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CONGO ATROCITIES

1960

On July 28, 1960, the Belgian government published a summary of the testimony, presented since July 5, of atrocities committed against whites by native Congolese police and soldiers. The report that the Belgian minister of justice read to newsmen covered some 32 pages and listed 230 persons as having been severely beaten; 291 women claiming they were raped — some repeatedly—; 10 persons shot; three badly hurt by stoning and two subjected to burns.

The minister of justice, Mr. Merchiers, had no figures on the number killed. It seems that the mutinous natives were more interested in humiliating and in committing outrages upon their victims rather than in murdering them. As Mr. Merchiers expressed it:

> "The act of abasement of human dignity, of humiliation, of the most profound actions against mankind and the civilized conception of human values were the rule, as if there had been given an order to do all that was possible to humiliate men and women but to avoid before world opinion the reproach of massacres."

Although some Congolese soldiers protested that they had made no great outcry against the common practice of white Belgian officers enjoying an occasional night with their wives, in fact had even offered to share their wives with their white "superiors," there was undoubtedly some brutality visited upon the whites, even if exaggerated. The report stated that:

> Men and women were stripped naked and clubbed with rifle butts. Several men were compelled to step on barbed wire with their bare feet.
>
> Mothers were said to have been repeatedly attacked in the presence of their children, one claiming she was assaulted while holding a baby in her arms. And so forth.

According to the Belgian defence minister, Arthur Gilson, in a broadcast, appeals were still coming from whites in isolated areas who feared violence. It was because of this situation, Mr. Gilson said, that Belgian troops would not be completely recalled until U.N. troops could give guarantee of safety to the whites. Whatever is the extent of the Congolese atrocities against the white Belgians in 1960, however, the violence has been magnified out of all proportions by the Belgian governmen for reasons of its own. Although part of the Congo, including the city of Leopoldville is a shambles, with business virtually at a standstill since the exodus of the Belgians, Belgium apparently had no intentions of pulling out of the mineral-rich Katanga Province. Native stooges have "seceded" from the new republic and Belgian business continues to f u n c t i o n. Belgium has now put her allies in the embarrassing position of having to choose between supporting Belgian imperialism and rushing to the aid of the newly established Congo nation which now seeks to oust the Belgians from the whole area, including Katanga. It is definitely in the interests of Belgian capitalism to magnify the recent atrocities.

1904

In 1904, the Congo was still the property of King Leopold II of the Belgians. In the 1880's under pretext of Christianizing this vast area and abolishing slavery within its borders, Leopold had enlisted the aid of Henry M. Stanley, the Anglo-American explorer and discoverer of the country, and had gained the acquiescence of other European nations in his venture. Within 15 years time, the Belgian king had made 400 million gold francs through his outrageous exploitation of the Congo natives. By the time the old tycoon died in 1909, the population of the Belgian Congo had been cut from 20 to 10 million, a direct consequence of one of the most brutal colonizations of all time. The tales of torture, atrocities and wholesale murder perpetrated on the Congolese in Leopold's (wild) rubber jungles by Leopold's police and soldiers so shocked the hardened imperialists of Britain and other countries that a Commission of Inquiry was sent, in 1904, to the Congo.

The data of the report (which was never published) was supplied by some 30 whites—explorers, agents, and officials of the Congo State, missionaries and consuls — American, Englishmen, Germans, Frenchmen, Italians, Belgians and Swedes. Fragments from the testimony of these witnesses can be read in **Leopold The Unloved,** by Ludwig Bauer, published in 1935. They tell a hair-raising story indeed! For example:

> "Lieutenant Tilkens writes (in letters): 'Comandant Verstraeten visited my station and congratulated me warmly. He said his report would depend upon the quantity of rubber which I was able to provide. The quantity increased from 360 kilogrammes in September to 1500 in October, and from January onwards it will amount to 4000 per month, which will bring me in a monthly premium of 500 francs. Am I not a lucky fellow? If I go on like this, within two years I shall have earned premiums of 12,000 Fcs.' He continues: 'S. S. Van Kerkhoven is coming down the Nile and will demand 1500 porters. Unlucky niggers! I can hardly bear to think of them. I am asking myself how on earth I shall be able to hunt up so large a number.' Then: 'Marshes, hunger, exhaustion. How much blood will be shed because of this transport! Three times, already, I have had to make war upon the chiefs who would not help me to get the men I needed. The fellows would rather die in their own forests than as members of a transport train. If a chief refuses, that means war, with modern fire-arms on one side against spears and javelins on the other. . . .' Next, to his major: 'I see the likelihood of general rising. The natives are sick of the regime, of having to work as porters, of gathering rubber, of being forced to provide foodstuffs. Once more I have been fighting for three months with only ten days interval. I have 152 prisoners. 'For two years I have been making war in this district, but have not been able to force the natives to submit; they would rather die. What am I to do? I am paid for my work. I am merely a tool in the hands of my superiors, and carry out their orders as discipline demands!'" (p. 263).

A British missionary, Scrivener, reported that fugitives told him horrible stories of murder and famine; of how in one place where there had been 3000 persons, only 300 were left; of a chief who stands at the gate of the store where the negroes deliver the rubber; if the quantity is too small, he shoots the bringer. Of how fugitives who are caught are placed behind one another in single file, and shot with one bullet in order to save cartridges (p. 266) and so on . . .

The report of Roger Casement, British consul at Boma, appeared as a British White Book. He saw a boy of eleven, both of whose hands had been cut off, the only survivor of a family of six, the rest having been murdered. He tells of one joint stock company which needed 72,000 rifle cartridges in three years for use in