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BELGIAN CONGO: Taking Over

The scene was set in the unfinished grand ballroom of what was to have been the Belgian Governor's new official residence. Now it was the debating hall of the Congo's first Parliament. A grey wastebasket was pressed into service as the voting urn. Amid the happy hubbub, a black soldier loped down the aisle, crying, "Mr. President of the Provisional Assembly, he has arrived!" As the President strode briskly to his seat, his Belgian adviser whispered, "Have you got your hammer?"

It was the showdown for the determined rivals for power, lean, bearded Patrice Lumumba, 35, and roly-poly Joseph Kasavubu, 43. Before the crucial vote to choose the national leadership, the newly elected Deputies ranged widely through an array of foreign and domestic issues. One rose to complain that the Belgians had not provided delegates with cars ("It's a scandal that one of our Senate colleagues had to walk to work this morning!"). Another, wearing a kind of beanie with a beelike antenna, kept urging the legislators to mind their manners, hardly deterring the wag who cried periodically, "When do we eat?"

Troubled Team. Kasavubu was confident. He had already been named by the Belgians as formateur to choose the first government. But when the ballots in the grey wastebasket were counted, Lumumba had won. His supporters danced with joy and playfully tugged at their leader's beard. The humiliated Kasavubu sat staring into space.

With the premiership safely in his grasp, Lumumba promptly renewed his offer to make Kasavubu President—a chiefly ceremonial office under the proposed constitution. To everyone's surprise, Kasavubu accepted.

The alliance is unlikely to survive for long. Kasavubu is a tribalist. His loyalties are rooted in his Bakongo tribe, and to preserve his regional influence, he fiercely defends his goal of a loose federal system for the Congo's government, even talks of setting up his region as a separate province. His parents sent him off to train for the priesthood at a mission school, but after five years of studying and teaching, he left to work as a clerk with a timber firm, then took a job with the colonial civil service. Later he took over leadership of the

budding Abako Party formed in the Leopoldville area. Early in 1959, one of his fiery speeches set off bloody riots in Leopoldville. The riots frightened the Belgians into handing over independence to the Congolese with almost disorderly haste.

Eyes of Fire. Lumumba is the Congo's nearest approach to a national figure. He is determined to install a strong central government rising above tribal loyalties. The son of a Batetela tribesman, he grew up in equatorial Stanleyville, where he attended first a Catholic, then a Protestant mission school, finally completing his education at the Belgians' training school for postal employees. A year after Lumumba took his first job as clerk in the Stanleyville post office, he was in jail, convicted of embezzling \$2,520 of government money. Freed in 1957, he prospered as the persuasive salesman for a brewery, then began spreading his talents into the political field.

The nervous Belgians could only guess at the policies Lumumba will pursue. He would like to eliminate the Senate, which he considers the stronghold of the conservative tribal chiefs. He has promised not to nationalize the big Belgian interests and professes to guarantee the safety of other foreign investment, but his socialist inclinations are strong. In foreign policy, his line will probably be neutralist, following the example of Ghana's Kwame Nkrumah, whom Lumumba admires. Whether Lumumba could forge any coherent policy out of his cumbersome new executive structure seemed open to question, for he had promised so many things to so many parties that last week his first Cabinet totaled 36 men, representing every political shade from flirting Communist to tribal conservative.



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