

# The Belgian Congo and Uranium Politics

EVER since the end of the last century when foreign observers revealed to a shocked world the atrocities inflicted on the inhabitants of the Belgian Congo in connection with the winning of rubber, Belgian governments have been reticent in regard to the publication of information about that vast territory. The present Belgian Government pursues that tradition with even greater determination than its predecessors.

Its secretiveness, however, is not so much in connection with the conditions of life of the people over whom it rules, deplorable though these conditions are. It is rather on the question of one of the products of the territory and of the condition and destination of its export that the government practices a policy of "sealed lips" and downright deception and falsification.

As is known, up to the outbreak of World War II the products of the Belgian Congo were exported almost exclusively to Belgium. However, in 1940 an Anglo-Congo Bipartite Agreement was reached whereby the British Government took many of the products of the Congo which were indispensable to the war effort. With the entry of the United States into the war and the loss of the Netherlands East Indies the resources of the Congo assumed even greater importance in the supply of raw materials to the war industries.

A tripartite agreement, Anglo-American-Congo, replaced the former bipartite agreement, and tin, cobalt, wolfram, industrial diamonds—and uranium—found their way to the U.S.A. in ever increasing quantities.

By 1945 the United States accounted for 35% of the total exports of the Belgian Congo. And it requires no great effort on the part of the average individual to imagine the important role of uranium in these exports. Yet the Belgian Government persists in describing its deliveries to the American atomic bomb industry as "scrap metal."

## The Case of Senator Libois

Numerous questions on the subject of uranium exports from the Congo have been asked in the Belgian Parliament by several members, notable amongst whom has been Senator Paul Libois, well-known scientist and university professor. They have met with a stubborn refusal on the part of Prime Minister Paul-Henri Spaak to give the least information.

The Belgian Government cannot prevent these embarrassing questions on uranium being asked in the Chamber. But when it comes to talking publicly about uranium in the hearing of the Belgian people and indeed of the world at large, the Government is not lacking in resourcefulness to circumvent this awkward situation. Such was the experience of Senator Libois who sought to broadcast on the Belgian radio on October 9th on "The Problem of Uranium."

The text of his speech was sent to the broadcasting authorities, according to established practice, for their approval. Finding in it nothing to which they could reasonably object, they nevertheless took the unusual course of passing the speech on to M. Achille van Acker, Minister of Communications. The Minister pleaded that he could not make any decision thereon whilst the Prime Minister was out of the country at the United Nations meeting. M. van Acker therefore begged Senator Libois to postpone his radio speech until the Prime Minister had been given the opportunity of seeing it.

This crude attempt to gag the senator was only partially successful. The Brussels newspaper, *Le Drapeau Rouge* (11th and 12th October), performed a public service by publishing the text of M. Libois' speech and giving the Belgian people a chance to judge it for themselves. It contained nothing more than what is currently passing through the minds of progressive people everywhere, not least among them the peoples of Belgium and the Belgian Congo.

Uranium is at present the most precious raw material. It is desired, nay coveted, by those who aim to dominate the world by their military power. It is also needed by those who see in it the principal source of energy of the future.

## The U.S.A. Congo Uranium

It is well-known that the principal deposits of uranium are in the Belgian Congo, which accounts for two-thirds of the world extraction of the ore. All this output is exported to the United States, from whence a very small part is re-exported to Great Britain. No other countries—including Belgium—receive a share.

M. Libois accused the Belgian Government of maintaining a close secrecy in all matters concerning the uranium of the Belgian Congo. It refused to make public the text of the Belgo-American agreement on Congo uranium. It refused to give an account of the quantity of uranium exported to the United States and of the price paid for it. (Paradoxically enough, figures have been published in America and they show that the Congo exported 7,494 tons of uranium to the United States in 1946 and 1,646 tons during the first quarter of 1947—D.B.)

M. Libois believes that two alternatives are presented to the Belgian people. Should they help a State, or a group of States, to impose by force their political ideas or economic domination on the world? Or should they collaborate, according to their means, with other nations to build a peaceful and harmonious world in which man will at last enjoy the well-being which science and modern technique can provide for him?

There is little doubt as to which course the peoples of Belgium and the Belgian Congo want their government to take. The utilization of nuclear energy for industrial purposes both in metropolitan Belgium and in the Congo could bring great benefits to the peoples of both countries. To that end Belgian scientists should have been given facilities long ago to construct and work on experimental piles.

However, the Belgian Government prefers to deny to its scientists supplies of the uranium extracted within the confines of its own territory and even suppresses information about its disposal although such information is freely published in the United States.

By pursuing its present course the Belgian Government not only violates the honour of the peoples over whom it rules but also betrays a trust of humanity.

DESMOND BUCKLE, *London*

## A Frank Statement of Belgian Colonial Policy

*The following excerpts from a lecture, recently published in KONGO-OVERZEE, by Mr. R. Godding, former Belgian Minister for Colonies, need no comment—except possibly the suggestion that the reader might note the similarity between the economic methods and objectives of the Belgian policy and those of the British schemes for colonial economic development now being pressed forward by the Labor Government in London. We quote:*

We can summarize the regime applied to the Belgian Congo as a combination of private enterprise and state nationalization. Our legislation decrees that the mines shall pay taxes varying from 10 to 50 per cent. At a meeting of shareholders, the Government has the right to vote just as any other partner. On every board of directors the Government is represented. At the launching of a new company the Government receives a considerable amount of shares. Altogether from 50 to 55 per cent of the net profits of the mines are being paid into the colonial budget. . . .

What have been the results of this system? It has led to exploitation of extensive gold, copper, tin and diamond mines, which could never have been carried out if it had been left to single individuals, and which the Government—supposing it had been able to find the competent personnel—could never have financed by itself. The system

(Continued on other side)

## 12,000 African Railway Workers on Strike Paralyze Transportation in French West Africa

A strike of 12,000 African railway workers in French West Africa, which began early in October, has brought railway transportation throughout that vast colony to a complete stand-still for more than a month.

The strike organized by the Railway Trade Union Federation has as its main objective the winning of the same wages and conditions enjoyed by the white railway employees.

Efforts at arbitration have failed. It is reported that French officials, who argue that the Africans' complaint of discrimination and their demand for equal pay for equal work are unreasonable, are confident that starvation will ultimately force the African strikers to come to terms.

The present strike represents a new stage in the development of organized labor in French West Africa. Although there have been previous strikes of African workers in the territory, this is the first organized on a such a large scale. It parallels the general strike which paralyzed communications for six weeks throughout Nigeria during the summer of 1945.

### RHODESIAN WORKERS ASK PAY RAISE; GOVERNMENT PLANS CURB ON UNIONS

A memorandum entitled "A plea to all employers including government and municipalities to raise the wages of African workers", issued by the Federation of Bulawayo African Workers and two other organizations of African labor in Southern Rhodesia, has recently been received by the Council on African Affairs.

The memorandum warns that "Southern Rhodesia is drifting into an economic crisis. . . . Ever since the war began there has been a progressive rise in cost. The end of the war has not stopped this rise. Drought has aggravated these difficulties. The Africans, more than any other section of the community, have suffered immeasurably from the effects of the war and the drought.

"There must be a reasonable distribution of the wealth of the country. If Southern Rhodesia is a poor country, let us share that poverty. If she is rich, we have an inalienable claim to the wealth of the country."

The memorandum further points out that the system of migrant labor into which the African is forced results in a "demoralizing sense of insecurity" and urges the establishment of permanent urban residential sites for Africans and for the same recognition of skilled African workers as that accorded to whites.

The memorandum concludes with a plea for the establishment of the following scale of minimum weekly wages:

For unskilled workers, 35 shillings (\$7.00) for men, 25 shillings (\$5.00) for women; for skilled workers, including building tradesmen, teachers, social workers, clerks, etc., the equivalent of \$10.00 for men and \$7.50 for women. One can imagine what the *present* wages are!

On its side, the government of Southern Rhodesia has proposed a Native Labor Boards Bill setting up machinery for settling disputes between African workers and their employers.

The Bill would not provide for official recognition of African trade unions but would enable certain limited categories of workers to make representations to an arbitration body composed mainly of representatives of employer interest. As in the case of the notorious Industrial Conciliation (Natives) Bill proposed for South Africa earlier this year, strikes would be outlawed and grievances would have to be referred to the Board.

### A FRANK STATEMENT OF BELGIAN COLONIAL POLICY (Continued)

has enabled the laying out of extensive palm, rubber, coffee, tea, cinchona and pyrethrum plantations.

One forgets too easily the great help provided us by our Colony. As a single example I will mention that all the margarine consumed today in Belgium is made from palm and palm kernel oil from Belgian Congo. This margarine can only be sold at the present low price because the Belgian Congo has agreed to sell its oil to Belgium at half the price it could obtain for it if it were freely sold at world prices. Thus Belgian Congo is compelled to sell its surplus production abroad at the same low price. This represents for Belgium a yearly economy of some 250 million francs and for Belgian Congo a reduction in potential revenue of about 800 million francs per annum. *I do not think that this policy is detrimental to the Natives. . . . (Our emphasis—editor)*

We have found that by encouraging mining establishment and big plantations on scientific lines with modern equipment, we could produce from the same soil much more at lower cost and of better quality. Hence, we could also raise the standard of living of the Natives.

As regards European settlement, I am convinced that it is of political importance to Belgium to encourage Belgian nationals settling in the Congo. . . . Some proposals are in preparation which will, I hope, enable us to double the Belgian population of the Congo within ten years from now. This increased white settlement will not be detrimental to the Natives, on the contrary. The two regions where the increase in Native population is most marked—lower Congo and Kivu—are those which have been thrown open to white settlement. The European artisans, foremen, etc., have organized themselves in trade unions, now completely organized as in Belgium. . . .

Life for these people is pretty good, not forgetting that none of them get less than 120,000 francs (about \$2,800) per year, in addition to free medical care, housing, and passages in and out. European children can now have in the Congo the same education as in Belgium.

In many respects I consider the attitude of Belgians towards their black brothers the right

### WHITE SETTLERS SHOULD LEAVE EAST AFRICA, SAYS LEONARD BARNES

A meeting held in London last month under the auspices of the Fabian Colonial Bureau heard Leonard Barnes, well-known author of *Soviet Light on the Colonies* and other books dealing with Africa, propose a motion "that non-African settlers in East Africa should be induced to emigrate, leaving the country to the Native inhabitants."

Mr. Barnes said that a settler was a person owning land, making his home permanently in East Africa, proposing to bring up his family there, and making a living from his operations on the land by the use of African workers. Settlers were to be sharply distinguished from the non-African population as a whole.

His latest figures were that in Kenya there were about 1,700 Europeans holding farming land in the Highlands. So, multiplying by four to account for wives and children, there were, say, 7,000 out of a total European population of about 18,000.

"The project of repatriating all European settlers is not economically fantastic," he said. "If compensation of £5,000 per settler were paid, the whole group could be expropriated for some £10,000,000; for that sum they could be put on ships and sent back whence they came—with a box of cigars and a case of whisky apiece for the journey: for in Kenya whisky is known as a conventional necessity, is it not?"

Mr. Barnes cited four different attitudes toward the problem of white settlers in East Africa held by such personalities as Norman Leys, Mrs. Elspeth Huxley, Miss Margery Perham, and the present Governor of Kenya, Sir Phillip Mitchell. Though the attitudes differ, he said, "All assume that the settlers are there to stay, and that there is some means of reconciling the divergent interests represented by the settler group on the one hand and the other East African groups.

"Nobody would want to break down all contact between Europe and Africa. There are many essential tasks which can be effectively discharged only by Europeans. My point is that the presence of settlers, so far from providing favourable conditions for the rendering of such assistance, does exactly the opposite.

"Recently Dr. Hinden and I attended a conference of Colonial administrators in Cambridge. The whole theme before those responsible officials was that of the hand-over, of how our responsibility for social, political and economic affairs was to be transferred to Africans in the most rapid and orderly fashion possible.

"To build up in an African colony a group of people with very powerful and deep-rooted privileges will make insoluble the whole policy of transfer, which would be difficult enough in any conditions. It makes nonsense of the whole policy of partnership. Social planning is the only way forward in Africa, and the policy of white settlement stands condemned as an obstacle to that planning."

one. It is one of paternal strictness often mixed with good humor or a joke. . . .

New legislation has been introduced in the Congo, concerning trade unions for Natives, workers' councils and employment committees. As you may imagine, this contains a certain risk, and prudence and discretion are needed to ensure that this new experiment is not used by paid and irresponsible agitators. . . . [or as] an instrument for political unrest.

# THE STATESMEN TALK ABOUT COLONIES—Notes of an Observer

## Imperialist United Front

The impenetrable united front of all the colonial powers against any encroachment upon their "sovereign rights" of colonial rule and against any extension of the scope of the trusteeship system. Don't overload it, Mr. McNeil of the United Kingdom warned; "the trusteeship system has enough on its plate." And Mr. Dulles of the U.S.A., champion of the U. N. Balkan and Korean Commissions, changed his tune when dealing with the colonies and trusteeship, cautioning against burdening the U. N. unduly and prematurely.

## The Two Creech Jones'

The striking contrast between Mr. Creech Jones of today, British Secretary of State for Colonies, denouncing efforts to widen the application of the trusteeship system to colonies in general, and the Creech Jones of only two years ago when as leader of the Fabian Colonial Bureau he declared that the administration of all non-self-governing territories was "a matter of international concern," and that there was no reason why Kenya, for example, as well as Tanganyika, Nigeria as well as the Cameroons, should not be under international control. When this reversal of views was pointed out in full detail to the Trusteeship Committee by the Indian delegate whose resolution had been attacked, Mr. Creech Jones sat re-faced, with eyes averted, and said not a word in self-defense.

## Hair-Splitting

The everlasting legalistic hair-splitting resorted to by the spokesmen for the colonial *status quo* and their oft-repeated demand for adherence to the strict letter of the Charter (when it suited their purpose), while evading fundamental moral and humanitarian considerations.

## It All Depends—

The trenchant observation made by the Soviet delegate, Mr. Arutiunian: "It seems to me that Article 73 of the Charter has met with a peculiar fate: it has a certain elasticity in the hands of the colonial powers." He noted that the representatives of those powers, citing the Charter, had objected to extending to their colonies the convention prohibiting traffic in women and children, as well as obscene literature, because it would violate the principle of self-determination. Yet when the Soviet Union attempted to further that principle of self-determination by securing participation (without vote) of the colonial peoples in the work of the Economic Commission for Asia and the Far East "we are again shown the Charter and are told, on the basis of the very same Article, that this cannot be done."

## Council Leaders Interview Mr. Sayre

Leaders of the Council on African Affairs on October 28 interviewed Francis B. Sayre, U. S. representative on the Trusteeship Committee of the U. N. General Assembly. They expressed criticism of the role of the U. S. delegation in opposing a forthright demand upon the Union of South Africa to submit a trusteeship agreement for South West Africa.

Stating that the side on which the U. S. A. voted on this issue would be closely watched by Negro Americans as well as liberal white people, the Council leaders urged the U. S. delegation to take the initiative in securing just and democratic solution of this and other colonial and racial discrimination questions before the U. N.

Present at the conference with Mr. Sayre were Paul Robeson, Chairman of the Council; Max Yergan, Executive Director; Wm. Jay Schieffelin, Vice Chairman; W. A. Hunton, Educational Director; and the Rev. J. Henry Carpenter, a member of the Council and Executive Secretary of the Protestant Council of the City of New York, Brooklyn Division, who has visited South Africa on behalf of his Church Board.

## Escape Clause

The clause of the Charter most often cited by defenders of reactionary, anti-democratic regimes is Article 2, paragraph 7: "Nothing contained in the present Charter shall authorize the United Nations to intervene in matters which are essentially within the domestic jurisdiction of any state. . . ." Cited by (among others) Argentina in demanding that the U. N. say and do nothing about South Africa or Spain, by South Africa in her own defense plea, by the Netherlands in protesting against U. N. interference in Indonesia, and by Belgium in rejecting decisions of the General Assembly affecting relations with her colonies. As one delegate remarked, from a certain point of view practically any question can be regarded as one of domestic jurisdiction. Unless correctly interpreted and applied, Article 2, paragraph 7, will unlift some of the most important sections of the Charter and render the U. N. powerless to achieve its declared objectives.

## On the Defensive

The representatives of the colony-holding countries, particularly of the United Kingdom, striving to portray the colonial system as a benevolent and progressive institution and charging its enemies, especially the Soviet Union, with "making political propaganda." One of the worst examples of such defenses of colonialism was the 21-page and hour-long speech by the United Kingdom's representative, Mr. A. H. Poynton, in which he pompously lectured the members of the Trusteeship Committee of the Assembly, October 3, on what he called the "five fallacies

which seem to color every international discussion on colonial affairs." The colonial system, he declared, "is not a negation of democracy: it is a practical illustration of democracy under tuition."

## Racial Discrimination

A challenge that was not met: "I have cited more than once the case of Kenya" said Sir Maharaj Singh, speaking for India, in one of the plenary sessions of the Assembly. "Not a word has been said by any representative of the United Kingdom about the racial discrimination exercised in so intense a form against all Africans and all Asiatics in that colony. I should like Mr. McNeil (chief delegate of the United Kingdom) to make a reference even now—and if he wishes to do this, I shall sit down—to the colony of Kenya. I challenge him to defend the racial discrimination which prevails there."

## Colonial Stooges

This year the French Government appointed Mr. Fily-Dabo Sissoko, an African, as a member of its delegation to the General Assembly meeting, presumably as a demonstration of France's democratic ideals. Like his predecessors,—Mr. Douala Manga of Cameroons at last year's Assembly meeting and Mr. Gaston Monnerville of French Guiana at the London preparatory meeting of the Assembly,—Mr. Sissoko proved himself to be a loyal adherent and supporter of the French colonial regime. Enough of such hand-picked stooges! It is high time that the delegations of *all* the colony-holding states, not excepting the U.S.A., included *duly elected representatives* of their colonial subjects. Why not?

## Malicious Half-Truths

One of the most fallacious, self-incriminating, and exasperating arguments repeatedly used by Mr. Lawrence, spokesman for General Smuts, in attempting to defend South Africa's treatment of its non-white population was that conditions must not be so bad for them since Africans continue to "flock into South Africa" from neighboring territories, and the Indians refuse to go back to India even though offered free passage. Mr. Lawrence obviously did not realize that he was saying in effect that South Africa belongs to whites and to whites only. And he of course did not explain that Africans are *forced* to come to South Africa because they have been rendered landless and cannot find remunerative work to pay their taxes in adjacent territories; and that the Indians, by virtue of their contribution to the development of South Africa, have more right to re-

(continued on next page)

## Democracy and Indirect Rule

E. H. Ashton, in an article in *AFRICA* (Oct., 1947), *Journal of the International African Institute*, reaches the conclusions quoted below in analyzing the problem of whether present-day British colonial administration in Africa is advancing or retarding the Africans' political progress:

When discussing the political development of the African it is important to ask whether in his social organization there is a sufficiently strong element of popular participation in government to form a basis for modern democratic institutions. . . .

The following conclusions may be drawn in answer to the question posed. . . . The traditional native social organization contained a strong element of democratic control over the tribal policy and over the actions of tribal authority, namely the Chief. This control was exercised through recognized and clearly defined institutions. This control and these institutions have been considerably weakened in modern times by two interacting influences.

The first is the policy of the British administration of working through the local Native Authorities and regarding them as the link between itself and the people, without ensuring that the people are consulted. The second is that the people have been drawn into the stream of European economic and social influences.

As they have neither the education nor the experience to understand them, they can no longer play a significant part in the administration of their public affairs and are therefore dependent on the leadership of the British administration and of their Chiefs, whom, by the same token, they are in no position to control. Thus their government has become largely authoritarian and out of touch with the ordinary tribesmen.

The Chiefs should again become responsible to their people. The spread of education and economic development will help to bring this about, but at the same time (and long before their effects can be felt), Government should lay greater

## Social Services In Nigeria Fall Far Short of Need

Supplementing the information on Educational and Health Services in the British Colonies, given in the September issue of *New Africa*, as derived from the reports submitted to the United Nations by the United Kingdom Government for the year 1946, we give here the data subsequently made available concerning Nigeria.

### Expenditures

Total population — 21,800,000, including 6,000 Europeans.

Total expenditure of government (in U.S.\$) — \$49,031,518.

Total government expenditure on education (in U.S. \$) — \$4,454,852, of which \$1,000,000 (estimated) was spent by Native Authorities and \$224,892 was from Colonial Development and Welfare Grant.

Total government expenditure on health (in U. S. \$) — \$4,888,000, of which \$800,000 (estimated) spent by Native Authorities.

Per cent of total government expenditures for education—9.1%.

Per cent of total government expenditure for health—9.9%

### Education

Government expenditure per head of total population (in U.S. \$)—20 cents.

Average annual attendance in primary and post-primary schools—523,628 (no break-down of students in primary and post-primary schools, or of those enrolled in government-aided and non-aided schools, is given).

Government estimate of percentage of primary and post-primary pupils to total school-age population—24% (much higher than is generally estimated.)

Percentage of all school children in relation to total population—2.4%.

Government estimate of percentage of literacy—not given.

Average annual attendance in government or government-aided post-primary and vocational schools—only figure given is 2,600 teacher training students.

### Health

Government expenditure per head of population (in U.S. \$)—22 cents.

Infant mortality rate per 1000—109.7 for the township of Lagos, "the only rate to which any reliability can be attached."

Death rate per 1000—not given.

Number of inhabitants for each doctor—100,000.

Number of hospital beds per 1000 of population—0.3.

emphasis on the people and take more cognizance of their views. The Chief will still be the administrative link between the British administration and the people, but authority should shift from the top to the bottom.

## Notes of an Observer (cont'd)

main there than have a considerable section of the white population.

### Conflicting Points of View

The Yugoslav delegate on one side of the debate on South West Africa criticizing "the intransigent and even rebellious attitude of the South African delegation," and the United States delegate on the other side expressing solicitude for Smuts and South African (white) public opinion, and urging the delegates not to cause them any embarrassment.

### And More of the Same

The electric effect when Madam Pandit, leader of the Indian delegation, unexpectedly entered the Assembly debate on South West Africa to answer Mr. Evatt's (Australia) lofty praises of Smuts and South Africa. And Sir Maharaj Singh's rejoinder to Evatt: "There is no such thing as a democratic government in the Union of South Africa."

### Pan-American Bloc

Fourteen of the twenty Latin and South American members of the United Nations (while four of the remaining six abstained) obediently following the virtual command of Mr. Arce (Argentina) and Mr. Dulles (U.S.A.) to vote for the two-thirds majority requirement rather than the simple majority for approval of the South West Africa resolution, thus securing defeat of the Indian text and endorsement of the much weaker alternative proposed by Denmark. (See Column 2 on page 2).

### Warning

The grave warning uttered by Sir Maharaj Singh: "They (the Africans) are awake in West Africa, in East Africa — I have been there; yes, and steadily but slowly they are awakening in South Africa. There is a sore festering among them and that sore is not going to be healed under present conditions. Agitation in those countries is increasing and will increase. It is for you, fellow delegates, and for you alone . . . to say whether you intend that justice should be done or to say that you are impotent and can do nothing and must leave them to their fate."

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