

Congo Nationalism Strains Econ

By ROBERT LEE

NEW YORK, N.Y. — President Joseph D. Mobutu of the Congo-Kinshasa (formerly Leopoldville) has turned his military regime down a noisily nationalistic path that few people—probably not even Mobutu—imagined it would follow when he seized power a year ago.

With an estimated \$2 to \$3 billion invested in the Congo, Belgian businessmen normally perspire in their air-conditioned offices during any political upheaval. But they quietly applauded the swift Mobutu takeover of Nov. 24, 1965.

They believed army rule would be a corrective to what they perceived as a "shift to the left" after the dismissal of longtime Belgian favorite, Moïse Tshombe, as Prime Minister on Oct. 13, 1965. Tshombe was dismissed by President Joseph Kasavubu who feared him as a rival in the presidential elections scheduled for last month.

Mobutu banished the rivals and canceled elections.

Africans made stronger assumptions that the Belgians about the rightist nature of the new Mobutu regime. The party organ of Zaire's socialist government called Mobutu a "lawman" of the "former monopolies." The paper drew analogies between the 1965 coup and that of 1960, in which Mobutu used his paratroops to help President Kasavubu get rid of Prime Minister Patrice Lumumba.

Lumumba is generally recognized as the first Congolese politician to think in

national terms. But his leftist tendencies worried Kasavubu, the Belgians and the United Nations, which had been charged with restoring order in the newly independent Congo.

It was Mobutu who made sure Lumumba was put on a plane that took him to a grisly death at the hands of Tshombe and his henchmen in Katanga province.

Lumumba the Hero

Now this made Lumumba a martyr of Congolese independence, and a potentially useful political tool in the Congo. But who would expect Mobutu to be the one to resurrect him? Maybe someone who remembered that Mobutu once turned out press releases for Lumumba.

As early as January this year Lumumba's name was regaining favor in Kinshasa. And on the sixth anniversary of Congolese independence, June 30, President Mobutu called him a "national hero."

"It is because he talked about economic independence that he was killed," the president said.

Mobutu has been doing so much talking about it he has the Belgians quaking in their copper mines, and Americans who had planned investments in the Congo have reportedly been discouraged. The clean sheet of capitalist confidence with which Mobutu set out has been crinkled.

First he picked a fight with the Belgian airline, Sabena, which provides the Congo's principal link with Europe and operates the Congolese airline, Air Congo. Then he tangled with the giant copper-mining firm, the Union Miniere.

Finally he slapped a sales tax on gasoline and forbid oil companies to raise their prices. He gave way only when they threatened to cut off imports.

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This change can be allowed in the evolution of the structure of Congolese government.

At first Mobutu retained the essential elements of the parliamentary system turned after that of Belgium. He appointed Col. Leonard Mulamba as prime minister and set himself above it all as president for five years, in a "regime of exception."

In fact, Mobutu forced himself doing his own isolating. In March he dissolved the parliament, brought it back in September, but without its previous powers.

Less than a month he dismissed cautious Lumumba. Thus, Mobutu taken all power into his hands.

He has also pushed aside the trio of Belgian military officers who were his closest advisers in the early days of the regime. Instead, he is being guided by a "kitchen cabinet" of four intellectuals, all under thirty (Mobutu is 32), all relatively inexperienced, all of them oriented toward the left.

They share with Mobutu a contempt for politicians whom they judge responsible for the Congo's vacillating course from independence to 1965 and admiration for people who can get a job done. The group appears to reinforce Mobutu's natural impulsiveness.

As a result, declarations and decrees have been outpacing the government's ability to implement them.

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These frictions had developed as a result of a series of incidents, including a threat by Mobutu to close all foreign consulates in the Congo outside Kinshasa. He said these diplomatic establishments were nests of subversion and he preferred independence to rice and wheat.

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It should be added that U.S. - Congolese relations are also a victim of Mobutu's heightened sensitivities on points of national pride.

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provincial administrative machinery, mesh. Redrawing provincial boundaries seems to have helped little and the recent replacement of four of the best governors by military men appears to promise even poorer administration.

Economic Problems

Where he has been able to utilize the army, Mobutu has been more effective. For instance, he improved policing of diamond mining areas and reduced smuggling. This helped to bring a halt to the steady deterioration of the value of the Congolese franc.

Outside the army, Mobutu has tried to create a power base in the form of volunteer youth movements of a paramilitary nature. Recruits are now said to number in the tens of thousands; more than 3,000 marched in the June 30 parade in Kinshasa. They are charged with the defense of the state against its enemies.

Armed, they would certainly represent an important force. But it seems doubtful they can be used to attack the Congo's principal problems, which are economic.

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 last May, and later he
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 ani (formerly Stanleyville)
 on a rather thin pretext.

Friction With U.S.

This anti-Belgianism,
 which has seemed almost
 paranoid at times, has put
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 made no sense unless Mo-
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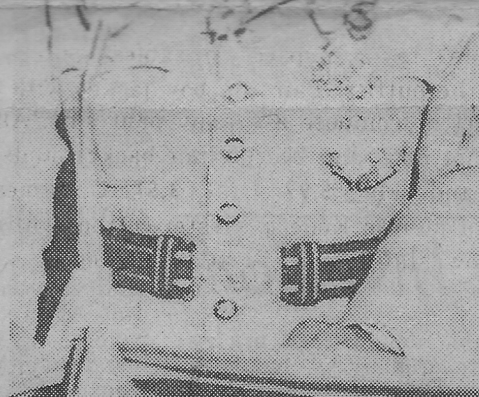
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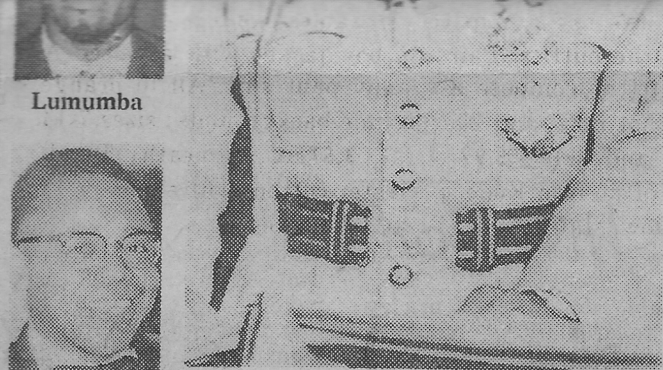
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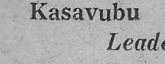
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U.S. economic aid to the Congolese has averaged about \$45 million a year since independence in 1960. In addition, a relatively small program of military support has been maintained to help the Congolese army combat a rebellion that began in 1964 and ended only this year.

An American official told Mobutu that his jibe at the United States would not make it any easier to get Congress to approve renewal of the Congolese aid program. Mobutu construed the remark as interference in the internal affairs of the Congo, for which he held Godley responsible.

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However small a threat Tshombe actually represents to the Kinshasa regime, there is no doubt he makes Mobutu jumpy. But the president's nationalistic attitudes may also be a result of a profound change in his thinking.

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And there lies the dilemma of the nationalistic approach that Mobutu has adopted. Every assertion of economic independence (that is to say assaults on Belgian control of Congolese industry) tends to injure the country's chances for economic growth, which is probably the only long-run guarantee of independence.

ROBERT LEE is a Minneapolis Tribune staff writer on leave for graduate study at Columbia University after a year in Africa.