
First Martyr

R. N. NORDAU

Congo My Country by Patrice Lumumba (Pall Mall Press with Barrie & Rockliff)

THIS BOOK INVOLVES the reader in several dimensions of disbelief. To start with, it comes as a surprise to learn that Mr. Lumumba wrote a book at all: his short and tragic political career has always been presented as the result of a charismatic personality, evocative rather than reflective. It seems, however, that the book was the result of an earlier concern on Mr. Lumumba's part to persuade the Belgians of the virtues of reform; it was written in 1956, while he was in prison, but was not published by the Belgian firm to whom it was submitted.

It is hard to understand why they were so cautious, for the most difficult thing about this book is to reconcile its mild—even sycophantic—tone with the ardour and capriciousness of the Lumumba who has come to be something of a Pan-African legend, and is probably independent Africa's first martyr. Consider, for instance, this description of Belgian Colonialism:

"Belgium, moved by a very sincere and humanitarian idealism, came to our help and, with the assistance of doughty native fighters, was able to rout the enemy, to eradicate disease, to teach us and to eliminate certain barbarous practices from our customs, thus restoring our human dignity and turning us into free, happy, vigorous, civilised men."

And this is no isolated example. The work is crammed full of references to 'our King', to the 'Belgo-African community', to the good works of the Governor-General and his allegedly dedicated and selfless civil servants. Its pleas for change are framed as requests for the betterment of the position of the *evolué* more often than as demands for liberation on behalf of the mass of the African population. It compliments the Belgians on the wisdom of their land policy, acknowledges the right of Europeans to preferential treatment as regards wages (provided only that the *evolué* is similarly privileged), and generally leans over backwards to offer bouquets to them on their generous behaviour.

AMAZED THOUGH ONE MAY be at Mr. Lumumba's apparent naïveté, it is for Belgium that one must reserve a sense of utter astonishment. Even when handed on a platter the mild and "constructive" type of policy that was being advanced by those like Mr. Lumumba on behalf of the tiny number who made up the African

middle class, they stood aloof from any political change until it was too late. By then, as we realise from Mr. Colin Legum's excellent (biographical) introduction, Mr. Lumumba had realised that power lay elsewhere than in the incipient Congeese bourgeoisie, and acted accordingly.

The book does not deal with Lumumba during this, the most important stage in his political career. It is left to Mr. Legum to show the developments that took place in his thought, notably after the All African Peoples Conference in Accra in 1958. From this time on, Lumumba became involved in the real struggle to free the Congo, and, what is more important, to unite it. It was in this cause that he employed all his dynamic personal vigour, the more fervently as he came to realise the enormity of the situation which the Belgians had left him to face.

The remarkable thing about Lumumba is not that he changed his views in so short a space of time, but that after doing so he did not immediately allow himself to be overcome by the frustration and bitterness which could so easily have followed so great a disillusionment.

It is too easy for a South African to draw terrifying analogies. The only pity is that the wrong South Africans will probably do so. ●

MAKE THIS

The New African

CHRISTMAS

- Give a new six-month subscription as a Christmas present [80c]
- Give two new six-month subscriptions [R1.50]
- Give three new six-month subscriptions [R2]

These are special rates. Write:

THE BUSINESS MANAGER
P.O. BOX 2068 CAPE TOWN

Published by the proprietors: *Insight Publications (Pty.) Ltd.*, Greenmarket Place, Shortmarket Street, Cape Town, and printed by *Pioneer Press (Pty.) Ltd.*, Shelley Road, Salt River.

The New
African:
NOVEMBER

Clive Wake
Maurice Hommel
Pctlake K. Leballo

Senghor and Socialism
"South African" Theatre
The Future of Pan-Africanism