sacred, things which have inspired the makers of history. Africa is no exception to these universal principles - perhaps the reason some of us wish it were, is that we love it only too well.

2. PINTO

My first encounter was on the 15th February 1960.

A few short hours after leaving grey Paris, where I had stood shivering at Orly airport in my tropical clothes, I was transported into a new and wonderful world. Dawn was breaking as the plane touched down at Niamey. It was five o'clock in the morning, the most magical moment of the day. A balmy heat enveloped the land, and a few silhouetted figures went serenely about their business. The spell was cast. Africa had captured me.

The stop-over included breakfast on the airport verandah. Among my fellow passengers was Sylvanus Olympio, Prime Minister of the autonomous Republic of Togo, which was due to attain full independence in two months' time. The two halves of this former German colony which had been governed by France and England since 1919, were finally to be reunited under a single government. I seized the opportunity to hand Olympio the visiting card given me by Louis Ignacio Pinto as I queued at the check-in at Orly. Pinto had seen Olympio arrive to catch the same plane, and had pressed his card into my hand, saying "You must introduce yourself. He's my cousin."

I had made Pinto's acquaintance in the United States, during a series of Moral Re-Armament gatherings which lasted through the summer of 1959. He had previously been the Minister for Justice in Dahomey (now Benin), but at that time he had been pushed onto the political sidelines. As my wife and I were French speaking, he struck up a friendship with us, and we enjoyed meals together on many occasions.

Pinto was one of the first men from former French West Africa to qualify as a lawyer. He served at the Bar in Paris, but for years had been denied the right to practise his profession in his own country. The truth was that the French authorities were afraid of young African graduates stirring up unrest in the colonies and

pressing for independence: they preferred to let them exercise their privileges in the mother country. Ignacio Pinto resented France for this, while at the same time recognising that it had given him an education equal to the challenge of the times.

However, his grudge against France was not the topic of conversation best calculated to make the Dahomean barrister's hackles rise; the intricacies of the political scene in his own country were what really stirred him up. His opponents had tried to burn down his house, and when he talked about them, I could almost see the daggers darting from his eyes. Thanks to Pinto, we became familiar with the names of the chief protagonists in the incredibly rapid revolution which was sweeping Africa. This was our earliest introduction to the continent with its thousand faces.

The theme of the conference in which we were then taking part may seem almost naive: there is a good and a bad way to lead people; there is a good and a bad way to lead your life. Informal meetings took place on Mackinac Island, in one of the Great Lakes of Michigan, close to the border between the United States and Canada. It was an idyllic spot, accessible only by boat, where all motor vehicles were banned except the ambulance. People from all corners of the world could be found there, some of whom bore heavy responsibilities in the leadership of their countries. Pinto was impressed by the atmosphere, which was very different from that usually found in the industrialised western world. A strong native American influence was in evidence, not least in the style of the huge roof made of logs arranged in the shape of a tee-pee, beneath which the meetings were held.

Detached from the pressures of political in-fighting, Pinto had time to think. From a distance, the political stance which he had stubbornly defended took on a more relative appearance. The utter futility of the hatred, fighting and vendettas became apparent to him. He wanted to be different, but more than this, he dreamt of a day when the warring factions of his region of Africa would renounce their endless feuding. Foremost among his own enemies was the Prime Minister of the Ivory Coast, Felix Houphouët-Boigny, and he resolved to write to him: "A strange transform-

ation is taking place within me, and I feel impelled by a power greater than myself to tell you with all humility and sincerity that I am sorry for harbouring hostility, resentment and even hatred against you." Pinto referred to the "tragic incidents" which accounted for his attitude during the preceding months, in particular the "progress of political talks" which finally led the Dahomean Government under Hubert Maga to join the "Alliance Council", a body championed by Houphouet.

Officially, the divisions stemmed from opposing concepts of how unity should be achieved, with one party favouring a Mali-Senegal Federation, and the other envisaging a much larger confederation on a continental scale. Yet at the outset, as Pinto pointed out to Houphouet-Boigny in his long letter, "we were on the same side, fighting for the same ideal. Our enthusiasm was boundless, and we shared the common goal of promoting African unity..." He saw ever more clearly that the greatest threat to a brilliant future of political freedom came from embittered relationships between people.

Pinto sent copies of his letter to other West African political leaders, including Modibo Keita of Mali and Leopold Sedar Senghor of Senegal.

Pinto's dream of drawing all these men together in a new spirit was never realised in the way he had hoped. But his eyes had been opened to a new truth: every individual, starting with himself, bears an inescapable responsibility for the world's future. He never again shirked that responsibility. In one of his letters to the African leaders of the time, he referred to the solidarity he had felt with the French philosopher Gabriel Marcel, whom he had met on the Michigan island. Marcel had stressed the need for people to add a spiritual dimension to their work, particularly in the political sphere, if their plans were not to go astray. "Many of us are faced with problems which seem technically insoluble", he had said. "By that I mean that the usual forms of intervention, whether diplomatic or military, have proved ineffective. But all of us have a responsibility for these problems, however small or

seemingly insignificant. Our own change of attitude, which above all means our willingness to be part of a world community, can help to make a breach in the walls of hatred and political or racial prejudice which still imprison the human race”.

3. APPRENTICESHIP

When Pinto told me to introduce myself to Sylvanus Olympio during the flight to Dahomey, he was not speaking lightly. He invested great hope in these personal contacts with leaders of the new Africa. He longed to share with them what he had learned in Mackinac, and to see them rise above their rivalries and jealousies. Pan-Africanism was in the air, but if it remained no more than a political slogan, it would not succeed in drawing together the Africans. The united front against colonial oppression, formed in 1946 at Africa's first democratic Uniting Congress in Bamako, had crumbled as the time for practical decisions about the continent's future drew nearer.

It was against this background that I was travelling to Dahomey, to join a remarkable group of Africans from a number of English speaking countries, who had aroused comment by making a film called "Freedom". This title echoed the unanimous cry of Africa's political and intellectual establishment at that time. But what sort of freedom? That was the crucial question. It never crossed my mind then that my friendly encounter with Sylvanus Olympio would lead to just one short visit to Lome, and that less than two years later he would be assassinated, the first victim in a succession of coups d'Etat which were to become a regular feature of Africa's history. Not all the fruits of political freedom were sweet.

The plane landed at Cotonou at mid-morning. To my dismay, the colleague who was supposed to meet me at the airport was nowhere to be seen. With no address, I was at a loss what to do. Very soon I was surrounded by a horde of children who seized my luggage and hustled me in the direction of the taxis. They knew very well that I was lost. Then it occurred to me that since Pinto had organised our visit with the Prime Minister, that would be the best person for me to contact; so I asked the driver of the airport bus to drop me at his residence. Hubert Maga gave me a warm wel-

come, and invited me to have lunch with him. His hospitality was entirely spontaneous. Afterwards he arranged for me to be driven to Porto Novo, the political capital of Dahomey (Benin), where we were to stay at the hotel for Members of Parliament. The official car functioned by means of its horn and its accelerator; and for a short while I had the exhilarating experience of being a very important person, as I watched the unfortunate pedestrians, often with huge bundles on their heads and babies on their backs, scattering to left and right in fear for their lives. I was discovering Africa.

A new wave was breaking over the continent. The proverbial wisdom which teaches that it is better to walk round an immovable obstacle than to tackle it head on, was being swept away. Little by little the old traditions were becoming mere formalities. Conspicuous at the reception which the mayor of Porto Novo gave for our party were a number of colourful dignitaries, some of whom were officially introduced as magicians, while one imposing figure, who obviously commanded great respect, was presented to us as the King of the Night. The man in charge however, was clearly Mayor Sorou Migan Apithy, a new political leader trained in Paris, previously a member of the French Parliament.

There were in the Porto Novo region two rival kings. In order to avoid bloody confrontations, one of them became King of the Day, and the other King of the Night. How this saving compromise was reached, I never discovered. But the agreement was that these two dignitaries should never meet, to the extent that they feigned ignorance of each other's existence. When they moved around, members of their entourage went ahead to spy out the land. If the rival monarch was in sight, they would create cunning diversions, so the tribal peace could be preserved.

One wished that at least the spirit of such an arrangement could be kept. But the sudden clash of civilisations taking place across the planet called for other types of remedy. Pinto had organised the "Freedom" group's visit to his country. He himself was delayed in Paris at the last moment, but from a distance he enabled us to meet all the leaders of Dahomey, both those in office and those who had



The King of the Night, magicians and dignitaries welcome the “Freedom” group in Porto Novo’s town hall. Standing in the middle is the Mayor Sorou Migan Apithy, a former Member of the French Parliament. This is a few months before the independence of Dahomey, now called Benin. In the background, an old style bust of Marianne still personifies French rule.

been ousted by their rivals, and were waiting in the wings for a chance to return to power.

The ambitions of rival politicians are not easily reconciled, in any country. They are more likely to lead to confrontation than to an alliance of equal partners. In western countries where parliamentary democracy is practised, it has served as a means of distributing positions of responsibility between competitors for power. But in Africa there was no guarantee that this system would work. Many African leaders of that period were drawn to Communism, believing it better suited to the Africans’ community spirit, at least in theory. Choices like these were not only political; they had far-reaching ideological implications as well.

Colonialism was perceived by the young African elites as the root of all their problems, and they were determined to exorcise all

trace of it. For many of them, this meant eliminating all forms of domination by the white man. For a young European like me working in Africa, it was therefore essential to discern in myself those attitudes which had fuelled resentment against my race. I might believe fervently in the shared humanity of all peoples, and I might sincerely wish to be of service to Africa; but I also had to learn that my way of expressing my opinions was often perceived as arrogant by my African colleagues. It stemmed more from the superficial intellectual sparring which enjoys such prestige in French education, than from a genuine desire for dialogue. I realised that the quality of my friendships would depend on the sort of apprenticeship I was prepared to serve.

Ten days after my arrival in Dahomey, I made a special trip to Yaoundé to see two Cameroonian friends who had been with me in Atlanta, the great capital of the South of the United States. It was in Atlanta that the agonizing problem of racial segregation first pierced my heart. The spectre of segregation, though most notorious in South Africa, was to haunt the nations of Africa throughout the succeeding decades.

4. ATLANTA

The moment a visitor alighted at Atlanta railway station, it stared him in the face: “Exit reserved for whites”. “Blacks only”. The segregation laws seemed to be thrust at him from the word go, and to me it felt like an assault on my own freedom. “What if I tried going out through the other door, just to see...”

In the United States segregation was not so all-pervasive as in South Africa. It had been abolished at the Federal level, but some states nevertheless retained their own laws concerning race. Our international delegation of over 300 people was not going to find life easy under a regime that in theory separated, but in practice discriminated between the races. Each of us had to be assigned a legal category, in hotels, on public transport and in cinemas - although there was some confusion over the classification of our Asian colleagues. The situation could have jarred sensitivities and sown seeds of discord among us; but in fact it made each of us more conscious of what was at stake in our mission.

Segregation was rooted in the belief that reconciliation was impossible, and so too therefore was any prospect of a shared community. From our own experience we knew the opposite to be true, and we were there in such large numbers to provide living proof of it. We had agreed together to respect the laws of the country, and never to provoke an incident. Within the limits imposed by the rules, we would live simply and freely as children of God.

At that time Atlanta’s hotels were exclusively for whites, and blacks were barred from running them. However, in the city’s suburbs stood a large building designated officially as an “apartment block”, which in effect served as a hotel for blacks. There was nothing to stop whites living there, so that was where a large part of our group stayed. The establishment was owned by a tycoon from the black community who went by the name of Chief Aitken. I based there for many weeks, sharing a room with the two Cameroonian friends I met again in Yaoundé, a black American who had been

chauffeur to a well-known Washington family, and Michel, a Frenchman who later became my brother-in-law. This was also the meeting point for the rest of the group, because ironically it was the only place in town where a multiracial gathering could be held without causing problems.

A musical portraying the life of Mary Mcleod Bethune, a great black American educator, spearheaded our campaign. Among the heroes of the struggle for black emancipation in the United States, she ranked with people like Booker T. Washington and Martin Luther King. Born to slave parents, she became an advisor to President Roosevelt on her people's affairs. This musical had been produced on Mackinac Island, where two years later I met Pinto. The lead was played by the outstanding black American singer Muriel Smith.

The show was called "The Crowning Experience", and it had its grand première on 11th January 1958 in Atlanta's huge municipal auditorium. In accordance with rules which were still in force, spectators entered through a single door, but had to separate once inside the hall, with whites sitting on one side and blacks on the other. Thousands of people came from every part of the city. The event had been publicised in the media, and was also hailed by public figures in Asia and Europe. "India joins with you in spirit to unite the races, classes and nations" proclaimed a message to the cast from Rajmohan Gandhi, grandson of Mahatma Gandhi, the pioneer of Indian independence.

Our intention was plain to see. It might not have been officially spelt out, but we felt that we were part of a sort of international conspiracy to help free America, purportedly the champion of liberty, from the consequences of segregation. Some people have gone so far as to compare the impact of "The Crowning Experience" with that of Harriet Beecher Stowe's famous novel "Uncle Tom's Cabin" a century earlier. But it would take more than three performances of a musical to transform the life-style of a city. So it was decided to extend the run. The only problem was the venue. The municipal auditorium was already booked for the following days, and other possible locations in the city, which were privately owned, did not allow access to everyone on an equal basis.

One cinema had a stage that was big enough, but the stalls and main gallery were reserved for whites, who came in through the front entrance, while blacks were relegated to the gods, which were reached via the back door and up a dark, grimy staircase. The owner, convinced by the high quality of the performance, and inspired by the goal which motivated us, agreed to open his doors for the first time to everyone, regardless of race. Blacks and whites would enter through the same door, but would then have to comply with the law by sitting in separate seating areas. Meanwhile the enthusiasm aroused by the first performances had waned. This auditorium was not a venue frequented by blacks, and they were reluctant to set foot in it until all forms of separation had been abolished. As for the whites, although they might not admit it even to themselves, most of them resisted the thought that one day they would have to share their lives with the other community on an equal footing.

If that theatre was going to be filled, we would have to approach people one by one and convince them. We seized every opportunity that came our way to speak in different circles, especially churches, which in the United States are the centres of social activity par excellence. On numerous occasions I found myself with my African colleagues in black churches where fervour and exuberance were the norm - unlike the starchy reserve in our reformed order of service - and where sermons were punctuated by loud "amens" and "hallelujahs" from the congregation. The preacher never failed to invite us to speak, and the people would descend on us at the exit, thanking us profusely for coming to "worship the Lord" with them. These churches were influential, and some were genuine political forums which drew thousands of people, Sunday after Sunday. The warm welcome we received from these communities was sometimes followed by invitations to people's homes, usually for the substantial Sunday meal which they ate at four in the afternoon. Many lasting friendships took root on occasions like these.

Access to the white community was more difficult and more exclusive; a phenomenon which always characterises privileged

groups, irrespective of race. We decided to make door-to-door calls, as in the United States this practice is not only the prerogative of Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses. We avoided presenting ourselves as a multiracial group, which would have been seen as provocative, and we felt it important not to appear confrontational. The precaution proved well-founded, for we quickly came to appreciate what a mountain of prejudice can accumulate at the heart of a community which feels that its comfortable life-style and secure existence are under threat.

Michel and I decided that we would cover a white neighbourhood only a stone's throw from the black apartment house where we were staying. We rang the first doorbell. It belonged to a pastor, who immediately welcomed us into his home. Both parents and children were attracted by the idea of meeting two young people from Europe. Yet even in such a warm and respected household, minds were clouded over the question of race. Sordid rumours about blacks were common currency, and the pastor's family had no scruples about repeating them, however unfounded they might be. "You'll find this hard to believe," the man of God told us, "but just round the corner from here there is an establishment run by blacks. It's a haven of filth and sleaze, and not long ago..." There followed a tale of rape and murder whose details I do not recall, because instinctively I closed my ears so as not to hear. This was a man who preached the Gospel faithfully every Sunday, and I wondered what it was that could blind him so utterly. Fear, perhaps, or dread of what might happen to his little blond daughter if she ventured alone more than five hundred metres from her house - this little daughter who had come to sit so trustingly on my knee. I am ashamed to say that I did not dare tell the pastor that the "haven of filth and sleaze" of which he had spoken was the very place where we were staying, and to this day I flinch when I remember my cowardice. I never went back to that family, and for me that will always be an opportunity wasted.

Yet change was in the air, and the new wind was gathering strength. There is no doubt that we had a part in stirring it up. When we came to the city, public transport was still governed by

the laws of segregation: whites in front, blacks behind. We conspired to keep the rules, while sitting at the very limits of the areas assigned to us, and I remember holding animated conversations in French with my Cameroonian friends across the divide between our respective seats. Nothing beats a concrete example for getting things moving. After five months of high-profile activity by an international team of three hundred people, Atlanta could never be the same.

Today it has become the metropolis of the South. As a thriving business centre, patron of the arts and source of peace initiatives, its influence extends across the world. The mayor of Atlanta, as in several other big American cities, is black. Supporters from all sectors of the community elect these men; so far as they are concerned, the race issue is entirely secondary to the business of dealing competently with the public affairs entrusted to them.

5. THE BELGIAN-CONGOLESE ROUND TABLE

For the Congo, 1960 stands out even more memorably than for other African countries, because in that year the colonial bubble burst suddenly and without warning. Until 1959 the Belgian Congo had barely featured in the world press. It had been the private property of the Belgian King Leopold II, and only became a colony as a result of a half-hearted decision by the Belgian parliament fifty years earlier. The Congo was cocooned from the march of events, and no one dreamed that the situation could change so rapidly – no one in Belgium, at least. There had been a few riots and uprisings over the decades, but still popular belief held it to be a tropical paradise, prompting many young Belgians to enroll in the colonial administration, joining missions or working on economic projects which profited the mother country.

What triggered the collapse was the publication of a seemingly innocuous article, first in Flemish, then in French, by a Professor Van Bilsen of the Institute of Higher Education for Overseas Territories. It appeared early in 1956, and the title caused an uproar: “A Thirty Year Plan for the Political Emancipation of Belgian Africa”. Given that world opinion was already tending in favour of emancipation, the reaction seems quite unwarranted. The tide towards independence had begun twelve years earlier, and to any informed observer of the international scene it was evident that the trend was irreversible and global. India, Pakistan and Ceylon (Sri Lanka) were granted independence in 1947, Burma in 1948, Indonesia and then Libya in 1949, and Sudan in 1953. In 1954 following the Geneva Accords, Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia became independent, bringing to an end France’s war in Indochina.

In Africa the emancipation process moved forward inexorably. Africans had held seats in the French Parliament since 1946, and some, like Houphouët-Boigny of the Ivory Coast, even served in the Government of the Fourth Republic. Meanwhile the British

had given autonomous rule to several of their African territories, and names like Kwame Nkrumah, Nnamdi Azikiwe and Jomo Kenyatta began to be internationally known.

In 1955, only a year prior to the release of the Van Bilsen report, the newly independent nations held a conference in Bandung, Indonesia. Its aim, in the words of poet, writer and later President of Senegal Leopold Sedar Senghor, was to mark the “death of the inferiority complex of the colonised peoples”. From a distance, the Congo still appeared to slumber - but appearances can be deceptive. Beneath the embers, the fire was smouldering. During the 1958 International Exposition in Brussels, a group of Congolese representatives considered “culturally advanced” were guests of the host country. Most of them did not know each other. Yet this chance encounter signalled the start of a national awakening. Few could have predicted that this same group of Congolese would return to Brussels two years later to attend a Round Table, the outcome of which would be immediate independence.

Between these two meetings came the unexpected incident of 4th January 1959. A demonstration by the Abako Party which had been banned by the colonial authorities degenerated into a riot, resulting in the burning of schools and missions. Multiple arrests followed, and the police and civil guard imposed a tough clamp-down. The death toll was estimated at between fifty-two and several hundred people. The world looked on in disbelief: what on earth was happening in the Congo?

At the time the incident was portrayed in the media as a clash between two tribes, the Bakongo, descendants of the ancient kingdom of Kongo which had maintained links with Europe since the sixteenth century, and the Bangala, a people who lived along the river bank, particularly in Equateur Province. The real story was somewhat different. Abako was the Bakongos’ political body, with Joseph Kasa-Vubu as its undisputed leader. Despite the government’s prohibition, the Abako demonstration drew large crowds at the arranged venue. These mingled with the spectators of a football match who were leaving the stadium, and a

tactless repressive gesture by the authorities sparked the explosion. The locally conscripted civil guard consisted mainly of Bangala, whose language, Lingala, was generally used in the Army. This was the basis for the unsubstantiated tribal war theory.

In Belgium, nevertheless, these events acted like a warning shot. There, as in all democratic countries, each person was free to express his opinion, however well or ill-advised it might be. Points of view flew in all directions. Finally the debate became so heated that one overwhelming desire took hold of the population: to be rid of this burdensome colony, which after all had been nothing more than the whim of a king. As for the Government, it was appalled at the prospect of a war like the one which had racked Algeria for nearly four years. From then on events moved swiftly, with no more time lost. Amid much vacillation, it was decided to hold a Belgian-Congolese Round Table to determine the future of the Congo, and pave the way for independence. Suddenly, the Congolese burst onto the world agenda.

The Round Table opened in Brussels in January 1960. There was some dissension among the Congolese delegations, particularly between those who advocated a unified state and those who supported a federal structure. But they were united in their call for independence as soon as possible. Some of them, like Joseph Kasa-Vubu and Albert Kalonji, who had been arrested in preceding months for "instigation to racial hatred", enjoyed an aura of martyrdom. Patrice Lumumba was still in prison when the conference opened, having been detained like his two compatriots for political reasons, but his case was still pending. This was Lumumba's second spell in prison, the first having been in 1956 when he was charged with embezzling funds from the giro banking service where he worked. At the Round Table, the Congolese were putting up a united front, with even the most moderate and timid demanding freedom from the platform. When Lumumba arrived in Brussels shortly afterwards, the press seized a classic photo opportunity, and his picture appeared in the newspapers with arms aloft and wrists bandaged where the hand-

cuffs had been. At the negotiating table, progress was rapid. The thirty year plan which had stirred such hope in the young Congolese nationalists two years before was now obsolete, and the talk was of months not years. The only remaining questions concerned the method of transfer and the extent of Belgian assistance to the new state. The whole independence process was to be formally completed on 30th June that same year.

During this period I accompanied some of the cast of the film "Freedom" to Luxembourg, where they were due to be interviewed on the national television. They were following developments in Brussels with keen interest. "Freedom" had been filmed in Nigeria, and told the story of an African country approaching independence. It was extremely topical, exploring the concept of inner freedom which is available to everybody. The actors were touring Europe, and after their broadcast they had to travel to Brussels to catch a flight to Stockholm. A perfect opportunity to meet the Congolese leaders!

In the foyer of the Plaza Hotel, where most of the Congolese were staying, the "Freedom" actors caused quite a stir in their brightly coloured traditional costumes. The Kwilu delegation was the first to return after the morning's deliberations. They entered the hotel at midday, and struck an immediate rapport with the actors. They talked together about the Round Table and about "Freedom", which had gained the reputation of being a great African classic on independence. Ifoghale Amata and Manasseh Moerane, the two leading actors, showed them a copy of the Flemish weekly "De Post", where the picture of Lumumba arriving in Brussels with bound wrists was printed beside a scene from the film. Soon the other delegations arrived, and before long there was quite a sizeable gathering.

Ten days later, the Congolese delegations attended a showing of "Freedom" in a room at the Plaza hotel. All the Congolese leaders of the day were present, with only two exceptions: Antoine Gizenga, later to lead the rebellion at Stanleyville, had chosen to undergo a period of training in Moscow rather than attend the Round Table; and Lumumba, already much in demand,

was in Paris; but his right hand man M'Polo Maurice was present. I was impressed by M'Polo's determined expression; and I could not have known that within a year he would embark with his defeated and humiliated leader on a flight that would carry both of them to their deaths.

Joseph Kasa-Vubu was among the first to arrive, surrounded by his delegation. His party was the most highly structured and probably the best organised out of all the Congolese parties, but its support came exclusively from the Lower Congo, between the port of Matadi and the capital. He was the undisputed leader of that Bakongo province, where he was already known as "King Kasa". There was a fear among the Belgians, as well as among the other leaders, that the "king" might try to break away and create his own independent state. Kasa-Vubu was an enigmatic figure. He left the projection room as he had entered, without a word.

Albert Kalonji could not have been more different. He was an energetic, ambitious man who after a quarrel with Lumumba had split away from the Congolese National Movement and set up his own faction. The minute the film ended Kalonji rushed over to Amata: "You must bring your film to the Congo". Kalonji was a native of Kasai province, where a tribal war was in progress between the volatile Baluba, whom he represented, and the proud Lulua people. "When the Belgians leave we are going to tear each other apart", he said. He did not want a blood bath, and he was realistic and astute about it - in spite of the hatred which could suddenly darken his face. Unite and rule was better than divide and rule in his book - and rule he would, for soon after this he became the "Mulopwe" (or paramount chief) of South Kasai, a region entirely inhabited by Baluba.

The film intrigued Kalonji. He was after power, no question, but he also wanted peace. And he was not going to let the matter rest. A few days later he rang me, proposing that I go with him to London, where he wanted to study Moral Re-Armament in more depth. He had found the means to pay for both his journey and mine, and he would be accompanied by a Lulua representa-

tive who was also attending the Round Table, François Lwakabwanga. In London we stayed with friends, who offered to take us to Oxford to see the famous university. It was among the students there in the 1920s that Frank Buchman had begun his work, which had since grown into a world-wide network serving the needs of the world. Oxford delighted Lwakabwanga, who made up his mind to buy himself a bowler hat, like a proper city gentleman. That was the first highlight of the visit. The second was in the car on the way back to London, when he and Kalonji decided to combine their efforts to bring peace to their province. To date, all other attempts had failed. A conference organised by the Belgian administration at Lake Munkamba a few months earlier had ended in confusion. Houses continued to be burned and pregnant women disembowelled, despite the colonial military presence. Yet this was nothing to what could happen once the occupying power had gone.

Kalonji and Lwakabwanga knew that the future would depend on them. During that drive they renounced private ambition, and committed themselves to a new course of action. It was one of those rare moments when you felt that a true union of hearts and minds had taken place. Lwakabwanga was later to treasure his bowler hat as the only one of its kind in the Congo, and it would serve as a constant reminder of that trip to Oxford, and of those decisive moments.

As soon as he returned to Brussels, Kalonji wrote to the Minister for the Congo, M. Auguste De Schryver, with a request that Belgium send a Moral Re-Armament delegation to the Congo to present the film "Freedom", and to help bring peace to Kasai before Independence. The Minister replied that he saw no objection, but that Belgium was not in a position to finance the project.

6. FREEDOM

Is there any uniting force that can make it possible for an ethnically mixed population to live together in peace? Throughout history nations have attempted to answer this question in many ways, but none have found a fully satisfactory solution. Is it enough for the rights and opinions of each group to be respected? On such a basis, consensus is reached through protracted negotiations, and gradually, with much effort, a *modus vivendi* is developed. Or does it take a strong man, whether a benevolent father figure or a tyrant, who can impose his own solution by persuasion or force? Inevitably, Africa's newly independent states faced a choice. The powers of East and West propagated different political systems, each deploying a variety of enticements, deals and other forms of pressure to win their allegiance. Both East and West were convinced that their own model of society was the miracle cure the continent needed, and they embarked on an all-out cold war in their bid for world domination. Was there really no other alternative, or could Africa find a third way?

Studying the script, one can see how the film "Freedom" filled a significant gap in this debate, while offering an extraordinary lesson in political science.

"Freedom" was conceived almost by chance, in the heart of a large, supportive family. Not a biological family, nor a tribal one, but a cosmopolitan family of the kind which often forms around the source of a great spiritual movement. The place was Caux, a little Swiss village perched on a mountainside one thousand metres above Lake Geneva. For twelve years, people from around the world had been meeting there to study the world's problems from a global perspective. The initiator of this movement, Frank Buchman, had recently arrived from the United States, where he had presided over three successive international gatherings, one of them in Washington. He was now approaching his seventy-

seventh year. With the support of politicians from a number of countries, Buchman had launched a mission of some three hundred people, who at that time were touring the capitals of Asia. At his movement's Swiss headquarters, representatives from many countries gave him a welcome. Prominent among them, according to the centre's press service, were "those from Nigeria and the Gold Coast, who led the whole crowd with the captivating rhythms of African music, accompanied by the beat of African drums." The voices and sounds of Africa rang out over the Caux mountainside.

It was not the first time Africa had come to Caux. Nnamdi Azikiwe, Nigeria's outstanding nationalist leader, had stayed there in 1949 with a delegation from his country. Just before his departure, Zik, as he was commonly known, made the following statement, which is quoted in the Cambridge University Press edition of his collected speeches: "I have learned here that we should not seek to discover whether the British are right or the Nigerians are right, but we should try to find what is right for Nigeria. That is a great lesson."

Six years later, a number of Zik's colleagues were among those from Nigeria and Ghana (formerly the Gold Coast) who welcomed Buchman at Caux. But Europe exercised a powerful fascination for these men and women who had recently set foot in it for the first time. After a few days at the international conference they wanted to go and see London, Paris, Brussels... Buchman's question was, "What have you got to offer them?" That offended the Africans. After all Europe had inflicted on them, surely now it was their turn to receive something. They had come to look for ideas and methods, not to offer them. "Listen," Buchman told them, "Last night I didn't sleep, and I had an unexpected idea. Why don't you put on a play expressing the aspirations of the African peoples, and giving Africa's answer to the world's problems?"

Five hundred people gathered in the great hall of Caux Palace and tried to think of a plot. "It should be set in a market-place", volunteered one woman, her round, beaming face enveloped in a

blue headscarf. For her, as leader of the Lagos market women, the market represented the heart of African life. A politician spoke up: "It should show that political enemies can learn to work together." He led the parliamentary opposition in Nigeria's Eastern Region, and had witnessed the birth of a new spirit in the regional assembly following Zik's visit to Caux.

"Take three days to write the script", Buchman told them. "You are excused all practical duties in the centre." One week later the first performance of "Freedom" took place in the Caux theatre. The first act had been written by the Nigerians, the second by the South Africans, and the third by the Ghanaians. Deep in the heart of Africa, the imaginary kingdom of Bokondo was beginning to take shape.

Bokondo is proud of its ancestral traditions, yet it is no stranger to tribal feuding and the burden of a foreign yoke. Mutanda, a popular young leader from the majority tribe, stirs the people up against Mr. Roland, the colonial administrator. Despite the latter's long experience of the country, popular resentment against him grows, especially when he decides to increase taxes. This is the opportunity Mutanda has been waiting for, the chance to rally the other tribes and discredit their leaders for selling out to the colonial power. Fierce passions are roused; Mrs. Palaver mobilises the market women; a bomb explodes. Bokondo could be facing the worst violence in its history. At this point the Prime Minister of Bokondo's autonomous government returns from an international conference in Geneva. He proposes to each of the protagonists a different kind of revolution, more profound and further-reaching. The conflict moves onto a new plane. The struggle is no longer between people, but within the conscience of each individual. The ideas introduced by the Prime Minister succeed in bringing people together. A new, authentic freedom is born, reaching far beyond the frontiers of the young state of Bokondo.

Within a few months, the play "Freedom" had been performed in London, Paris, Bonn, Geneva, Helsinki, Copenhagen and Stockholm. It was received with enthusiasm, but it also sparked

controversy. The Africa portrayed on the stage was neither irrelevant nor out of date, but nor was it the Africa pictured by many passionate, bitter young Africans who had transposed Karl Marx's class struggle into a racial war. "The most unexpected show of the summer", commented the Paris daily "France-Soir" following a lively performance at the City University's theatre. The cast had been alternately cheered and booed by African students who made up at least half the audience.

"Freedom" challenged all people from every continent to break loose from hate, greed and the lust for power, the real sources of oppression. This was a message Africa could give to other civilisations, which for all their wealth and sophistication, had failed to reconcile the torn, embittered human race.

There were calls for "Freedom" to visit Africa; it was wanted in America. The actors had obtained temporary leave from their responsibilities in their respective countries, but it became impossible for them to meet all the demands. So they decided to make a film. For the opening scenes, five thousand members of the Yoruba tribe assembled on the orders of their traditional chiefs. Hausas and Ibos offered settings for filming the internal fighting in Bokondo as it struggles towards independence.

In every continent, the film revealed Africa as it really was during that pre-independence era. It was seen by the President of the Foreign Affairs Commission of the American Senate, and by MPs in Uttar Pradesh, India; it was shown in the Philippines and New Zealand, in Northern Ireland and Sri Lanka. The world première in Hollywood was a real confirmation of excellence, and an Iraqi delegate brought a greeting from members of the United Nations. But the greatest impact was in Africa, starting with South Africa where it was shown in both black and white universities. Several leaders at the time felt it encapsulated their deepest aspirations. When Nkrumah paid an official visit to Eastern Nigeria, Nnamdi Azikiwe arranged a showing for him. The film was dubbed into fifteen languages, including Swahili and Hausa; and the education service of the Congolese National Army, then commanded by General Mobutu, helped to produce it in Lingala. When I was in Dakar recently, I met a dis-

tinguished Muslim who told me that twenty-five years earlier, a fellow student had asked him to play a part in the Arabic version.

I have been able to give only a small indication of the scope and influence of this remarkable production, which the "Tribune de Genève" compared to "other artistic creations which were forerunners of major upheavals in the history of mankind". Let me give an outline of the philosophy which underpinned it.

In the imaginary kingdom of Bokondo, history is determined essentially by the morality of the protagonists. Political life is characterised by jealousy and intrigue among the petty chiefs, with each waiting for an opportunity to score points over the others. Aloof from this human jungle reigns a king, as yet unchallenged, who skillfully manoeuvres between the colonising powers and the growing aspirations of his subjects. He embodies the tradition of a chief who is respected for his wisdom and integrity. In contrast to the argument for historical determinism or the Marxist dialectic, in Bokondo everything depends on the quality of individuals. This simple, even simplistic vision, echoes the age-old story-line which presents life as a battle between the forces of good and evil. "Freedom" spoke to people's consciences, inviting them to play their part in righting past wrongs, starting with themselves. The battle line does not lie between parties or races, peoples or tribes, but through each human heart; and each person must assume responsibility and make his choice. In "Freedom" no one is judged and no one excluded, except the villain, who consistently exploits other people's weaknesses for his own corrupt ends. The message is that so long as a glimmer of sincerity remains, even the most unscrupulous individual can be touched, and experience a change of heart.

In fact what the film expresses is an evangelical perception of the world and of individual relationships, though this is not thrust explicitly upon the audience. Spiritual forces are at work throughout; yet the film is equally acceptable to the African animist tradition as to Christianity or Islam. This universal message emerged from countries in the process of transformation, situated at the frontier of Islamic and Christian influence, at a time when the

natural inclination of their people towards God might easily degenerate into confrontations between extremists. As the film ends the king of Bokondo makes clear the source of that uniting force: "A new age is dawning, based on the designs of God." He continues "God never planned a divided world for us. We brought division into our family life, our national life, when we stopped listening to Him. The chick that is nearest the mother hen eats the fattest worms... Now I see a new age planned on God's guidance. Empty hands will be filled with work, empty stomachs with food and empty hearts with an idea that really satisfies."

Following chapters relate the part the film played in the history of Zaire.



Nnamdi Azikiwe arranges a showing of the film "Freedom" for Kwame Nkrumah in Enugu.

7. BALUBA AND LULUA

Independence Day in Zaire, fixed for the 30th June 1960, was fast approaching. Action had to be taken quickly if Kasai was to be pacified before that date. As it was the number of incidents had increased in recent weeks, with each ethnic group blaming the other for starting the violence. Communities were being displaced and the refugees numbered tens of thousands. The Government's attempts at peace-making had failed, including the Lake Munkamba Convention. The opposing tribal chiefs had signed the Convention in January, but it was immediately denounced by the political leaders.

On 28th February 1960 however, the Brussels daily paper "Le Soir" reported that at the conclusion of the Round Table, a new Lulua-Baluba Convention had been agreed in the presence of Minister for the Congo De Schryver and Governor General Cornelis. Albert Kalonji and François Lwakabwanga were two of the signatories. Among other things this agreement stated that "all Congolese, irrespective of ethnic identity" might settle in the districts surrounding the provincial capital, a declaration which in effect authorised the Baluba to reside in Lulua territory. This ran contrary to the policy of segregation which the senior leaders had previously ratified, and which had led to the forceable displacement of large numbers of people.

Back at home the Lulua chiefs rejected the Brussels Convention, but on their delegates' return from the Round Table they allowed themselves to be persuaded. The Lulua Council, the tribe's political voice consisting of prominent Lulua personalities and intellectuals, issued a statement backing the agreement. In it appeared this remarkable phrase: "It is high time we discarded our bitterness and looked confidently to the future".

The message of the film "Freedom" had played its part in all this. Lwakabwanga had been to Caux on two occasions, first with Baluba representatives, and the second time accompanying the

Paramount Lulua Chief Kalamba. It was during these visits that the decision was made to send an international team to the Congo to show the film there. But funding posed a problem, so a collection was made in Caux itself. Dr. William Close, an American surgeon, was inspired to give the money from the sale of a house in the United States; he subsequently dedicated several years to the service of the Congo.

A team was assembled. As well as Dr. Close himself, it comprised two of the actors from "Freedom", Ifoghale Amata of Nigeria and Manasseh Moerane of South Africa; two Kenyans who had taken part in the Mau Mau revolt, Nahashon Ngare and Lennart Kibuthu; a white settler from Kenya, Wilfred Hopcraft; an Afrikaaner from South Africa, Bremer Hofmeyr; two Swiss, Eric Junod and myself; and lastly a trio of young Americans, Steve, Paul and Ralph Colwell, three brothers who wrote songs equally well in French and in the local languages, and whose music the whole of the Congo would soon be humming. Later we were joined by Bremer Hofmeyr's wife Agnes and by Irene Laure, who had played a distinguished role in the post-war reconciliation between France and Germany.

François Lwakabwanga and a young Muluba, Pierre Mbale, who were going ahead to prepare the ground, asked me to accompany them. We landed in Leopoldville on 1st May 1960, followed by Dr. Close two days later. After a few calls, most notably on Governor General Cornelis to let him know of our presence, we departed for Luluaburg where the rest of the team joined us.

I discovered some notes I made at the time, reminding me of the key events of that journey to Kasai. Ten days after our arrival the international group entered Lulua territory as guests of Chief Kalamba, who had recently returned from Europe. In Demba, site of the Chief's official residence, the film "Freedom" was presented in the open air to hundreds of people. A few days later it was shown in Tshikaji, the Muluba heartland. Then in Luluabourg, every corner of the cinema was packed with Lulua and Baluba for a showing arranged by the Mayor. He had alerted

the police as a precautionary measure, but it proved unnecessary. In fact one dignitary was so impressed by the reconciliation between Bokondo's political opponents, that he got up at the end of the film and conspicuously went to shake the hand of a leader from the other ethnic group. Incidents like this may seem trivial; but in a volatile situation where young boys from the age of ten were prepared to resort to any means, the tide was beginning to turn. People were realising that they too bore some responsibility.

It was during our visit to Chief Kalamba's village that we heard about one extraordinary event. After the film, as we sat by candle-light savouring the goat prepared for us by the village women, François Lwakabwanga told us the story. That very afternoon, at the entrance to the village, a truck carrying 43 Baluba had broken down - a not infrequent occurrence in the Congo. Only a month earlier on the Mabamba road, a truck crowded with Lulua had been attacked by the local Baluba. This could be the villagers' perfect opportunity for revenge. The "Freedom" team were expected that same evening. The Paramount Chief had seen the film in Europe. He gave orders that the Baluba should be helped to repair their truck, and sent on their way. François had simply drawn up a formal list of the truck's occupants. He showed it to us in the half-light, knowing full well that these people were lucky to be alive.

Back in Luluaburg, in a radio interview, we told the story. The young Belgian reporter was reluctant to believe us, and uncertain whether to broadcast it. Given the present climate in the province, an incident like this seemed impossible. The Belgian colonial administrator, who remained at his post for a few more weeks, confirmed the story, and only then would the reporter release the news, which was also published in the local newspaper.

All this did not mean the end of the troubles between Baluba and Lulua. Friction between the ethnic groups, and disputes within their ranks were to continue in the months following independence. The people re-grouped in their own ethnic territories. François Lwakabwanga was later to become Governor of North Kasai, a focal point for Lulua aspirations. As for Albert Kalonji,

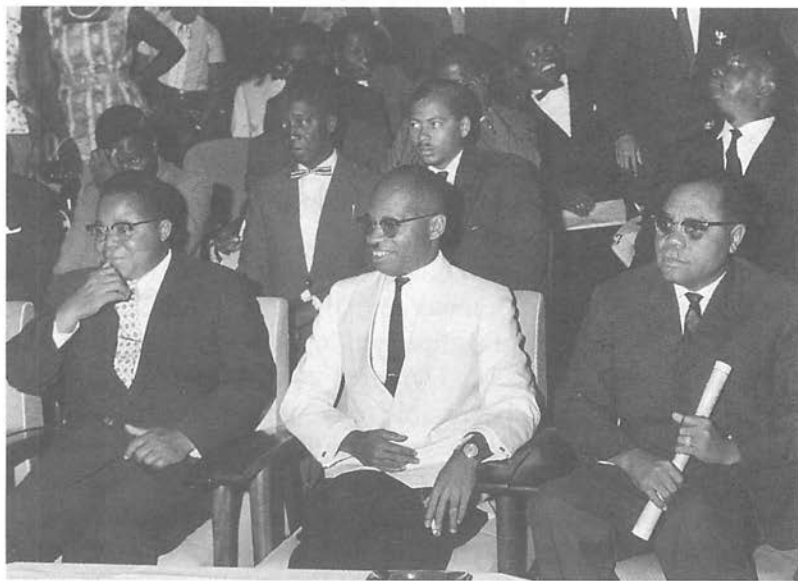
on the day after independence he declared himself Mulopwe, or “Emperor” of South Kasai. A disastrous move, which almost ended in civil war with his fellow countrymen who disputed his authority.

Does this discredit the work of the film “Freedom”, and the international team who accompanied it? Yes and no. We were certainly a trifle naive if we imagined that deep, one might say ancestral divisions were somehow going to disappear. Nonetheless, it seems undeniable that relations between the two groups were profoundly influenced by the message of reconciliation in the film. A number of individuals from both sides vouched for this when we met them later. In 1961, when things had begun to calm down, Albert Kalonji and Paramount Chief Kalamba wished to demonstrate that a new page had been turned by staging a great display of reconciliation in Kinshasa, in the presence of the Head of State, Mr. Kasa-Vubu. “Freedom” was shown to the large crowd gathered for the occasion, some 5000 people from both ethnic groups. In Kasai itself, Lwakabwanga told me, both sides had already performed the traditional ceremonies of reconciliation: goats and chickens had been slaughtered, cats buried alive and other rites carried out.

So much for the official demonstrations. Others took place in the secrecy of the heart, but were no less real. At the end of July 1960, Albert Kalonji had summoned his supporters to his political stronghold in Kinshasa. They met in an inner courtyard, surrounded by brick walls, accessible only through a narrow door on each side. The film was to be shown, and François Lwakabwanga was invited to speak. I witnessed the inner struggle this invitation provoked in François. The smallest incident, the slightest sign of hostility from any one of those present, would be enough to ensure that he never left the stronghold alive. Yet if he refused to go, it would be a denial of all he had struggled for since the decision made in Oxford with Kalonji, to reconcile their two peoples. Should he take the risk? Lwakabwanga hesitated all day. Finally he decided to place himself in God’s hands and go. He spoke at the end of the film, and was applauded. I felt that I had been privi-

leged to witness a moment which would live in my memory for the rest of my life.

Of the lessons which can be drawn from these events, there is one which applies to the realm of political thought. The conviction that it is possible to live in harmony was first born in a small number of people, and gradually spread to the whole population. To the colonial administration, segregation was the only possible course. But in the life of nations, just as in families, separation always entails suffering. Where conflict has become deeply embittered it may be necessary to separate the protagonists; giving legal sanction to such separation however, is never satisfactory, and a lasting solution has still, one day, to be found.



August 1961. The official reconciliation between the Lulua and Baluba tribes in Kinshasa. Left to right: President of the Republic Joseph Kasa-Vubu, Baluba leader Albert Kalonji, Paramount Chief Kalamba of the Lulua.

8. POWER STRUGGLE

The Zairians, Patrice Lumumba once said, are like the Belgians, just as the inhabitants of former French colonies take after the French, and those of English speaking territories retain some typically British characteristics. He was quite right: the Zairians acquired a number of Belgian attributes, and the weeks leading up to independence provided a striking illustration of this phenomenon.

One year earlier, on 4th January 1959, riots had shaken Belgian rule in the Congo to its very foundations, precipitating the pledge of independence. A long period of indecision and intrigue among the Belgian authorities followed, both in Brussels and Leopoldville. Contemporary accounts, particularly the detailed reports in the files of the Centre for Socio-Political Research and Information in Brussels, convey the impression that despite the urgent matter in hand, the whole long drawn-out debate focused on whether or not to replace the Congo's Governor General, Mr. Cornelis, and the Minister for the Congo and Ruanda Urundi, Mr. Hemelrijk. The latter was indeed replaced, but when I arrived in the Congo in early May 1960 a successor had still not been found for Mr. Cornelis. But I do not want to be drawn into the maze of political wheeling and dealing. To the outside observer, the protracted negotiations among the Belgians which preceded the setting up of the first Congolese Government, and those leading to the election of the new Republic's first President in the Congo, were both equally obscure.

As political parties emerged, the Congolese leadership formally split. Some, like Kasa-Vubu, whose power-base comprised a limited area, favoured federalism; others, notably Patrice Lumumba, advocated a unitary state. Yet again, this rift was the mirror image of the language divide which had split the Belgians for over a century.

With hindsight, the faith that western democracy would be an adequate system to resolve these differences and shape the future

of that vast land seems naive; but despite the odds, hope was in fashion, and baseless optimism was preferable to bottomless despair. Our team was as guilty as any of this blinkered idealism. Anyway, the die had been cast, and now there could be no turning back. In this spirit we set about inviting the leaders and people of the country to see our film, which we offered as “a contribution towards the success of an independent Congo”.

The creation of new national institutions took place in the context of a power struggle extending far beyond Belgian-Congolese relations. This huge country, with its fabulous mining resources, had become an object of international speculation; and the super-powers, like vultures over a carcass, were battling to control it. The Khrushchev era in Moscow marked the last of the powerful Communist regimes to believe in world domination through ideological control. Khrushchev himself sent paternal messages to the Congo, and his envoys were on the spot. Shortly after independence even the USSR football team arrived to challenge the Congo in the great Leopoldville Stadium: in the spirit of comradeship between the two peoples, it was agreed that the match should end with a draw! The KGB apparatus had concentrated its efforts on certain Congolese leaders, in particular Gizenga, who was being trained in Moscow at the time of the Round Table. He later won renown as the leader of the rebel government in Stanleyville, which claimed more Congolese and European victims than all the other incidents of this turbulent period in Zaire's history put together. Gizenga was supported and inspired by a Guinean woman, Mme Blouin, who was considered by some to be a direct agent of Moscow. The Americans were there too, and the head of the CIA in the Congo, a man called Ted Devlin, attempted to extend his influence to the very heart of our team.

Industry also had vested interests, not least Union Minière, owner of the copper mines in Haut-Katanga. As the situation in the Congo deteriorated, the preservation of the mines became an urgent priority, and Katanga's efforts to break away were partly driven by Belgian financial concerns. A few months later, at a time when the entire country seemed to be falling into complete

chaos, including Katanga, one of the director generals of Union Miniere came to visit us in Caux. His company, he told me, wanted to send some money to support our work in the Congo. For us the sum was significant; for them it was a mere pittance, and no strings were attached. Perhaps I should have turned it down. In the event it enabled us to continue our campaign for the next two years, by financing travel and maintaining a small team in the country. Money aside, one very important point emerged from all this: namely, that among the protagonists in the Congolese imbroglio realisation was slowly dawning that without a bare minimum of real understanding between them, no political solution was possible.

We did not seek official support, as fundamentally our work consisted of person-to-person contact, believing as we did that it is people who determine history. But an occasional helping hand from official quarters was not unknown, and that was how part of our team set off in a Belgium Army DC3 vehicle in early June 1960 on a tour of five provincial capitals, with the aim of showing the film "Freedom" to the newly elected Congolese authorities, the Belgian governors and the religious leaders. In this way we visited Coquilhatville in Equateur, Stanleyville in the Eastern Province, Bukavu in Kivu, Elisabethville in Katanga, and for the second time Luluaburg in Kasai (these were their names at the time). This practical assistance from the colonial army was made possible by the Minister for African Affairs, M. Ganshof van der Meersch. He had arrived at his post in Leopoldville on May 6th, and from then on became the Belgian Government's primary representative in the Congo. He was acquainted with the work of Moral Re-Armament, and his wife was in touch with the "Freedom" group. She played an important part behind the scenes in facilitating contacts and meetings for us.

Genuine mutual understanding never comes easily. It has a price. François Lwakabwanga recalls: "Each morning we would gather before or after breakfast to pool our ideas for the day. One day I had noted down that I ought to apologise to the Governor General, because during a meeting in Brussels I had been very

rude to him in front of the other participants. He had blushed, but made no reply. I had treated him disrespectfully. The rest of the group thought this was a good idea, and a good plan for the day. We telephoned, and Mr. Cornelis gave us an appointment. I began right away by making my apology. He was most astonished and asked me what had brought about this change in such a short time. That evening we invited him to see "Freedom", and he came with his son. The following day he invited us to his home..."

Although the basic procedure had been agreed at the Round Table, it was predictable that the formation of independent Congo's first government, and the election of its first Head of State, would be accompanied by endless discussions and deals followed by unlikely alliances and spectacular denunciations. Only after several unsuccessful attempts was Patrice Lumumba able to present a government to the House, one week before Independence Day. The day before the announcement we were eating in a restaurant in town, when François Lwakabwanga appeared with Moise Tshombe of Katanga. Tshombe was grinning from ear to ear with his characteristic infectious smile, and obviously well-pleased. He told us he had achieved his objective, namely that the Ministry of Defence would be managed jointly by the members of the Government, but that its secretariat would be entrusted to a member of his own party, the Conakat. In addition, the Home Affairs Ministry was to go to Kasa-Vubu's Abako Party, which shared Katanga's federalist goals. Tshombe could return to Elisabethville with the assurance that a united Congo was still viable.

But the list of Ministries announced by Lumumba the following day did not correspond to these promises. The Prime Minister himself assumed responsibility for the Ministry of Defence, a move which could not fail to alarm those who already mistrusted him. Back in his own capital, Tshombe lost no time in declaring that the government was "in the hands of extremists" who intended to "impose a unitary structure which we will not accept at any price".

Others too were disappointed. Albert Kalonji, leader of the Kasai Baluba, received no portfolio, and his supporters organised demonstrations in the city. However, the immediate issue which had the whole country up in arms was the election forty-eight hours later of a Head of State. The two rival candidates were Joseph Kasa-Vubu and Jean Bolikango, to whom Lumumba had promised his support, only to withdraw it the next day. Kasa-Vubu was elected by a comfortable majority in the first round, which seemed the most sensible solution, given the opposing political forces at the time. On the Belgian side official satisfaction was expressed. Minister for the Congo De Schryver was pleased that "Belgium's bold political strategy for independence" had made "a good start".

The "Courrier Africain" from the Centre of Socio-Political Research and Information in Brussels reported on 1st July 1960: "In Messrs. Lumumba and Kasa-Vubu, the Congo has appointed for itself two leaders with real power, whose most pressing obligation is to reach some mutual agreement, or at least to coexist." The emphasis was on the relationship between these two men, upon which everything depended. Unfortunately, developments during the next months showed that coexistence was going to create more problems between them than solutions. The situation called for men who were not only free from private ambition, but who possessed an unshakeable integrity which would have enabled them to withstand the conflicting pressures which came to bear on them, both from without and within.

Meanwhile we ourselves kept the flame of hope burning, while doing what we could to maintain contact with those whose decisions would influence the future. Some extracts from letters I wrote to my wife provide a glimpse into the ways we used our time.

Leopoldville, June 26th 1960

"A showing of "Freedom" is in progress as I write. In the front row are Prime Minister Patrice Lumumba, Deputy Prime Minister Antoine Gizenga, Belgian Minister for African Affairs Ganshof van der Meersch, Minister for the Congo Auguste De Schryver,

as well as fourteen members of the new Government and a good group of MPs and senators. There is a line of brand new Ministers' cars in front of the building, all Ford-Galaxies with the new Congolese flag flown proudly on the bonnet: a big yellow star on a dark blue background with six little stars along the pole, representing the six provinces. Here inside I can make out a group of young people dressed in white at the back of the hall. Those are the chauffeurs, whom we invited in to watch the film as well.

“All this is the result of a thought which came to Mme Ganshof van der Meersch yesterday morning during a time of reflection. Things happened very quickly. She arranged for one of us to be invited to a luncheon which the two Belgian Ministers were giving that day (yesterday), in honour of the new President of the Republic Mr. Kasa-Vubu, the Prime Minister and his Government. Mme Ganshof was hoping that our colleague would suggest a showing of the film to Lumumba, but she found she was sitting next to him, and had to make the suggestion herself! Lumumba accepted immediately, and this date was made which is still in progress now. Irène Laure said a few words of introduction.

“Lumumba has finally put together a government, a “national union”, with the backing of the main parties. But it seems that he has not kept all his promises. He is running the Defence Ministry himself, for reasons one can guess. He has also put some of his own M.N.C. men in charge of Ministries he had promised to others. It would have been reasonable to expect Jean Bolikango to be appointed Deputy Prime Minister, after his defeat in the presidential election, as he is one of the most senior leaders and a moderate. Instead the job has gone to Gizenga, the leader of the P.S.A. who recently returned from a trip to Moscow. The Communist woman from Guinea has got him under her thumb - the one I told you about in my last letter (Mme Blouin).

“Last night some members of Bolikango's tribe, the Bangala from Equateur, attacked a group from Abako, the party of President-elect Joseph Kasa-Vubu. Three dead, noses cut off, bowels hacked open with machetes. This morning, as soon as

they found out what had happened, Ifoghale and Manasseh, the two leading actors in “Freedom”, went to look for Bolikango, and found him just as he was about to unleash a wave of violence by his people. There would have been carnage in the local town, with countless huts up in flames. Bolikango was surrounded by some of his most hard-line advisors, but Ifoghale and Manasseh talked to them for a good hour, and finally managed to make them see sense.”

Friday 1st July

“We have just spent an extraordinary hour with Jean Bolikango, who came to lunch in our flat. He repeated several times that the arrival of Ifoghale, Manasseh and two other colleagues the other day was providential. He said: “I was in total confusion, ready to stop at nothing, and on the verge of making a decision for the worst. You don’t know what you did by coming to see me at that precise moment. I don’t know what brought you, but it undoubtedly averted bloodshed. I and my country will always be grateful to you for it.”

Some notes by Lucie Perrenoud, a Swiss woman who was accompanying Irène Laure, and who was also present at the meal with Bolikango, serve to confirm the above. This is what she wrote in her diary on July 1st:

“Bolikango came for lunch with a friend - late, but we were still cooking the fish. He listened and talked. Manasseh and our two former Mau-Maus from Kenya, Lennart and Nahashon, took part in the conversation. Bolikango said: “After my defeat (in the presidential election) my mind was clouded, I was volatile, easily swayed and ready to go to any lengths, even to the extent of withdrawing to my province with my tribe, leaving a trail of devastation behind in Leo. I was surrounded by men who were spoiling for a fight. I didn’t know what to do. Then you arrived. Your visit and your words saved me from spilling blood. I don’t know what prompted you to come. After your visit I could see clearly again, and now I no longer think about my defeat. You came to my help.

I took the opportunity to say things to my men which I would never have dared to say if I had been alone. What you did was important not only for me, but for my country.”

The letter to my wife continues:

“The day before yesterday Albert Kalonji came to supper. Irène completely won his heart with stories about her grandchildren. Kalonji has also been excluded from government. His people demonstrated in front of the Palace of the Nation in protest. There were several hundred people waving placards: “No government without Kalonji - divide Kasai”. No incidents, fortunately. Kalonji is very bitter. Let us hope that he finds the same experience as Bolikango, who told us “I am completely at peace”.

“Yesterday afternoon, after the meal with Bolikango, we all went to an “official” football match, where the two best teams in the Congo were playing. The stadium was full to bursting - eighty thousand people. After the match there was a dance display by the different tribes. It was quite a sight, and the rhythms were entrancing!

“In the evening we all attended the official Independence dinner, along with between one thousand five hundred and two thousand other people. Irène Laure found herself next to the German Government representative Mr. Lubke (later to become President of the Federal Republic), while Bremer Hofmeyr (from South Africa) sat next to Mr. Hallstein, President of the Common Market.”



End of July 1960. The showing of "Freedom" for Lumumba's Government. Distinguishable from left to right are: Messrs. Ganshof van der Meersch, Bomboko, De Schryver, Lumumba, Gizenga.



Lumumba congratulates one of the actors at the exit.

9. 30th JUNE 1960

Mutanda: All our misery has been ushered in by the oppressor.

Roland: But Mutanda, my country has saved your people from slavery and barbarism and every form of human degradation.

Mutanda: And who begged you to save my people from slavery, barbarism and every form of human degradation?

Roland: I wonder where you would have been if my grandfathers had not sacrificed their blood for yours?

Mutanda: I wonder too where you and your nation would have been had you not come and carried away the blessings that God gave us, for your own benefits? Whenever I think of the past, my blood boils and I am all fire for vengeance, and I swear we shall have our revenge.

This extract of dialogue from “Freedom” helps to explain why the film made such a powerful impact in all the African countries where it was shown during the independence years. But even more than in other places, it seemed to be tailor-made for the situation in the Congo and the rival personalities there. On the fateful and long-awaited 30th June 1960, there was an obvious parallel between Roland and the King of Belgium, who had arrived in Leopoldville the day before to confer independence officially upon the colony. Mutanda clearly personified Lumumba, while the level-headed Prime Minister of the imaginary Kingdom of Bokondo with his unflagging nationalist zeal could only be the new President of the Republic, Joseph Kasa-Vubu.

An air of expectancy could be felt throughout Leopoldville that stifling morning of 30th June. “Independence cha-cha” was the name of a popular tune which was playing in every bar in the

city. People intended to celebrate; but at the same time there was an unspoken anxiety about what would happen next. Crowds pressed around the entrance of the Palace of the Nation, trying to catch a glimpse of the dignitaries, especially King Baudoin, the Bwana Kitoko, whose visit to the Congo five years earlier had provoked such euphoria.

I was there too, in the midst of the crowd, when the Sovereign arrived at the Palace at ten o'clock in the morning. Profiting from my slight build, I managed to slip through to the front, and I remember being squeezed against a pillar, thinking perversely how easy it would be to assassinate a Head of State! The ceremony inside was about to begin, but the Ministers who had attended the showing of "Freedom" four days earlier could not have suspected that the film's fictional dialogue was about to be repeated in reality, almost word for word.

The King: Independence in the Congo marks the culmination of the great work which King Leopold II conceived and initiated with tenacious courage, and which Belgium has tirelessly carried on.

Lumumba: (whose speech was not anticipated by protocol) Men and women of the Congo... Let this illustrious day, 30th June 1960, be engraved indelibly upon your hearts. Proudly teach its significance to your children, so that they in turn will tell their children and grandchildren the glorious story of our battle for freedom... A battle fought with tears, blood and fire, of which we are deeply and eternally proud; a just and noble battle; the battle which liberated us from the humiliating servitude which was so violently forced upon us.

The King: For eighty years Belgium has sent the flower of her youth to this land, first to deliver the Congo Basin from the execrable slave trade which was decimating her population, and latterly to reconcile ethnic groups who were bitter enemies, but who are now preparing together to become Africa's biggest State.

Lumumba: We have endured irony, insults and blows, morning, noon and night, for the sole crime of being black. Nor have we forgotten that a black was addressed as “tu”, not because he was a friend, but because the respectful “vous” was reserved for whites.

The King: At this historic moment we should turn our thoughts to those first pioneers of African emancipation, and to their successors who made the Congo what it is today. They deserve our admiration and your gratitude, for it was they who dedicated all their efforts, and sometimes their very lives to a great ideal, and so brought you peace, enriching your moral and material heritage.

Lumumba: We have endured appalling suffering on account of our political opinions or religious beliefs. Our forefathers were exiles in their own country, and their fate was worse than death itself. Let us not forget the firing squads before which so many of our brothers died, or the dungeons into which they were cast when they refused to submit to the law of oppression and exploitation. (Applause)

In actual fact, these speeches were delivered in their entirety one after the other, not cut and rearranged in this disrespectful manner. But the effect is undeniably striking. It lays bare the real feelings beneath the outward formality of the two communities, between whom a confrontation was now imminent. Before the morning was over, rumours about the incident were circulating round the capital. Would the King leave without attending the festivities? Some of his advisors were of the opinion that the insult was intolerable. Harmony was restored however at the lunch following the signing of the Independence Act, when Lumumba smoothed things over by proposing an almost affectionate toast to the Belgian King, paying “solemn homage to him, and to the noble people he represents, for the achievements of three quarters of a century.”

Many people have commented on this incident. Lumumba's unscheduled speech took everyone by surprise; yet the opportunity to make it was given him by Mr. Kasongo, who as President of the Chamber of Deputies chaired the proceedings. Moreover, the text of the speech had been distributed to journalists at the very last moment, immediately after the Belgians and Congolese had completed the advance exchange of speeches dictated by diplomatic protocol. But the fundamental question remains unanswered. Who was the inspiration behind Lumumba's speech? And who had written the speech for the King? The ripples on that first day of independence were caused by invisible undercurrents whose sources lay outside the Congo in other power bases, or in some revolutionaries' lair.

A few days later, while on a visit to Usumbura, the Belgian Minister for African Affairs Mr. Ganshof van der Meersch attempted to mitigate the insult to Belgium and its King by describing it as "the residue of a Congolese complex towards their former masters, which for the first time could be freely expressed in a dialogue between equal partners." In fact the day's events revealed a pattern of Belgian-Zairian relations, of furious arguments followed by reconciliation, which has been repeated again and again over the last thirty years. Even as I write these lines, I see in my newspaper that the Belgian Minister for Foreign Affairs Mark Eyskens and his Zairian counterpart Nguza Karl-I-Bond have just signed an agreement in Rabat, resolving a difference which has divided them since last October.

On the evening of June 30th our entire group were among some two thousand guests at the Independence Dinner. The programme of celebrations included an item by the three Colwell Brothers, who had composed a "Hymn to the Congo" especially for the occasion.



Joseph Kasa-Vubu receives the "Freedom" group formally ... and informally.

10. THE RADIO

The euphoria was short-lived. Within a few days the Congo had become the focus of international attention, rousing embassies out of their complacency and increasing hostility between East and West. By July 1st there were already reports of inter-tribal fighting in Kasai, and several incidents occurred in Leopoldville (re-named Kinshasa). On July 4th in Equateur Province, a strike led to scenes of looting and violence, and was crushed by the Civil Guard, leaving sixteen dead and thirty injured. The first signs of discontent in Leopoldville's military base began to emerge on the same day. The fight for control was on.

The Congo's new leaders lacked experience, and the Belgians were still there to support them if needed, as agreed in the cooperation accords. The Commander of the Civil Guard, General Janssens, who was keenly aware of his responsibilities, summoned the officers and soldiers of the Leopold military base, and told them: "I made no promises. The Civil Guard will fulfill its duties as before." On the blackboard he wrote: "Pre-independence = post-independence". From a strictly military standpoint the equation was accurate, but its effect on morale was deplorable. Mutiny broke out that same day in the Thysville military base, which lay half way between Kinshasa and the river estuary. From there it spread like wildfire across the whole military establishment.

Amidst this growing instability, the "Freedom" party stayed true to its mission of reconciliation, doing what it could while trying to keep calm in the face of chaos. On July 3rd Amata and Moerane visited Prime Minister Lumumba, and on the 4th, the whole group was received by President Kasa-Vubu. The two men disliked each other, and their enmity only intensified as time went on. When Lumumba went to Camp Leo early in the morning of July 6th, the day after Janssen's tactless order, he too was booed by the soldiers; mutineers scattered across the city.

We were fortunate to have been lent a flat on the top floor of a big modern building opposite the Central Post Office. From the balcony we had a prime view of events as they unfolded, and we watched the drunken, armed mutineers take control of the street below. On the night of the 7th panic set in among the Europeans. At midnight we were roused by a ring at the doorbell, and instructed that all Europeans should assemble in a big hotel in the city. Confusion reigned in the hotel lobby, and the first signs of a total collapse of cohesion and leadership in the community became evident. No one knew what to do, and it was mutually decided that home was still the safest place to be. The rest of the night was spent wide awake, waiting for further developments.

Those days certainly tested the unity of our team. With antagonism between blacks and whites intensifying all around us, impelled largely by fear on both sides, the pressure upon us was considerable. There was a mass exodus of Europeans who either headed in droves for the airport, hoping to get on a flight, or else made for the port to try and cross the river into Brazzaville. Some were in such haste they abandoned their cars with the key in the ignition - obviously not expecting to need them again.

Then came the announcement of the return of the Belgian paras; and before long we could see them from our look-out on the balcony, parading across the Grand Boulevard in their armoured vehicles. The demonstration was aimed ostensibly at guaranteeing the safety of the Europeans, but it provoked anger and panic among the Congolese. At the United Nations there was a general outcry from the Third World delegations, backed by the Eastern countries. U.N. forces, mainly recruited from other African countries, took over a few days later. During the Belgian "occupation" the Europeans in our group could move safely around the city, and took responsibility for buying in supplies. Once the Ghanaian soldiers had arrived and were posted at fifty-metre intervals along the Boulevard, it was wiser to let our former Mau-Maus go to the market.

The team voted unanimously to stay. To leave at the very moment when we might perhaps be able to help would have been

cowardly. When the Belgian soldiers returned, we had seen from our balcony two men using every ounce of their persuasive skill to avert a worse catastrophe: two courageous men who did not hesitate to lay their own necks on the line. These were Bishop Malula and Justin Bomboko, a dynamic young politician, later to become Zaire's Minister for Foreign Affairs. We looked for ways of supporting men like these. Whatever declarations might be made at the international level, the future of the country would be decided right there in front of us, and would depend on the response of its newly liberated people.

In the days that followed, the situation seemed to become more stable. Now that Belgium had withdrawn its troops, the country was under United Nations' protection. It was possible to move about freely once more, at least during daylight hours. This was the period when we got to know Anicet Kashamura, who occupied the post of Minister for Information in Lumumba's Government. He said to us: "You have something to offer the country. We must give you some air-time." The request was put to us just like that, almost incidentally. How could we refuse? Alright, we said. "Come to the studio tomorrow. You can start right away."

At that time radio was the primary means of communication for all Africa. In Congolese towns and villages, programmes were broadcast to the whole population through loud-speakers. We were being offered the chance to address the entire Zairian nation daily - or at least those who understood French. What should we say? Our fifteen minute programme was recorded in the afternoon and broadcast twice, once at eight o'clock in the evening, and once at six o'clock the following morning, the time when the day's activities began. On the Equator, day breaks without a dawn all year round, and it becomes fully light within minutes. "There Is An Answer", the programme introduced on July 13th by Minister Kashamura, was to have extraordinary repercussions. We received thousands of letters of support, not only from all corners of the Congo, but from countries as distant as Guinea and Niger. In the capital itself the impact was such that it became the subject of political controversy.

To begin with the programmes featured the personal testimonies of members of our group. The Nigerians, Kenyans and South Africans aroused particular interest: "There is an answer. People find it when they relinquish their hatred and personal ambition and start to listen to the voice of God who speaks within each one. We have tried it, it works. In our countries conflicts have been resolved when leaders have applied this solution." This simple message went straight to people's hearts. Evidently we had a big audience, for people would stop us in the street to tell us their impressions.

On its thirteenth day, the programme featured Japan, and the story of a government minister who was blackmailed by his Communist mistress. The aim was to illustrate the relevance of a morally upright private life for those who want to govern a country. At the scheduled time we had gathered together to listen to the programme recorded that afternoon, when to our great astonishment we heard a woman's voice announce "This is African moral re-armament", followed by an anti-imperialist tirade interspersed with military marches.

The concept of Pan-Africanism was in the air. It had its theoreticians and its skilled politicians, such as Ghana's President Kwame Nkrumah, who had kept up a correspondence with Patrice Lumumba since the latter's visit to Accra in late 1958. By speaking of "African moral re-armament", the radio presenter clearly wanted to build on the success of our broadcasts, while injecting a xenophobic bias.

Pan-Africanism in itself was as valid a political option as, for instance, European integration today. The trouble was that behind the scenes there was a deliberate attempt by Moscow to hijack the idea with the help of the international Communist apparatus. Their goal was to take advantage of the withdrawal of Western colonial powers and the wave of African independences, to create an African continent which pledged its allegiance to Communism. In this context, the story of the Japanese minister and his Communist mistress acted like a red flag to a bull.

I have already mentioned Mme Andrée Blouin, a Guinean who was in the Congo at that time. She was a light-skinned woman of mixed race, an extremely beautiful and imposing figure who was rumoured to be particularly intimate with Vice Prime Minister Antoine Gizenga, the Congolese leader who was undergoing training in Moscow at the time of the Round Table in Brussels. Mme Blouin had been officially appointed Head of Protocol for the Government, and it was her voice we heard over the radio that day. We were acquainted with Mme Blouin. She made no secret of closely monitoring our actions, and shortly after her "pirate" programme we were informed that we were being taken off the air, by order of the Government.

We found ourselves involved in the war of ideas and struggle for dominance between the great powers, just when the Kremlin leader, Nikita Khrushchev, was stepping up his covert advances to the Congolese leaders and people, and when Patrice Lumumba was threatening to request Russian military support as a means of putting pressure on the United Nations. We contacted several members of the Government, and learned from them that there was a hard core of cabinet members who were influenced by Mme Blouin and her associates, and who were determined to get their own way. One member of the Government, Delvaux, gathered together twelve of his colleagues to protest fiercely against a Government decision about which they had not even been consulted. Newspapers ran articles complaining of "Communist infiltration in the radio". But it was all to no avail. The programmes were suspended throughout the period of turmoil which overtook the Congo in subsequent weeks. They resumed however in November 1960, when the interim government of university graduates was set up, and continued until August 1962.

This did not mean the end of the ideological battle for control of the radio. Every political faction aspired to use the airwaves for their own propaganda purposes, despite the large contingent of United Nations troops who guarded the studios. To this end, Patrice Lumumba arrived one morning with a truck full of soldiers and ordered the Ghanaian duty officer to let him in. As it

happened, the officer had had the inspired idea in the middle of the previous night of making his men dig trenches, in case of just such an eventuality. This enabled him to avert a bloody confrontation. We had got to know the Ghanaian troops, both officers and soldiers, upon whom our safety depended, and they struck us as a particularly disciplined group. As for Mme Blouin, she was expelled from the Congo by the interim government. Shortly afterwards she went to stay in Lausanne where she had links with certain leading figures in Vaud Canton, the location of Moral Re-armament's international centre, Caux. Was this mere coincidence? I have never been able to verify.

Andrée Blouin was part of an international network; so too were we. I have already spoken about our involvement in tackling America's race issue, the contacts we made in Atlanta, and the impact of the musical "The Crowning Experience" on the city's life. During July 1960, one of the first copies of the film version of "The Crowning Experience" reached Leopoldville. A public showing was arranged immediately in one of the city cinemas. U.N. Assistant Secretary General Ralph Bunche, who was then head of its operations in the Congo, came to see it. Bunche had achieved the highest position of any black American in international life.

My time in the Congo was drawing to an end. I had other commitments in Europe, and I was eager to rejoin my wife who had been following events from Paris. The Press there had seized upon the situation in the Congo to make sensational headlines, and they gave the impression that the place was crumbling around us, and all that remained of Leopoldville was smoking rubble. In fact most of the inhabitants were still carrying on their daily lives in relative tranquillity. Nevertheless, control of individual movement was being tightened: one day a 6pm to 6am curfew was imposed; then meetings of more than five people were banned. The Postal and Telecommunications Service was on strike, except for the telex section, which became our sole means of communication with the outside world.

Some of my colleagues extended their stay by several weeks, and others came to join them. Two members of our team, Dr. Close and Eric Junod, devoted several years of their lives to the Congo. I myself returned in 1962, and I twice visited Rwanda and Burundi when they attained their independence. This is not the place to launch into an account of the ethnic conflicts which have torn apart the peoples of those two countries on various occasions over the years, both before and after that date. But there too we met people who were prepared to renounce their bitterness, despite the suffering which each of them had experienced.

11. REFLECTION

This is a good point at which to stand back and evaluate our involvement in Zaire. I have described how an international team comprising different nationalities, races, cultures, ages and religions, intervened in a crisis. But what did we hope to achieve? Others had already taken charge of Zaire at that time. The United Nations had been called in as a last resort, to avert a total collapse of law and order, and to seek solutions to the various conflicts - especially that caused by Katanga's secession. There could be no question of our little team trying to compete with the work of the U.N., whose presence was legitimised by a mandate from the international community, and whose resources were vastly superior.

Although a number of "officials" were kindly disposed towards us, we were simply private citizens, with no official backing. We had come in response to an invitation with a specific purpose: to pacify Kasai. I have described how this mission was to some extent accomplished. Then requests for help began to arrive from other areas, and before long we felt involved in the whole country's future, and wanted to do everything we could to make the coming of independence a success. Once having identified a clear objective like that, it became all too easy to react to events on a short-term basis, alternating between extreme optimism and despair.

To give an example from my own experience, I remember being deeply distressed in 1966 on reading a press account of the hanging of the "Pentecost Conspirators". On the Monday morning after Pentecost, President Mobutu announced on Radio Congo that a plot against his person had been uncovered, and those responsible were to be tried for high treason. The alleged conspirators were the Prime Minister Evariste Kimba who had been dismissed when General Mobutu took power a few months earlier, and three other former Ministers. Within three days these four men had been publicly tried before a special court, and hung

in front of two hundred thousand spectators. The press report gave a graphic description of the tormented victims' death throes, and the rising hysteria of the crowd. I felt at that time an acute sense of failure, both on our part, and on the part of those who held the future of that huge country in their hands.

We did not go to the Congo as firemen in an emergency. Our real work was long term. To be successful its effects must be permanent; they did not have to be spectacular, but we did want lasting change in the conduct of individuals with influence in their own spheres of activity. We went, as I have said, by invitation. Our hosts were men who had already in a way become architects of renewal. The Lulua and Baluba who asked us to go to Kasai understood that reconciliation had to start with them; we could not do this work for them, but only help them to implement it.

Soon after that first campaign in the Congo, a very formal invitation came to us from Rwanda and Burundi, requesting a similar campaign before independence in those two countries. The letter was signed by the two Bami (the Kings of Rwanda and Burundi, which were then monarchies), the Governor General and the President of the Belgian House of Representatives. The invitation was honoured, although not perhaps in the way the signatories of the letter had envisaged, nor with the consequences they anticipated.

A Rwandan priest had harboured bitterness against his foreign archbishop, who incidentally was Swiss. In his heart he blamed him for encouraging violence in the country by adopting a stance which had disturbed the balance of power between tribes. The priest and his family suffered directly as a result. But his own resentment also fanned the flame of hatred in others; and he decided to make a gesture of forgiveness towards his superior. Such was his sense of inner liberation that he longed to share it with others, and asked some of us to go and help him in the work of bringing peace to his nation. Through this man's initiative we were able to establish contacts with many political and religious leaders in Rwanda and Burundi. However, the repeated bloodshed of the last thirty years has shown how grossly we underestimated the task of reconciliation which would be needed to create lasting peace in those two countries.

We learned other important lessons from our experiences over that period. In the first place our team remained united amidst ever-increasing anarchy. As a visitor in a country where tension between parties is high, it is tempting to take sides, to favour one party or politician over another, and consequently to interfere in the affairs of the host country and be guilty of complicity in the local divisions. The situation which developed in Katanga following its announcement of secession, barely a week after June 30th, brought this risk home to us particularly clearly. Some of us had built a warm relationship with Tshombe, the leader of that province. Rightly or wrongly, we suspected that he was less in the grip of external forces than swayed by politicians whom we believed were manipulated by the Communists. There was no way of knowing for certain and such beliefs are often groundless. In general we kept in touch with all the Congolese leaders, whatever their political affiliation, with the Belgians in government, business or missions, with U.N. representatives both military and civilian, and with the diplomats.

One thing we noticed was that when the social framework starts to fall apart, and all familiar boundaries collapse, then people's true motives are revealed. There are those who panic, those who turn the situation to their own advantage, and those who try to seize power for themselves - or struggle desperately not to lose it. There are those who drink themselves into a blind stupor because their family has been evacuated and they are left alone in an empty flat. There are those who try to save their thriving businesses and those who become political mercenaries in the battle for control between the rival powers. It was hard to believe that there might also be a group of genuinely impartial people in Zaire, who desired only the best outcome for the country's inhabitants. Perfection does not belong to this world; but the intention was there. That was why our group had the respect of all parties. There were also individuals who reacted selflessly. A Belgian industrialist confided in us during those days of uncertainty: "My wife loved the Congo. She died here, and I want to devote the rest of my life to this country. As long as I can possibly prevent it, none of my employees will lose their jobs."

Since my aim is to write a personal account, I will avoid addressing more general issues such as the Congo's inadequate preparation for independence, and the premature haste with which the transition was made. But I will make a few comments connected with an event which I myself witnessed.

A few days before Independence, a friend and I drove early one morning to the airport some thirty kilometres from Kinshasa. As we approached, we noticed an ever-increasing crowd on either side of the road. All the way to the airport people were running, waving palm leaves, shouting jubilantly. We could not understand the reason for this excitement, until we entered the terminal and found a rapturous welcome in progress with singing and dancing, in honour of a man wearing a red robe. He was one of Simon Kimbangu's first disciples, who had just been released from prison in Katanga. Simon Kimbangu was a prophet from Lower Zaire, whose inspiration came mainly from the Baptist missionaries. He had preached for a few months, rousing the masses, was then arrested, tried by a single judge without witnesses or a lawyer, and condemned to 120 lashes and execution. King Albert commuted his sentence to life imprisonment, and after being flogged as prescribed, he was deported to Katanga where he remained behind bars from 1921 to his death in 1951.

Kimbangu posed a problem for the colonial and religious authorities of his day. The way in which his case was handled was no different from the methods used by dictatorships today, and it revealed the true nature of Belgium's purported "civilising mission" to the Congo. For there could be no ethical justification for a government to flout a moral law which was nevertheless binding on individual citizens. Nowadays our perception of human rights has certainly changed. Yet for those with eyes to see, a wealth of lessons can be learnt from a people's history, including their experience of colonial rule. Kimbangu may have stirred up nationalist feelings; but he also made moral demands on his people. In some ways he was similar to Gandhi, who was imprisoned by the British, and contemptuously referred to by Churchill as a "naked fakir". In each case the colonial power wanted to stifle a de-

velopment which, handled with sensitivity and long-term vision, could have been the start of a genuine growth of self-reliance and responsibility. Instead, forty years later, those countries inherited the irresponsible demand for immediate independence. The chaotic results must be blamed partly at least on a heavy-handed repression which smothered the early attempts of the inhabitants to take control of their own future.

The religious establishment, in its anxiety to keep religious fervour under control, violated the spiritual aspirations of the people. An article in the Catholic bimonthly "L'Actualite Religieuse dans le Monde", published in Paris in 1984, had the humility to admit the undeniable truth: "Above all, the Prophet Simon brought to Africans a message of salvation and hope. He gave them an assurance of their dignity as black men and women, equal to whites in the eyes of God. Sadly the Belgians in the Congo did not appreciate the humanitarian and spiritual value of this message, but saw only its subversive potential. Consequently the colonists and missionaries, foremost among them the Catholics, were determined to have Kimbangu condemned as a dangerous trouble-maker. The ensuing persecution undoubtedly constitutes one of the most shameful chapters in the history of European missionary involvement in Africa."

Even at the moment of independence, did the former colonial rulers really want to see the emergence of a new Zairian character? Did they envisage a genuine partnership, or was the purpose of the "Congolese gamble" to prove that the Belgian presence, and therefore Belgian authority, were indispensable? Jean Kestergat, correspondent for "La Libre Belgique", makes this suggestion in his book "From Lumumba's Congo to Mobutu's Zaire". He outlines the difficult task of government faced by Zaire's new leaders and the rivalry between Lumumba and Kasa-Vubu, and then writes: "All this was a source of anxiety to the Congolese, but at the same time it inspired hope in the Belgians... Brussels reckoned that its civil servants and army officers were now under the authority of an inexperienced government, so that the real power would remain basically in the hands of the former colonialists. They were quite

ready to serve the new authorities, so long as these had the wisdom to content themselves with the heady feeling of new-found prestige and its trappings: the luxurious Ford-Galaxy limousines, and a life-style they could never have hoped for prior to independence.” This is surely one of the roots of the “Zairian malaise” still felt today by many Belgians, which I have discussed on several occasions with former residents of the Congo, and even with young people who never experienced that period. All are agreed in diagnosing a “Congo sickness” which drags on like a bad cold.

Returning to our group: we were human beings, subject to the temptations of fear and prejudice like anyone else. I remember leaving the Congo towards the end of August 1960 with a certain sense of relief. The situation during the previous weeks had grown increasingly out of control, instilling in me an intangible and unspoken fear, which gradually built up inside me. Being afraid is no bad thing. The danger lies in not recognising it, for fear causes one to make bad decisions. Some of my colleagues had a greater tendency to panic in certain situations. I proudly thought I could be strong while others became panic-stricken. But I had to admit the grip of a slow, creeping fear which did more harm than their uncontrolled outbursts.

With the exception of a few extremists who openly advocate racism, people are united in their condemnation of it, and will swear blind that they are not racist. The truth is not always so simple. Feelings of superiority towards my white colleagues, and leniency towards those who are black, are also marks of racism. The ability to value every person for what he really is, regardless of his origins, is a painstaking art to acquire. Two years after my first visit, I returned to Zaire. I remember thinking before I set off that I should go as God’s ambassador, a man among men. And it was true that during that second visit, I forgot completely about the colour of my skin.

This freedom from racial prejudice was most evident in Dr. William Nkomo of South Africa. William had taken time off his medical practice to play a part in the film “Freedom”. During a short visit he made to Zaire in 1962, I had the privilege of serving

as interpreter when he was received by Prime Minister Adoula.

During his student days in South Africa, William, together with other impatient young men like Nelson Mandela, Oliver Tambo and Walter Sisulu, founded the African National Congress Youth League. They felt that the ANC leadership at that time did not really represent the people, and they wanted to rekindle the spirit of African nationalism. Some, like William himself, went so far as wishing “to drive all the Whites to the sea”. They felt that the official ANC policy of non-violence played into the hands of the white establishment.

William later recalled how in 1953 he had attended a conference in Lusaka, Zambia, where he saw “white men change, black men change, and where he decided to change himself.” From then on, the racial bitterness disappeared from his life. His struggle moved onto a new plane.

In February 1954, while the South African Parliament was debating contentious racial issues, he addressed a multiracial audience in the Cape Town City Hall. “I have fought militantly for the emancipation of the African people” he declared. “But I have fought full of bitterness and hate. I saw no alternative to bloody revolution. Now I am engaged in the greatest revolution, the one that begins in the hearts of men. With changed Boers, Britons, Coloured, Indians and Africans, I am fighting to make the world what God intends it to be for us all.”

William was forty years ahead of his time. Now South Africa, with all its many races, is seeking to follow the path pioneered by people like William Nkomo.

12. THE PLEDGE

Long evenings confined by the curfew to our apartment gave us an invaluable opportunity to get to know one another better. Nahashon Ngare told me about his experience with the Mau Mau, a secret society whose aim was to get rid of all white people in Kenya. The Mau Mau were united by a solemn pledge made during initiation rites, from which the only release was death. For a man to take the step of renouncing his pledge, as Nahashon had done, he had to discover an aim for his life big enough to supersede what he already had. A new and more worthwhile commitment was required to replace the old one.

Our party in Leopoldville included a white couple from South Africa: Bremer Hofmeyr was an Afrikaner, while his wife Agnes came originally from Kenya. Her maiden name was Leakey - a name that has become well known through the research by some of its members into the origins of the human species. During the Mau Mau uprising, at a time when the campaign seemed to be losing momentum, a Kikuyu soothsayer declared that a white man who was respected and loved by the Africans must be sacrificed in order to gain the favour of the spirits. A farmer was chosen - Agnes Leakey Hofmeyr's father. An armed gang burst into his house one night, dragged him up a nearby hill and buried him alive. In our team were this same woman and her husband, as well as Nahashon and his friend Lennart, who although they played no direct part in the crime, would at one time in their lives have been willing to condone it as a necessary expedient for their cause. Agnes spoke openly about her father's murder, about her inner turmoil when she heard the news, and the decision she subsequently made with her South African husband to commit their lives more fully than ever to building a future where black and white could live together in mutual freedom.

In one sense, the Mau Mau had justice on their side. During the Mau Mau uprising, the great anthropologist Louis Leakey wrote a book in which he tried to make the British authorities understand what the unrest was really about, and its roots among the Kikuyu people. He pointed out for example the fact that the colonial government had failed to understand the Kikuyu code of land ownership, and thought itself justified in expropriating their land and giving it to the white settlers. He also criticised the attitudes of certain missionaries, echoing the protest made back in 1938 by Jomo Kenyatta, the man who became independent Kenya's first President. Some missionaries regarded the country's social customs with contempt; they sought to erase all trace of the old culture and impose their own brand of Christianity. The Mau Mau pledge was effective in unsettling colonial rule - but the price was high. A brutal repression followed, and the rebellion was crushed. So it was something of a miracle when Jomo Kenyatta, in his first speech after independence, asked the settlers to stay, to continue cultivating their land, and to participate in the national life of the new Kenya. One of those settlers, Wilfred Hopcraft, also took part in our long conversations during the curfew in Leopoldville.

Only a pledge, a resolution, a decision or a commitment can empower a network of people to make a difference in the life of a society. The name and the structure do not matter. What counts is the quality of commitment and the extent of the sacrifice it entails.

What was the pledge which bound together the members of our own network? We certainly had no oath-taking ceremony! Yet each of us was bound in some way by a deep personal commitment which had been sealed in different circumstances in each of our lives. It enabled us to identify others whom we met in the course of our daily activities who shared a similar motivation, and it put us on a wave-length with the most unexpected people.

I remember an encounter with a young boy during my visit to Burundi in 1962. We were staying on a hill overlooking Lake Tanganyika, in the Jesuit school then run by Father Cardol. It was

the holiday period, so the only pupils left were those few who had been unable to return to their villages. One day a boy of ten or twelve stopped me in the courtyard and asked, "Are you interested in the little ones as well?" It was true that most of our contacts had been with older pupils. I sensed that something deeper lay behind his question, and was unsure how to reply, so I suggested, "Let's be quiet and think for a moment, and then you can tell me what's really on your mind." After a few minutes, this is what he said: "My father was killed through a window in our house. I think I know who did it and I was going to avenge him. I don't think I should." What had made this child understand in a moment of illumination that revenge leads to revenge and hatred breeds hatred, in a fiendish cycle of cause and effect? During the bloody conflicts which have periodically ravaged the country since, I have often wondered what became of that boy.

That is how true freedom fighters are recruited, people who will fight for the freedom of not just one country, one province, one racial group or one class, but for the whole of humanity. Our group had been sent specifically to Leopoldville to offer impartial support in a time of crisis; but others who came originally for other reasons also rallied to the cause. One of these was Mme Ganshof van der Meersh, the wife of the Belgian Minister. Discreetly, without ever interfering with her husband's responsibilities, she facilitated contacts and took initiatives which led to better understanding between rivals. Years later, Mme Ganshof told me that during those months she had felt a stronger sense of divine inspiration than at any other time in her life.

What does this personal pledge, the guarantee of a fighter's loyalty, mean in practice? My mother-in-law once told me what the first step in such a commitment had meant for her. It came down to making restitution for a towel she had removed surreptitiously from a hotel room. Some would dismiss this as trivial or an irrational guilt complex. I disagree. By deciding to go beyond the usual, reasonable standard of integrity, she introduced the highest standards into her family. I have had reason to be grateful, for it instilled in my wife an unwavering commitment to

moral values, and I know my mother-in-law conveyed to all her four children the same convictions she herself had acquired: namely, that honesty cannot be measured; that it must be absolute or it is not honesty at all; and that there is a difference in degree but not in essence between embezzling millions of pounds in a Swiss bank account, and hiding a hotel towel in your suitcase.

Once a person has made this pledge, he resists the temptation to cheat when he knows it would be easy. In the same way a person resists the temptation to be unfaithful because of his or her marriage vows, if they were taken seriously. Not long ago a Zairian friend told me he had stayed with his wife until her recent death for this very reason, and he was deeply grateful for the life they had lived together. It had been his life-line, and had given him greater discernment in the decisions he had to make, which were sometimes of national significance.

A senior Belgian official who met our team in the Congo returned to Belgium bitter and disillusioned by all that had happened. He felt the need to make a new start, and undertook a comprehensive review of his life, in much the same way that one would re-assess a commercial enterprise. He realised that his sense of failure resulted from a long series of tedious appointments, and not only from the mess in the Congo, as he had thought. He wanted everything to be out in the open, so he showed his review to two friends in Paris, including details of certain bad habits he had indulged in. His pledge took on a more formal nature, when following a Christian practice, he got down on his knees with his two friends, renounced his old habits and handed his life completely over to God. "My wife has started to believe in our love and our marriage again," he later wrote, "and she has decided to back me."

Eventually husband and wife agreed to return to Kinshasa at the request of a senior Zairian official, one of his former subordinates. "During the colonial period he was one of our assistants" wrote the Belgian. "Now I found myself in the paradoxical position of having to train him as a manager while being technically under his orders. He occupied the grandiose office which had been mine before independence, while I had a little table at the side..."

During the latter part of the Emperor Haile Selassie's reign, I happened to be in Asmara. A struggle to liberate Eritrea from Ethiopian rule had been going on there since the suppression of its democratic constitution and its annexation by the Ethiopian imperial government. This war continued after the Emperor had been deposed, and lasted for nearly thirty years. It was my third visit to the country, and I was due to have dinner with the Shum Ibrahim, chief of a major tribe which inhabits the region between Keren and the Sudan. A Dutch colleague and I had been invited by the chief's son, Osman, who had taken part in one of our training programmes in Europe. I was looking forward to conversing freely in Italian with the Shum Ibrahim, who spoke the language of his country's first colonial rulers.

The Shum lived in an old colonial house flanked by two walled sentry-boxes, now empty; but before going in, we wanted to pay our respects to another leading personality of the Eritrean Muslim community, Omar Kadi, whom we had seen on the other side of the square. Kadi had defended the Eritrean cause before the United Nations; but the claims for annexation presented by the Emperor's emissaries were nonetheless ratified, and freedom was denied to Eritrea. Trusting the assurance of the American representative who vouched for his safety, Kadi returned to his country. He was arrested as he stepped out of the aeroplane and spent eighteen years in prison. "You can't go and see the Shum", gasped a distraught Omar Kadi. "He has just been assassinated in front of his house. He was leaving for the Mosque, as he does every evening." We had noticed some soldiers standing around, but we had no idea that this was the reason.

A few days later my Dutch friend and I, together with the Indian headmaster of the town's biggest school and the son of an Egyptian businessman, made the dangerous journey over the Asmara hills to Keren, where the funeral was being held. For a whole week members of the tribe, many of whom had walked long distances, poured into Keren to pay final homage to their late chief. When we arrived, a space was made for us in a large room stripped bare of all furniture except chairs lined up along the four

walls. On them sat men robed from head to foot in white, their faces veiled. The crowd parted slightly, and I found myself sitting next to Osman, whom I had difficulty in recognising. All this happened in silence, as no one was allowed to speak to their neighbour. It was, I have to say, one of the most dignified moments I have ever been privileged to experience. After a long pause Osman leaned towards me, drew back the veil which covered his face and said in a voice just loud enough to be understood: "Tell the others I will never give up." What did he mean? Quite simply that the pledge is for life. It is the cement which binds people in fellowship, not in any structured organisation, but looking forward to the day when all humanity will be united, and "God is all in all". Then there will no longer be Lulua and Baluba, Tutsi and Hutu, Flemish and Walloon, Muslim and Christian; or rather each will keep his distinctive attributes, but learn to use them in the service of the whole.

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