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# Congo: Unfolding Patterns

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WELL OVER TWO YEARS have now gone by since the turbulent days of Congolese independence in 1960. Although pockets of disorder remain, especially in the North Katanga, the popular image abroad of a broad swathe of chaos, where 13 million people in tropical Africa's most urbanised state had sunk helplessly back to subsistence, has become almost wholly false. A new equilibrium emerges; the political patterns which seem likely to be dominant in the next few years slowly unfold.

It is still early to render any definitive judgements on the consequences of the most revolutionary decolonisation Africa has yet experienced. The surprising telescoping of independence preparations agreed to by the Belgians at the Brussels Round Table, only five months before independence, was radical enough; it was compounded by the unplanned, pell-mell, and total Africanisation of the Administration, the Army and the state-operated portion of the economy (transport, central banking, urban housing, pension funds, public utilities, among others) achieved after one month of independence by the panic exodus of the Belgians following the Force Publique mutinies.

Such a disorderly transfer of authority would have produced profound dislocations in even the best-organised and stable political societies. When one adds to it the many special problems of the Congo, such as the acute shortage of trained personnel for the top positions; endemic ethnic conflicts, exacerbated by a demagogic electoral campaign largely fought by tribal parties; the Katanga secession, and heavy international involvement, one can appreciate the full magnitude of the task which lay before the Congolese leadership.

One of the paradoxes of this ill-engineered power transfer was that it has given rapid promotion and considerable status satisfaction to a large group of the emerging elite, through their absorption into the very large number of new openings, either in the newly created political sector, or in the freshly vacated upper reaches of the administration. The Lumumba government, for example, had 28 cabinet ministers; the first Adoula government had 42, and the revamped cabinet announced July 1962 had 27. The Chamber of Representatives had 137 members, the Senate 84, and each Province was equipped with 10 Ministers, plus from 60-90 deputies. The lowest paid of these offices,

provincial deputies, was worth 300,000 francs per annum (140 pre-independence francs = £1).

On the other end of the tandem, the mass of the population suffered a sharp drop in its standard of living. The electoral campaign speeches had built up some rather unreal expectations as to the immediate material gains from independence. Not only were these not met, but unemployment rose sharply in the urban centers, and peasants were badly hit by the shrivelling of the rural trading network, which made it very difficult to market their produce, and to obtain any goods in return for what money they did acquire.

The consequences of this disillusionment have been a sharp alienation of the mass from the political leadership. On 2-3 April 1962, one witnessed the extraordinary spectacle of the largest trade union in the country, the Union des Travailleurs Congolais (UTC), calling a nationwide general strike against the excessive salaries in the political sector. The strike was a failure, both because of the relative weakness of the trade union movement in the Congo, and the ineffectiveness of the strike weapon when unemployment is over 50% in many large centers. But there is no doubt but what its objectives had the sympathy of the overwhelming percentage of the urban mass.

Related to this phenomenon has been the virtual collapse of political parties since independence. Parties in the Congo really only got under way in 1959, and once the national elections of May 1960 were over, made little active effort to retain the machinery built to fight the electoral campaign. The vacuum created by the Belgian exodus in July 1960 stripped the parties of all their ablest personnel to fill the thousands of administrative posts vacated. Parties continue really only as caucuses of deputies at the National Parliament, and to a lesser extent at the Provincial Assemblies, but their links with the countryside have entirely disappeared. The MNC-L at Stanleyville resisted these forces longest, but it, in recent months, has also been subject to the difficulties of fragmentation and apathy which struck other parties earlier.

Disappearance of parties and the weakness of the trade unions has left the mass with no effective method for articulating dissent; thus the alienation represents no immediate threat to the government. The mass is too amorphous, too riven by its ethnic conflicts, too devoid of real leadership to become an active political participant.

Coincident with the demise of parties has been a resurgence of the Administration as a dominant force. The Belgian colonial tradition was heavily bureaucratic; it was both extremely thorough in its penetration and occupation of the country, and far freer from the harassments of Legislative Councils, Parliaments or other external bodies than in the British or French territories. The Belgian blueprint for independence could be described as the creation of a new political sector to give status satisfaction to the nationalist leader, while the virtually all-white Administration carried on its work of really running the country. The political sector has not functioned well, but the Congolese had their revenge in taking over the really vital component of the Congo government, the bureaucracy.

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