In order to get the Congo in the first place, Leopold had kept secret his true intentions, and now he tried to keep secret what he was doing there in order to hold on to it. Independent explorers and geographers were discouraged. Casual travelers were barred. He carefully selected his officials and agents from the ranks of his most abject supporters and from the most disreputable elements in Europe—mercenaries, soldiers of fortune, adventurers, and profiteers, whom nothing was likely to shock. He even tried to control the missionaries who were allowed to enter his kingdom, giving preference to Belgian Catholics on whose loyalty he believed he could count, while hanging the threat of expulsion over the others if they did anything to cross him. But the secret he was trying to keep couldn't be kept; the things that were happening in the Congo under his personal rule were far too atrocious even for his most loyal priests, his most abject supporters, his most immoral agents, to keep from the eyes of the world.

The atrocities centered primarily on rubber, which, with the newly rising demand for bicycle and then automobile tires, was then the single most valuable product of the Congo. At the time, rubber was not cultivated on plantations; it still grew in the wild, and to harvest it natives went into the forests, located the rubber trees amid the profusion of other species, tapped their trunks, waited for the slowly running sap to collect, then brought it back to the state's agents. The work was hard and unrewarding, given the low prices the state monopoly paid for the latex, and there was very little enthusiasm for it. Thus, as often as not, the state-imposed quotas—which constantly escalated as the profits to be made in rubber escalated—were not met. So the state resorted to coercive methods.

As early as 1890, reports about these methods began to reach the outside world. They came at first from English Baptist missionaries, who were initially rather tentative in fear of Leopold's wrath, but as time went on they grew bolder and were joined by other missionaries, including the Belgian priests, and then even by officials of the state apparatus. And what they told of were the most unspeakable, inhuman cruelties. The soldiers of the Force Publique—recruited for the most part from the cannibal tribes of the Lualaba—were used to enforce the rubber quotas. Like their commanders, they were paid low salaries but handsome commissions based on how well they did their jobs—that is to say, how much rubber they coerced out of the local population—and they were taught by their white officers that terrorism was the most efficient way of getting it done. "I have the honour to inform you," a district commissioner in the late 1890s wrote to his sector and post commanders, "that you must succeed in furnishing 4000 kilos of rubber every month. To this effect I give you *carte blanche*. . . . Employ gentleness first, and if they [the natives] persist in not accepting the imposition of the State employ force."

One common use of force was the taking of hostages, usually women and children, who could be bought back by their husbands and fathers only with stipulated amounts of rubber. To make sure that they would be bought back, the conditions under which these hostages were held were awful. "In stations in charge of white men," an American missionary wrote, "one sees strings of poor, emaciated women, some of them mere skeletons . . . tramping about in gangs with a rope around their necks and connected by a rope one and a half yards apart." Brutal floggings, often fatal, with a bullwhip called the *chicotte* were freely meted out to encourage the rubber collections. If a village failed or was slow in meeting its quota, a punitive raid was staged, accompanied by rape, plundering, and wanton killing, and any protest or rebellion was dealt with by mass executions. A white officer

described such a raid: "We fell upon them all and killed them without mercy . . . he [a Monsieur X who was in command] ordered us to cut off the heads of the men and hang them on the village palisades, also their sexual members, and to hang the women and children on the palisade in the form of a cross." As the American missionary wrote in 1896, "War has been waged all through the district of the Equator, and thousands of people have been killed and twenty-one heads were brought back to Stanley Falls, and have been used by Captain Rom [the station commander] as a decoration around a flower-bed in front of his house."

One particularly widespread punishment was the cutting off of hands.

> If the rubber does not reach the full amount required the sentries attack the natives. They kill some and bring the hands to the Commissioner [a Danish missionary wrote]. That was about the time I saw the native killed before my own eyes. The soldier said, "Don't take this to heart so much. They kill us if we don't bring the rubber. The Commissioner has promised us if we have plenty of hands he will shorten our service." These were often smoked to preserve them until they could be shown to the European officer.

For the most part, the hands (and, for that matter, the cut-off heads) served as proof that the Force Publique soldiers were doing their job, that they were actually killing people who failed to meet the rubber quotas and not just going off into the forests and shooting off their bullets in pretense. But horribly often the hands were taken from the living.

> The scenes I have witnessed [another American wrote], have been almost enough to make me wish I were dead. The soldiers are themselves savages, some even cannibals, trained to use rifles. . . . Imagine them returning from fighting rebels; see on the bow of the canoe is a pole, and a bundle of something on it. These are the hands (right hands) of sixteen warriors they have slain. "Warriors?" Don't you see among them the hands of little children and girls? I have seen them. I have seen where the trophy has been cut off, while the poor heart beat strongly enough to shoot the blood from the cut arteries at a distance of fully four feet.

The baskets of severed smoked hands, set down at the feet of the European post commanders, became the symbol of Leopold's Congo Free State. In the degenerate, brutalized atmosphere of the Congo forests—the atmosphere out of which Joseph Conrad created that chilling masterpiece *Heart of Darkness* and the malevolently evil figure of Kurtz, a station agent in the vicinity of Stanley Falls—the collection of hands became an end in itself. Force Publique soldiers brought them to the stations in place of rubber; they even went out to harvest them instead of rubber. Hands took on a value in their own right. They became a sort of currency. They came to be used to make up for short falls in rubber quotas, to replace the food that hadn't been delivered to the stations or the people who were demanded for the forced-labor gangs; and the Force Publique soldiers were paid their bonuses on the basis of how many hands they collected. A native might save his life by surrendering his right hand, but more often than not the harvesting of hands meant wholesale murder, and there are estimates that in the twenty years of Leopold's personal rule at least 5 million people were killed in the Congo.

Leopold mounted a massive propaganda campaign to counter these devastating reports. He created a phony Commission for the Protection of the Natives, which ostensibly was to track down what he maintained might be a few isolated cases of atrocities and have them corrected. He set up a secret press bureau, whose job was to influence and buy off prominent newspapers and newspapermen. He imputed ulterior motives to his accusers, claiming, for example, that the English were attacking his rule in the Free State because they wanted to take it over for themselves or that the Protestant missionaries were sending out those reports in order to undermine the Catholics. And in the Congo itself he used all his powers to terrorize to prevent the reports from getting out. An Italian officer in the Force Publique, for example, who finally had become disgusted with what he had been forced to participate in, discovered that a white man wasn't free to quit Leopold's service.

> If he insists [he reported], and leaves his station, he can be prosecuted for desertion, and in any case, will probably never get out of the country alive, for the routes of communication, victualling stations, etc., are in the hands of the Administration, and escape in a native canoe is out of the question—every native canoe, if its destination be not known and its movements chronicled in advance from post to post, is at once liable to be stopped, for the natives are not allowed to move freely about the controlled water-ways.

As these horror stories circulated ever more widely and the evi-

dence supporting them mounted always more irrefutably, Europe, and especially Britain, at last became exercised. And by the turn of the century, something amounting to a concerted political and propaganda campaign against Leopold's Congo misrule was underway, spearheaded by such men as H. R. Fox Bourne, Herbert Samuel, John Holt and Edmund D. Morel.

Morel had started his career as a clerk at the Liverpool shipping line of Elder Dempster, which imported rubber from the Congo Free State, and it was while in this relatively lowly job that he first became suspicious of what was going on in the Belgian king's personal realm. Specifically, what Morel noted was that, although the Free State had ostensibly been created and given to Leopold for the humanitarian purpose of bringing the benefits of European civilization to the peoples of the river basin, in fact very little if any European goods were exported to the Congo in exchange for the increasingly huge quantities of rubber that were being taken out. This statistic alone—the Free State's disastrous export-import imbalance—forced Morel to draw the only possible conclusion: that Leopold was stealing the Congo blind. Turning into a muckraking, investigative journalist, Morel set about substantiating this contention. He scoured the ledgers of other shipping firms and those of the Congo monopoly trusts for further damaging statistics; he collected fresh eye-witness accounts of Leopold's atrocious *modus operandi* from missionaries and disaffected Free State agents. And he published what he found in inflammatory newspaper articles and in such devastating polemical books as *Red Rubber, The Congo Scandal* and *King Leopold's Rule in Africa.*

John Holt, a Liverpool merchant who headed one of the largest West African trading companies of the time, took a keen interest in Morel's work. His interest, it is only fair to point out, wasn't entirely philanthropic. Like all British merchants, Holt was extremely annoyed at being shut out of the Congo's rich trade by Leopold's monopolistic practices and was eager to find a way of breaking the Belgian king's hold on the river basin. So, not surprisingly, he encouraged and supported Morel in every way he could, publishing Morel's articles in his company's newspaper, *West Africa,* and helping Morel start his own newspaper, *West African Mail.* At the same time, he lobbied energetically among his fellow merchants and succeeded in getting the British Chambers of Commerce to pass a resolution calling on the British government to launch an inquiry into the abuses in the Congo Free State.

Herbert Samuel, a Liberal party member of Parliament, following up on this line of attack, carried the anti-Leopold campaign into the House of Commons. Again and again he introduced the subject for formal debate and, using Morel's writings in support of his arguments, stressed Leopold's violation of the Berlin Act in not allowing free trade in the Congo and pointed out the huge, often 500 percent profits being made by Leopold's monopoly concessions and the atrocious methods by which they were making them. H. R. Fox Bourne entered the fight as the leader of the Aborigines Protection Association—the direct descendant of England's venerable anti-slavery and abolitionist movement—and he brought all the righteous fervor and propaganda techniques of that movement to the Congo cause, writing such blistering tracts as "Civilization in Congoland: A history of wrongdoing" and staging, along with Morel and Holt, fiery public rallies.

All this together ultimately aroused public opinion to a furious pitch. But unquestionably the fatal blow to Leopold's personal kingdom was delivered by Roger David Casement.

"A tall, handsome man of fine bearing," Herbert Ward, the sculptor, who knew him in his Congo days, wrote of Casement; "mere muscle and bone, a sun-tanned face, blue eyes and black curly beard. A pure Irishman he is, with a captivating voice and a singular charm of manner. A man of distinction and great refinement, high-minded and courteous, impulsive and poetical."

Casement's greatest popular fame, of course, came years later as one of the authentic martyr-heroes of the Irish rebellion. Then, just before the Easter Uprising of 1916, having gone to Berlin on the quixotic errand of trying to secure armed assistance from the Germans for the Irish independence movement, he was arrested by the British, tried for treason and hanged. But before he met this tragic and romantically futile destiny, he performed a service to the peoples of the Congo far more important than any he ever performed for the Irish.

Born in 1864 in Sandycove near Dublin, Casement developed his interest in the Congo in much the same way as Morel. Orphaned as a child and raised by guardians in Ulster, he was sent as a teenager to live with an uncle in Liverpool who was an agent for a West

African trading firm and who got the youth a job as a clerk at the Elder Dempster shipping line where Morel was to work ten years later. During his employment there, Casement shipped out as a purser on one of the line's packets for a rubber-hauling voyage to Boma and though the journey started out as a lark it gave him a taste for African adventure which he was to pursue for the next quarter century.

He began in the Congo itself. In 1884, at the age of twenty, he left Elder Dempster and joined that band of Europeans who were then working for Stanley on the river. This was nearly a year before the Berlin Act created the Free State, while Leopold was still cunningly manipulating the European Powers into granting him sovereignty over the river basin and while Stanley's forces were still building a roadway and stations around Livingstone Falls to the Stanley Pool. Very much a believer then in the humanitarian and philanthropic purpose of Leopold's enterprise, Casement first was employed at the road-building expedition's supply base at Matadi, then was transferred to the trading station that had been built at the equator on the river's left bank (today's Mbandaka). In 1886, after the Free State had been established and Stanley had departed, Casement returned to Matadi to take charge of the survey for the railway that was to be built from there to Leopoldville.

On completion of this work, in 1887, Casement found himself without a job. Leopold by then was growing wary of having idealists like Casement around and was weeding out all but the most hardened adventurers from the Free State's employ. Casement, however, wasn't yet ready to return to Europe so he took a post as lay helper at a British mission on the Stanley Pool, looking after the station's river transport and managing its accounts and correspondence. But then, in 1890, when it seemed he would at last have to leave Africa, construction on the Matadi-to-Leopoldville railway began and, despite the Belgian king's unease with Casement's type of idealistic enthusiasm, he was signed to a one-year contract on the project because of his experience in preparing the original survey. And it was while on this job that Casement met the young Polish-born sea captain, Teodor Jozef Konrad Korzeniowski, who was to gain literary fame under the pen name of Joseph Conrad.

Since boyhood, Conrad had been drawn to the Congo—in *Heart of Darkness,* his protagonist, Marlow, reminiscing on "when I was a little chap," remembers thinking then that the river resembled "an immense snake uncoiled, with its head in the sea, its body at rest curving afar over a vast country, and its tail lost in the depths of the land. And as I looked at the map of it in a shop-window, it fascinated me as a snake would a bird"—and in the fall of 1890 he signed on as captain on one of the Free State's steamers plying the Congo from Leopoldville to Stanley Falls. All things considered, this was a very brief interlude in Conrad's relentlessly adventurous life, lasting in fact barely four months. But the impact of the experience was enormous. Out of it came his masterpiece, *Heart of Darkness,* which, when published in 1902, gave literary expression to an entire age's perception of the Congo as a place of horror and dread and which forever characterized in men's minds Leopold's agents as sadistic lunatics. And out of it also came his life-long friendship with Casement which was to stand the anti-Leopold cause in good stead in the years to come.

> I can assure you [Conrad wrote of Casement], that he is a limpid personality. There is a touch of the conquistador in him too; for I've seen him start off into an unspeakable wilderness swinging a crook-handled stick for all weapons, with two bulldogs, Paddy (white) and Biddy (brindle), at his heels, and a Loanda boy carrying a bundle for all company. A few months afterwards it so happened that I saw him come out again, a little leaner, a little browner, with his stick, dogs, and Loanda boy, and quietly serene as though he had been for a stroll in a park.

Returning from his last such stroll on the Matadi-to-Leopoldville railway project, Casement, now twenty-seven, joined the British foreign service and, though he remained in Africa, it was eight years before he again returned to the Congo. His first posting, in 1892, was to Britain's Niger Coast Protectorate where he was put in charge of a survey of regions until then unexplored and, in some cases, never visited by Europeans. Then, in 1895, he was named Her Majesty's Consul in Lourenço Marques, capital of Portuguese East Africa (today's Mozambique), where he got involved in the Boer War, then raging just across the frontier in South Africa, by planning a raid on the Pretoria railroad. And three years later, in 1898, he was assigned as Consul to Loanda in the Portuguese colony of Angola.

By this time, concern about what was going on in the neighboring Congo Free State was rapidly on the rise so, while still in Loanda, Casement unofficially began checking out the situation there and

became increasingly horrified by what he found. For example, about this time on a visit to his old base of Matadi, he made the same discovery that Morel was to make a few years later: namely, that no European goods beneficial to the peoples of the Congo were being imported to the Free State. Instead, he learned, the loads of rubber on the Matadi wharfs, destined for Antwerp, were being exchanged for guns and ammunition with which to arm the forest sentries of the Force Publique who in turn used them to terrorize the populace into harvesting ever more rubber. Casement's disturbing dispatch to this effect convinced London to transfer the consulate from Angola to the Free State and so, in 1900, Casement once again returned to the Congo, now as British Consul in Boma.

Once officially on the job, Casement followed up on his initial discoveries and began looking into all the alleged abuses of Leopold's rule and firing off sharply worded dispatches to London. "There is no free trade in the Congo today," he wrote at one point. "There is, it might be said, no trade, as such, at all in the Congo. There is ruthless exploitation at the hands of a savage and barbarous soldiery of one of the most prolific regions of Africa, in the interest of and for the profit of the Sovereign of that country and his favoured Concessionaires." At another point he complained angrily that the entire Congo "has become by the stroke of the pen the sole property of the governing body of that State, or, it should be said, in truth, the private property of one individual, the King of the Belgians." And throughout these dispatches, he repeatedly urged the British government to intervene, to take action so that the Free State's "rotten system of administration either be mended, or ended."

Casement's scorching dispatches from Boma came pouring into Whitehall just as the anti-Leopold campaign of Morel, Holt, Fox Bourne and the others—Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* appeared at this time—was reaching a fever pitch. And the combination proved irresistible. In 1903, under the management of Herbert Samuel, the British Parliament voted a motion stating that

> the Government of the Congo Free State, having at its inception guaranteed to the Powers that its native subjects should be governed with humanity, and that no trading monopoly or privilege should be permitted within its domains, and both these guarantees having been constantly violated, this House requests His Majesty's Government to confer with the other Powers signatories of the Berlin General Act by virtue of which the Congo Free State exists, in order that measures may be adopted to abate the evils prevalent in the State.

The British government then sent a note to the thirteen other powers of the 1885 Berlin Convention, requesting a meeting to discuss their possible intervention. And it also instructed Casement to undertake an extensive tour of inspection of the Free State and make a detailed official report of what exactly was going on there.

Traveling light—just with his crook-handled stick, two bulldogs and Loanda boy—Casement set off in June 1903. He was gone just a little over three months but what he saw and heard in this brief period confirmed at first-hand all the atrocity stories that had been circulating for years. He saw women chained in sheds with their babies, being held hostage for the delivery of their village's rubber quota. He saw men beaten mercilessly with the *chicotte* for having brought insufficient latex to the collecting point. He heard of whole tribes migrating across the Congo River to escape the Force Publique's brutalities, of mass executions by the state's agents, of punitive raids in which obscene mutilations were committed.

He interviewed a handless boy of eleven or twelve who had been wounded in such a raid on his village and who, while playing dead, had been "perfectly sensible of the severing of his wrist, but lay still fearing that if he moved he would be killed." Another youth, taken prisoner in a raid, told Casement that he had had his hands tied so tightly with thongs that they "had swollen terribly in the morning, and the thongs had cut into the bone. . . . The soldiers beat his hands with their rifle butts against the tree. His hands subsequently fell off." And a woman told of fleeing with her son from soldiers "when he fell shot dead, and she herself fell down beside him—she supposed she fainted. She then felt her hand being cut off, but she made no sign."

All this, and more, Casement described in chilling detail in his official report, "confident that once any decent man or woman . . . learns and appreciates the ghastly truth of the wrong done to the Congo man and woman—aye, and the poor hunted child!—they will not desert them." And when the report was published, in February 1904, the effect was electrifying. A contemporary English statesman declared that "no external question for at least thirty years has

moved the country so strongly and vehemently as this in regard to the Congo." Of the report itself, Moral wrote,

> The scenes so vividly described seemed to fashion themselves out of the shadows before my eyes. The daily agony of an entire people unrolled itself in all the repulsive and terrifying details. I verily believe I *saw* those hunted women clutching their children and flying panic-stricken through the bush; the blood flowing from those quivering black bodes as the hippopotamus-hide whip struck again and again; the savage soldiery rushing hither and thither amid burning villages; the ghastly tally of severed hands.

And Conrad wrote,

> It is an extraordinary thing that the conscience of Europe, which seventy years ago has put down the slave trade on humanitarian grounds, tolerates the Congo State today. It is as if the moral clock has been put back many hours. . . . In the old days, England had in her keeping the conscience of Europe. The initiative came from her. But I suppose we are busy with other things—too much involved in great affairs to take up the cudgels of humanity, decency and justice.

An immediate consequence of the Casement Report was the founding of the Congo Reform Association. Led by Morel (Casement, as a civil servant, could not participate but he gave it considerable behind-the-scenes support) and using the organizational set up of Fox Bourne's Aborigines Protection Association, it soon had active chapters not only in Britain but throughout Europe and the United States as well, lobbying their governments and marshalling their citizenry's outrage against Leopold. And nowhere was that outrage greater than in Belgium.

The Belgians had never been happy with their king's African adventure and now they found themselves embroiled in a nightmare of ugly worldwide publicity because of it. Something had to be done. Under pressure from his own Parliament, Leopold was forced to agree to the creation of a Commission of Enquiry—consisting of distinguished lawyers from Belgium, Italy and Switzerland—to investigate the conditions revealed in the Casement Report. The king hoped, of course, that the Commission would refute or, at least, ameliorate the charges against him. But that wasn't the case. When the international panel returned from an on-the-scene tour of inspection in 1905, it confirmed every one of Casement's findings.

Leopold made one last-ditch attempt to hang on to the Congo by promising to undertake a program of wide-ranging reforms. But it was rejected. In the first place, it was clear that the promised reforms would not go to the source of the problem: the state's participation in and monopoly control of the Congo's trade. In fact, with incredible imperial arrogance, at the very moment that the furor was at its height, Leopold had the audacity to extend his Crown Domain and reorganize his monopoly trusts so as to increase his personal profits from the river basin. But, additionally, the European powers had at last recognized the outlandishness of a situation in which an individual owned a country and ruled it as the most absolute of absolute monarchs without even the pretense of democratic controls. And they decided that the Congo must be taken away from him. The only question was to whom should it be given. In those days of the Scramble and ruthless colonialism, it never occurred to anyone that it might simply be given back to the Congo people. No, the belief then was that Africans couldn't rule themselves, that it was the God-given right and duty of European governments to do the job for them. And in this case the European government that seemed the natural choice for the task was that of Belgium.

Belgium, however, was no more eager now for an African colony than it ever had been and so for the next two years the matter was a subject of intense national debate. Elections were fought over it, governments fell because of it and the Parliament was occupied with no other question. But the outcome was inevitable. In August 1908, the Belgian Parliament, albeit reluctantly, voted an annexation treaty and on November 15, 1908, twenty-three years after its formation, the Congo Free State became the Belgian Congo.

P+P #15

EPILOGUE

In retrospect, we know that there never was any such thing as a good colony, and the Belgian Congo proved to be among the worst, but it was a considerable improvement over the Congo Free State. It couldn't help but be.

The Belgian government dismantled Leopold's apparatus of personal rule and put the administration of the Congo in the charge of a colonial ministry, answerable to the democratically elected Parliament, and set about correcting the most flagrant abuses. For a while many of Leopold's agents remained at their posts, especially at the more remote jungle stations, but in time the worst of them, the foreign mercenaries, soldiers of fortune, and sadistic adventurers, were weeded out and a conventional colonial service of Belgian civil servants and military personnel was created. The government was removed from the business of doing business. The rights of the Congolese to own and work their lands and to trade in their products were restored. The system of forced labor was abolished. The state's monopoly in trade was ended. The Domaine Privé and Crown Domains were thrown open to all comers. And they came.

Missionaries and entrepreneurs, settlers and traders flocked into the Congo. The European population rose from about 3000 in 1908, when Belgium took over from Leopold, to more than 100,000 on the eve of independence in 1960. Thousands of businesses were established. Huge plantations were put into cultivation for rubber, cotton, coffee, and palm oil. Banking consortiums were formed. The diamond fields of south Kasai, the tin and gold deposits of Kivu, the rich copper and uranium ores of Katanga were developed. Mines, factories, roads and railways, and astonishingly modern industrial cities were built. Passenger and cargo steamers were launched on the rivers, hydroelectric power dams were constructed at the cataracts, dock facilities and port towns burgeoned along the navigable stretches. In the great rush of development, the Congo became something very close to "the grand highway of commerce to West Central Africa" that Stanley had visualized, and its vast basin seemed at last to have received the wonders of European civilization of which the ManiKongo Affonso had so long ago dreamed.

There was a time, especially during the fifteen years after the Second World War, when the Belgian Congo was considered the very model of an African colony. Its economy boomed. Its colonial service seemed to administer its affairs with even-handed justice. The missionaries and mission stations offered primary and secondary education. The business concerns and industrial conglomerates provided an admirable array of enlightened social services—employment, housing, medical care, decent wages and working conditions—and the Congolese were said to be the happiest and most prosperous of all of Africa's colonized peoples.

But it was a tragic illusion; the "civilization" that Belgium appeared to have cast over the Congo proved the most fragile of façades, behind which seethed the savage anger of a people too long abused, of tribal nations too much invaded, and when the opportunity came this savagery and anger erupted in what was the bloodiest epoch of the Congo's relentlessly bloody history.

"The winds of change" was how Harold Macmillan termed the demand for independence from European rule that arose among the colonized of Africa in the wake of World War II. But those winds, with amazing swiftness, gathered the strength of a howling hurricane and, from the guerrilla wars in Algeria to the Mau Mau terror in Kenya, ripped across the continent with such irresistible force that it swept away all but a remnant of Europe's colonial power within little more than a decade. Nowhere in Africa, however, was the transition from colonialism to independence quite so agonizing as in the Congo.

Blame for the horrors of that era falls heavily on Belgium's shoulders. Having corrected the most outrageous abuses of Leopold's reign, it settled self-righteously into fifty years of what it regarded as enlightened colonial administration, never once giving a thought to the possibility, let alone the necessity, of eventual decolonization. And, when

that eventuality was suddenly at hand, it did next to nothing to prepare the Congolese for it. As late as 1958, the Belgian government officially—and proudly—was describing its colonial policy as "paternalistic." No civil rights were thought necessary for the Congolese. They were citizens neither of Belgium nor of the Congo. They participated not one jot in the governing of the colony. The highest ranks they were allowed to attain in the colonial administration were as minor clerks in the civil service and as noncommissioned officers in the Force Publique. Elections were unheard of. Political parties and publications were banned. Racial segregation was the order of the day. Until 1955, Congolese were forbidden to go to college, and even after that they were not permitted to study at universities abroad; a special native school, Lovanium University, under close colonial supervision, was created in Leopoldville to insulate the "children" from dangerous foreign influences.

Nevertheless, the Congo was no more impervious to the winds of change than any other African colony. Political unrest stirred first among the so-called *évolués*—Congolese with secondary-school educations. Barred from organizing politically, they formed social, religious, and cultural clubs, usually along tribal or regional lines, and at clandestine meetings, discussed, planned, and plotted how to get better pay, improve working conditions, end racial discrimination, gain civil rights, and ultimately, win independence. These clubs became the Congo's political parties of the 1960s. In the 1950s they served as the training ground for the country's future political leaders. For example, out of the government workers' club in Stanleyville emerged a charismatic postal clerk by the name of Patrice Lumumba. In the Bakongo tribal club in Leopoldville, a pudgy civil servant named Joseph Kasavubu won popularity by stirring up memories of the lost greatness of the Kingdom of Kongo. In Katanga, at the Union Minière mining complex, a white-collar worker named Moise Tshombe organized a club among the Luba-Lunda tribesmen. And the leader of a soldiers' club in the Force Publique garrison at Thysville was a young NCO by the name of Joseph Mobutu.

Belgium's view of the *évolué* clubs and their leaders was remarkably sanguine, and its response to the political discontent that they signified was confined to token gestures. For example, a system of *immatriculation* was introduced by which a Congolese "who demonstrated a state of civilization implying the aptitude for enjoying laws and fulfilling duties" could gradually gain Belgian citizenship. The idea, essentially, was to defuse any political threat posed by the *évolués* by making a privileged class of them and thus separating them from the masses they might lead. "The time will come which will assure to each, white or black, his proper share in the country's government, according to his own qualities and capacity," the Belgian King Baudouin, on a trip to Leopoldville in 1955, declared. "But before we realize this high ideal, gentlemen, much remains to be done." Just how much, in the Belgian view, was revealed by a University of Antwerp professor. In a scholarly article in 1956, he outlined a scenario for the Congo's gaining independence—in thirty years.

But the winds of change were blowing too hard for such a leisurely timetable. In 1957, Britain granted Ghana its independence. In August 1958, Charles de Gaulle chose Brazzaville, just across the Stanley Pool, to announce that France was granting independence to all her colonies. In December 1958, newly-independent Ghana held an All-African People's Conference in Accra, at which the call went out to all the continent's blacks to rise up and throw off their colonial chains. Patrice Lumumba managed to attend that conference, and when he got back to the Congo the drive for independence surfaced in earnest. The *évolué* clubs revealed their true political character. They sent petitions to Brussels, organized rallies, staged demonstrations and strikes, circulated inflammatory pamphlets, clashed with the police.

Under the impact of this unexpected political activity, the Belgian government in January 1959 vaguely promised that "Belgium intends to organize in the Congo a democracy capable of exercising its prerogatives of sovereignty and deciding on its independence." To the nationalists, this sounded like a meaningless placebo, and the wave of rallies and strikes went on. In October, Belgium took another step to mollify the nationalists: it set a timetable under which independence would be granted in 1964. But the nationalists rejected this as not soon enough. So in January 1960, Belgium convened a conference in Brussels with black delegates from 62 *évolué* clubs and 19 tribal associations and, in a stunning capitulation, agreed to grant the Congo its independence virtually immediately.

Why Belgium reversed herself so abruptly is a question that will probably never be answered to everyone's satisfaction. There are those who say that Brussels feared that revolutionary violence would rapidly escalate and draw Belgium into a long, debilitating guerrilla war that

she could ill afford, and so, never particularly happy about having an African colony anyway, decided to abdicate all further responsibility and be rid of the problem once and for all. On the other hand, there are those who believe that Belgium was perfectly aware that the Congo was in no way yet ready for independence, that chaos would surely follow its granting on such short notice, and that, as a result, she could expect to be called back to restore order and, in effect, to resume her rule. Whichever the true reason, Brussels set independence for June 30, 1960. This allowed barely six months for the Congolese to formally organize political parties, choose slates of candidates, conduct elections for a bicameral national assembly and a host of provincial and local governments, and take over the civil service bureaucracy and colonial administration from the Belgians. Considering that at the time there were hardly a score of Congolese college graduates in the country—and among them not a single military officer, engineer, lawyer, architect, doctor, economist, or anyone with any practical experience or training in government—it was a patently impossible job.

The troubles began during the election campaign. Candidates made wild promises of miracles to come. In one case, a candidate advised his constituents to bury stones because they would be turned into gold once the Congo was independent. Another promised that, if elected, he would resurrect all his voters' dead relatives. More dangerously, candidates used the campaign to vent long-repressed hostilities against whites, and they sought to gain political advantage by stirring up old tribal feuds. By Independence Day, the country was in a state of high nervous excitement. Crowds roamed the streets of the major cities, impatient for the miracles of freedom to begin, nursing tribal grudges, eager to become lords over the whites and take vengeance for past injustices.

King Baudouin, either out of gross ignorance or even grosser insensitivity, intensified the country's edgy mood when at the Independence ceremonies in Leopoldville he devoted much of his formal address to paying homage to King Leopold. Patrice Lumumba, the newly elected prime minister, was enraged, and when his turn came to speak on behalf of the new Congo government, he launched into a vitriolic diatribe on the cruel and inhuman rule of the Belgians. Joseph Kasavubu, the republic's new president, rebuked Lumumba and later Lumumba tried to calm the situation in a second speech, but his original words had touched a raw nerve in the Congolese people. As Independence Day wore on, the crowds turned into mobs, there were repeated clashes with the Force Publique, attacks on whites, outbreaks of tribal feuding. The mood rapidly worsened during the first week. With the wholesale departure of Belgian civil servants—and the lack of trained blacks to replace them—the public services broke down. And, when government employees didn't get their paychecks, wildcat strikes erupted which turned into riots when the Force Publique attempted to quell them. But the most devastating blow fell when the Force Publique itself mutinied.

At the time, Lumumba, who was eager to replace Belgians with Congolese in every other sector of the new administration, was unwilling to risk running the Force Publique with inexperienced blacks. He believed that, for the obviously difficult times ahead, he had to have a well-disciplined gendarmerie and so intended to keep the 1000 Belgian officers in command of the 24,000-man force until Congolese could be trained to replace them. To the NCOs and soldiers, though, this was discrimination, and on July 1 the Force Publique garrison at Leopoldville staged a protest demonstration against the policy. When they refused to obey orders to return to barracks, the Belgian commanding general ordered out the Thysville garrison. But that garrison mutinied as well and, as if a string of dynamite had been set alight, one by one so did virtually every other garrison in the country.

The soldiers went on a rampage, attacking their officers, raping officers' wives, looting stores. On July 6, Lumumba capitulated and agreed to replace all Belgian officers with Congolese NCOs and promote everyone else at least one rank, thus creating an army without a single private. But he was too late. The mutinies had started a tidal wave of violence. Blacks attacked whites and each other as anti-European hatreds and intertribal rivalries exploded with savage fury. The sudden chaos was exacerbated by the panicked flight of whites. In the first week some 40,000 Belgians fled. All services shut down, food shortages developed, epidemics broke out. Then another disastrous blow fell.

Moise Tshombe, who had been elected premier of Katanga Province, called on Lumumba and Kasavubu to ask Brussels for troops to restore order. Fearing that this would bring back Belgian rule, they refused, and so, on July 11, Tshombe declared the secession of Katanga. He called for and got Belgian paratroopers to round up and disarm the Force Publique mutineers in his province. And he also

asked for and got Belgian civil servants to take over the shattered administration in Katanga.

Lumumba was desperate. The Congo's richest province had seceded, and violence was sweeping the rest of the country. He had only one place to turn. On July 15, he appealed to the United Nations for help.

While overall the UN's performance in the Congo must be judged positively, at the outset its presence only further complicated the rapidly deteriorating situation. Lumumba wanted the UN troops to attack Katanga and end Tshombe's secession, but the UN wanted to avoid a military confrontation with a member nation, Belgium. First the Belgian paras had to be gotten out of Katanga. In the meantime, the polyglot army of soldiers from Ghana, Tunisia, Guinea, Mali, and Ethiopia concentrated on bringing the Force Publique mutineers under control and on putting down the tribal warfare. While it did, the whirlwind of chaos raged throughout the summer.

In September, the situation took another bizarre turn. Declaring him unable to handle the affairs of state, Kasavubu fired Lumumba. Hearing this, Lumumba commandeered the Leopoldville radio station and broadcast to the nation that he had fired Kasavubu. The bewildered Congolese assembly didn't know which of the leaders to support so it wound up supporting neither. All pretense of a functioning government came to an end. And, as might be expected in such a situation, a military man stepped in. Joseph Mobutu, the young former NCO of the Force Publique who had been promoted to the command of the army when Lumumba ousted the Belgians in July, seized power.

His first move was to arrest Lumumba. On hearing this, Antoine Gizenga, a close associate of Lumumba's, declared the secession of Oriental Province, of which Lumumba's hometown and power base, Stanleyville, was the capital. The soldiers of the province's garrisons opened an attack on Mobutu's forces, and by Christmas they had overrun Kivu Province and northern Katanga. A renewed wave of savagery ravaged the country; whites were murdered and the most horrendous kind of tribal warfare, marked by wholesale massacres and cannibalism, raged in the rain forests. Blaming Lumumba, Mobutu decided to get rid of him. In January 1961, he had Lumumba flown to Katanga. What he had in mind in turning Lumumba over to Tshombe has never been made clear. Perhaps he only meant to exile him to a distant corner. But in February the news came that Lumumba was dead, killed by Katangese soldiers. The world-wide outcry—which made Lumumba a martyr-hero of Africa—was so furious that Mobutu resigned and Kasavubu resumed command.

In the midst of the turmoil, the United Nations at last began to make some progress. Belgium had been persuaded to withdraw its troops from Katanga and, though Tshombe recruited white mercenary soldiers to replace them, the UN troops were finally authorized to attack Katanga and bring its secession to an end. That war lasted eighteen months. On several occasions, Tshombe was ready to concede defeat and offered a ceasefire with the United Nations (it was while flying out to meet Tshombe to negotiate one such ceasefire that the UN Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld was killed in a plane crash) only to reneg and keep the bloody fighting going. But finally in January 1963, with his mercenary troops in full retreat, Tshombe threw in the towel and fled into exile in Spain. The Katanga secession was over and, after two years of political controversy about their presence there, the UN forces withdrew.

But the Congo's agony was not over. The economy had collapsed; strikes and riots were endemic in the cities and towns; tribal warfare raged in the jungles. And, above all, Oriental Province was still in secession and had fallen into the grip of an increasingly savage rebel regime. In an attempt to bring the province back into the fold, Kasavubu had arrested Gizenga, but his place in Stanleyville had been taken by a wild-eyed revolutionary named Christophe Gbenye, who received military aid from Russia and China and who claimed to be in possession of "the magic Golden Book containing all the powerful secrets of the Congo, given by Lumumba to Gizenga and by Gizenga to me." He enlisted witch doctors in his cause, called his rebel soldiers Simbas (Swahili for "lions") and convinced them that a special *dawa* (magic) he dispensed made them impervious to bullets. Dressed in monkey furs, armed with poisoned arrows and spears as well as Russian rifles, largely recruited from the once-cannibal tribes of the Lualaba, and often doped up on *mira* (a local marijuana-like drug), the Simbas struck terror before them as they marched through the jungles to the beat of the ju-ju drums. The Congo army fled before their horrifying advance, and in the course of some eighteen months they overran more than half of the Congo.

Kasavubu declared a state of emergency, and, in June 1964, in yet

another bizarre twist in the Congo melodrama, he called Tshombe out of exile to head a government of national unity to meet the frightening threat of Gbenye's Simbas. Tshombe's idea of how to meet that threat was brutally simple: he would put into the field an army even more terrible than that of the Simbas. As it was clear that the Congo's own soldiers weren't up to the job, he turned to those who had helped him in the Katanga secession: white mercenaries. The call went out; the pay was $300 a month, all you could loot, and the most savage kind of excitement. And the mercenaries answered the call. Former French Foreign Legionnaires, ex-Nazis, white racists from Southern Rhodesia and South Africa, soldiers of fortune, demented sadists, adventurers and fugitives of every description—the descendants, in spirit and temperament, of the brutal agents of Leopold's Free State—enlisted in Tshombe's army. Once unleashed into the rain forests, they proved more than a match for the Simbas in savagery. Looting, massacring, raping, committing atrocities, they rolled back the Simba tide.

By September, Gbenye's forces had been driven into the northeastern corner of the Congo basin. All they held of any consequence was Stanleyville itself. In this desperate situation, Gbenye played one last horrifying card. He held 1300 white hostages from 25 countries in Stanleyville and, in a message to the United Nations, he warned that unless the mercenaries' drive on the city was halted, all the hostages would be executed and "we will wear their hearts around our necks like fetishes and dress ourselves in their flayed skins."

The fate of the hostages riveted the world's attention. An attempt was made to negotiate for their lives. But Gbenye remained adamant: Tshombe's advance on Stanleyville had to be turned back first. The negotiations dragged on, frustratingly, frighteningly, for weeks. And each day the hostages' situation grew more menacing. They were herded into barracks. They were manhandled, brutalized, tortured. Groups of them were periodically taken out to face firing squads, surrounded by howling mobs. Though no whites were executed yet, the Simbas began machine-gunning blacks whom they considered "enemies of the revolution." As the mercenaries tightened the siege around Stanleyville, water and food ran low and the Simbas turned ever more savage.

On November 24, 1964, a lightning military blow was struck at Stanleyville in a desperate gamble to save the hostages' lives. Using planes supplied by the U.S. Air Force, 600 Belgian paratroopers jumped on the city center as the mercenaries smashed into its outskirts in a coordinated attack. As soon as they realized what was happening, the Simbas drove the hostages into the streets and, as loudspeakers blared hysterically, "Kill them, kill them all—men, women, and children," the Simbas opened fire with rifles and Sten guns. A wild melee broke out; the paras and mercenaries moved in fast, the hostages scrambled for cover. It was a brief battle. The Simbas were no match for the modern military force thrown against them, and they soon broke and ran for the darkness of the rain forests. Gbenye himself fled, never to be heard of again. Twenty-nine hostages were found dead. Later, 51 more bodies of whites were found, hacked to pieces and cannibalized. The secession of Oriental Province was over.

The Congo smelled of the graveyard. It has been estimated that at least 200,000 Congolese had been killed in the less than five years since independence. The roads, bridges, railways, and communications network were a shambles. The rubber and palm-oil plantations had been abandoned, the mining industries crippled. There were shortages of everything, refugees everywhere, and every sort of tribal, racial, and regional strife had been stirred up to a killing pitch. Despite the submission of Oriental Province, the conditions in the Congo in 1965 were such that the chaos and bloodshed of the past five years seemed likely to go on for five years more. And they very well might have. For, in a chilling reprise of his action with Lumumba, Kasavubu suddenly fired Tshombe; and this immediately threatened to lead to still another round of tribal and civil wars. But then, just as he had done in the first year of independence, Joseph Mobutu stepped in. This time, though, the army chief made sure his seizure of power would last.

Mobutu's second regime can be taken to mark the Congo's final passage—for better or worse—from the mysterious mythological darkness of its savage past into the rather banal light of the modern age and, as such, provides an entirely appropriate point at which to end this book. For, from 1965 onward, the story of the river belongs less to the history of its discovery, exploration, and exploitation by Europe than to the politics of modern independent Africa. This politics is characterized by the struggle going on all over the continent—with some admirable successes and many dismal failures but always with much agony and hope—to recover the virtues and values that prevailed in Africa before the white man came, to combine them with the inarguable advantages of the civilization the white man brought,

and out of that combination to forge a new but genuine African identity and society. It is a struggle that has seen, on the one hand, the undertaking of such monumental industrialization projects as a multibillion-dollar hydroelectric complex to harness the enormous power of the Livingstone Falls and, on the other hand, the introduction of Mobutu's *authenticité* campaign to change not only all the European place names but all the river people's Christian names as well. (Mobutu changed his from Joseph to Sese Seko.) It is, in short, the struggle by which the Congo is, in fact as well as name, being transformed into Zaire.