

The CONGO KNOT

THE CONGO PROBLEM HAS BECOME an entanglement of several distinct problems. It may help to unravel the strands and examine each individually. They are: the mutiny and the restoration of peace; the secession of Katanga; the economic effect of Rhodesia and Nyasaland; the administrative breakdown and its repair; the Russia's jubilation; and the effect on race relations, particularly in neighbouring countries. Probably there are other strands still entwined. The restoration of peace has properly become a matter for the United Nations. It is a token of the progress made in Africa—and a rebuff to those who opposed it—that troops should be upholding the will of the United Nations from independent countries which five years ago did not exist. It is now proposed that European troops shall be used alongside African troops. African coun-

tries will regard the Congo as their affair, but the presence of Europeans will demonstrate that the United Nations is intervening not against Belgians but against trouble-makers of whatever race. Belgium can be criticized on many grounds for her scandalous handling of the Congo's independence, but she cannot be blamed for trying to rescue people in danger. To this extent M. Lumumba's complaints of aggression can be dismissed. He is on stronger ground in fearing Belgian designs of Katanga. The Belgian Government's statement that it had "noted" the province's secession might be interpreted as recognition. If secession might be interpreted as recognition. If secession were made absolute, it would mean that all hope of Belgian-Congolese economic co-operation had been lost and that Belgium was prepared to write off the benefits to Africa of her 75 years there for the

sake of her copper interest. It would put the rest of the Congo in desperate economic straits, and African Governments and politicians throughout the continent would not forgive either Belgium or, vicariously, the other colonial Powers for an act of treachery to the State.

KATANGA'S fortune cannot easily be separated from those of the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland. Last year the copper production in Katanga was 280,000 tons, which is more than the world surplus. If production stops entirely there will be a world shortage and Northern Rhodesia's copper prices will shoot up. A ceiling price on copper would be hard to enforce. Apart from the short-term political dangers inherent in copper boom, in which Europeans will benefit individually more than Africans, the way would open for copper substitutes to take a hold of the market and jeopardise Northern Rhodesia's (and, if it is still there, the Federation's) whole economy. Thus, even while the status of Katanga remains in doubt, it is important that the Union Miniere should get its technicians back from their refuge across the border. They cannot be expected to go back without the firmest guarantees of security. As soon as

the United Nations force has begun to keep the peace M. Lumumba should have a good night's sleep and brace himself to negotiate with T. Tshombe a federal arrangement whereby Katanga (and possibly other regions) remains part of the Congo but enjoys that degree of provincial autonomy which he has been claiming since long before the Belgians left. If, as seems possible, the Central Government starts to break up the Congo will in any case be more than a collection of provinces. In the more favorable political climate which a Congo-Katanga federation would bring about the administration problems could be tackled. The Congo will, for some years, have no energies to spare for quarrels with her neighbours. Her immediate purpose should be to restore the administrative machine to the conditions it was in when the Belgians left, and then to get new people to run it. As soon as possible they should be Congolese, but in the meantime they should be grateful for anyone with experience and a knowledge of French. Most of the former French colonies in Africa are now independent. They, too, suffer from a shortage of experienced staff, but it is not as serious as the Congo's. It would entail great self-sacrifice to part with some of the men they have, but between

them they might muster the core of an efficient Congo Civil Service.

IN THE LAST ten days, the Soviet Union has had its first opportunity to meddle directly in an African situation. Mr. Khrushchev seems to have no other purpose than to excite emotions still further and cause as much havoc as he can. He must have little respect for the intelligence of Africans if he thinks that the Belgians rescue operation in the Congo can be represented as imperialist aggression against Madagascar and Togo, which is how he described the situation in his message to M. Lumumba. It may be that Russia which hitherto has been lukewarm in its support of an African nationalism based on intellectuals and the middle class rather than on the proletariat, sees in the mutiny a working-class uprising which meets the Marxist specification. Whatever profit Mr. Khrushchev eventually extracts from it, the Congo situation will not simplify the job of those in Rhodesia and Nyasaland who are working for a sensible solution of racial problems. It has emphasized the danger of creating an administrative vacuum which has only lately been realized by the

Government concerned. African self-government is now the rule, and European Governments the exceptions. The exceptions cannot be expected to persist for many years. On the other hand, no responsible African leader can take the risk of re-enacting the Congo debacle. Britain with her diminishing overseas responsibilities and her growing army of ex-colonial civil servants, is uniquely able to offer handsome terms: independence with a unified European-African Civil Service and with a training scheme (on the lines of that at the Zaria Institute of Administration in Nigeria) to overlap independence. It would be worth trying to get Dr. Banda's and Mr. Kaunda's signatures to an agreement entitling Britain to ensure continuity in Civil Service when the date for self-government is fixed. It invariably happens that the colonial civil servant doing the job is also the training officer for his subordinates, but we should not stop at this. Something like a crash programme in administrative training here and overseas is needed for the future security of the inhabitants, black and white, of Central and East Africa. —
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