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BELGIAN CONGO: Nightmare

The elections were over and the votes were counted, but for harassed Belgian officials in sweltering Léopoldville last week, the nightmare of readying the Congo for independence on June 30 had just begun.

No one knew for certain where the capital would be, and controversy even raged over the new flag (yellow stars on a blue field). The man with the largest bloc of votes in the first Parliament, goateed Patrice Lumumba, 34, was a convicted embezzler; the only other leader who might command a following, chubby, erratic Joseph Kasavubu, 43, just three months ago was vowing to destroy the new nation by pulling his own Lower Congo region out and merging it with the French territory next door.

Some followers of the two men reportedly flocked into the towns, staking claims to white settlers' homes—and to their wives. Kasavubu's party newspaper darkly suggested that "in former days, African women had to slave to bring up the white man's mulatto children, but in the future, white women will have to rear the mulatto offspring of the black man." As if all this were not enough, the Congo's finances were chaotic; \$230 million in capital escaped the country before exchange controls were imposed, leaving scarcely enough in currency reserves to back the Congo franc.

In this atmosphere, no one could blame the whites who chose to leave for their "holidays" in Europe, as preparations for the independence celebrations began. Many would never return. Sabena's daily flights to Brussels were booked solid for weeks ahead, and hundreds of settlers were driving out through Uganda, their belongings piled high atop their autos. The Belgians who decided to stick it out were laying in stocks of food and fuel for a speedy getaway if necessary.

Brussels seemed hopeful that something might yet be salvaged from the chaos by installing in power a coalition headed by Kasavubu, who has been cooperating with Belgians recently. He controls only 12 of the Lower House's 137 seats (v. 36 for Lumumba), but with Belgian help might attract enough support from among the 18 other elected parties to form a coalition government. In pursuit of this scheme, Kasavubu last week flew to Brussels to dicker with Belgium's Minister of the Congo and to call on young King Baudouin,

who is scheduled to open the Congo's first Parliament at the end of the month, provided the country does not explode into bloody civil war beforehand. Watching the events in Brussels with rising anger, choleric Patrice Lumumba growled: "The Belgians prefer to give power to stooges and retain power for themselves in the Congo. Without my party, the government will not last two months."

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