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## BELGIAN CONGO: A Blight at Birth

Streaming into Leopoldville last week, the delegates to the Congo's first Parliament were a strange-looking lot. Some had the sharply pointed heads of a tribe that practices infant skull bandaging. Newly elected Senators in elaborate robes sat soberly at sidewalk cafes sipping beer, looking somewhat dazed. Others were tieless and in shirtsleeves, but sported bright, beaded caps with dangling horns and tassels as they gawked at the sights. Most were obscure villagers who had never before been to the city, but some of the faces were already nationally and even world famous.

Wiry, goateed Patrice Lumumba, 34, the Batetela tribesman from Stanleyville, whizzed about grandly in a black limousine as he dickered desperately to get control of the first government. Chubby, 43-year-old Joseph Kasavubu, loyal to his Bakongo people, was also deep in negotiation with key faction leaders such as Paul Bolya of the Mongo tribe and Jean Boli-kango, the Ngombe spokesman. The corridors of Leopoldville's new Palais de la Nation echoed to the jabber of a score of languages and dialects, for the Congo's first legislators represent a nation of more than 150 separate tribes, each with its own interests and jealous point of view, its own savage and mystic creed, its own desire for power.

Political Potpourri. Out of this tribal nightmare must come a national cabinet, a prime minister and a chief of state in time for independence day on June 30; but bloody tribal fighting has raged for months through the Congo. Bitterest of all was in the land of the Lulua. Since the 19th century, when Arab slave raiders drove the frightened Baluba westward into Lulua territory, the Baluba had happily tilled Lulua soil in semi-serfdom in exchange for the right to remain in the area. Then last year, when whispers of Congolese independence filtered out from Leopoldville, the Baluba began declaring themselves free men, tried to take over some of the Lulua land for themselves.

The warlike Lulua reacted with spears, knives and sharpened sticks, killing hundreds of Baluba, burning their huts and carrying off their women. Only Belgian armed intervention, coupled with the mass removal of tens of thousands of Baluba to another region, stopped the blood bath.

In other areas other tribal groups were at loggerheads. In the Congo's western tip, around Leopoldville, Kasavubu and his Bakongo supporters refused to sit in the provincial assembly as a minority, decided to set up their own regional legislature. Jealous tribal leaders in the mineral-rich southeast, defeated at the polls, talked of setting up a separate province of their own.

Thus, tribalism may yet tear the vitals out of the new Congo before it even gets its start as a nation, just as it has been the political plague everywhere in Africa. For to conservative tribal rulers, democracy is a mysterious and not entirely welcome concept. Tribal elders do not like the idea of upstart youngsters challenging their authority in the tribe's affairs. Warrior clans, like the Lulua, whose hegemony was built with spears and brawn, are outraged to find themselves outvoted by the humble Baluba, who have adopted such unmanly professions as clerk or typist. Many tribes had less interest in establishing a new nation than in protecting their own traditional home areas from outside interference.

Ghana's Kwame Nkrumah was resisted every inch of the way by the Ashanti chiefs who clearly foresaw the loss of their power in a single nation run from Accra. In Nigeria, the ancient feud between the Yoruba of the west and the Ibo of the east, and their joint contempt for the Moslems in the north, is a major obstacle to peaceful nationhood. Kenya's warlike Masai dread the thought of national power in the hands of the clever Kikuyu; and for the majestic (6 ft. 6 in.) but backward Watutsi of Ruanda-Urundi, education and all the talk of one-man-one-vote sounds suspiciously like the death knell for four centuries of unchallenged supremacy over the fast-rising politically conscious Bahutu, who have long been virtual serfs.

Africa Irredenta. The maps of Africa, with their artificial and arbitrary boundaries drawn years ago by the European colonialists, may be in for severe revision at the hands of the tribalists. In the Congo itself, leaders of the million-strong Bakongo people dream of doing away with the frontiers that currently split them three ways: one-third in Portuguese Angola, one-third in the French-oriented Congo Republic, and one-third in the Belgian Congo. A united Bakongo nation would control Matadi, the chief sea outlet for much of central Africa's vast hinterland.

In the mineral treasure house of the southeast Congo, where the Bemba and the Tshokwe tribesmen flow over into parts of Northern Rhodesia and Angola, irredentist sentiment runs high among some black leaders. Moise Tshombe, boss of copper-rich Katanga province, talks of negotiating with the Northern Rhodesians and his Conakat Party has begun organizing branches in Northern Rhodesia itself.

With total independence ten days away, the Congo's tribalists were still bickering in mutual hostility. Sly Patrice Lumumba was given his chance to form a coalition but failed. At week's end, the Belgian authorities turned to the mercurial Kasavubu. Even if he succeeded, he was given little chance of survival for long with Lumumba in opposition. Said a neutral diplomat in Leopoldville gloomily: "I have an uneasy feeling this place is tottering on the brink of disaster."

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