

BOOK REVIEW

Thomas Kanza. *Rise and Fall of*

Patrice Lumumba, Conflict in the Congo

(London: R. Collings, 1978, 386 pp.)

"The tradition of all the dead generations weighs like an alp upon the brain of the living." (Karl Marx)

This volume is an expanded version of the 1972 edition of Thomas Kanza's *Conflict in the Congo*. If taken seriously, this book may be the *coup de grace* to Lumumba's memory and to Lumumbism. It may indeed jeopardize any chances of revitalizing Lumumba's revolutionary political line in the context of the never-ending mass resistance movement in Zaire and elsewhere in the Third World. Citizen Kanza's thesis is a real hodgepodge, combining diplomacy, politics, psychologism and historicism. From the start, he wishes to emphasize the fact that his is an eye-witness story and not hearsay or anything like bookish knowledge. To make sure that the reader understands and respects his first-hand knowledge, Citizen Kanza warns:

When I talk of Kasa-Vubu, Lumumba, Tshombe, Mobutu, Bomboko, Kalonji, Nendaka, Munongo, Gizenga, Mulele, Kamitatu, Gbenye, Soumialot, Kashamura, and the rest, I shall be talking of them as I knew them -- not as they may be known to the world through the mass media. All these, and many other names both in the Congo and elsewhere, will occur in relation to contacts which I had personally with the people concerned. To pronounce final judgement on the influence they exercised, or the part they played in the tragi-comedy (sic) of the Congo, will be for the next generation. (P. 8)

His point is well taken. Citizen Kanza was, and still is, an insider, a participant-observer who is willing to share his knowledge and political experience with us, the outsiders. Yet, despite his willingness, he is reluctant and, in fact, incapable of telling it like it was. He refuses to analyze the facts, chooses to play with words and he passes the buck to the next generation. How can this future generation arrive at a judicious assessment of the situation when the facts are so ingeniously hidden within a labyrinth of verbiage? How can that be when the "Criot's" own sense of history is questionable?

Like every other Zairian bourgeois scholar, Kanza's political history of Zaire begins with a detailed and candidly written autobiographical account which underlines his social and class position as well as his "rough" road to academe. He is very open and straightforward about all the connections and class alliances he made before becoming a diplomat. As of 1960, however, the "first" Congolese scholar begins to show a certain lapse of memory. His story vacillates and becomes more and more confusing. Since, in Zairian political circles, knavery is equated with skillful and high diplomacy, Citizen Kanza, in his zigzag style of telling the story, wants to be all things to all people. He does not want to offend anyone. Still, he wants the reader to know what a brilliant minister he was and how stupid and unfit his colleagues were. He also wants the reader to bear in mind that he was the first Congolese university graduate. Kanza, if one believes his story, was the man who knew, at all times, what was transpiring, what needed to be done and how to do it. He seems to say that whenever his prime minister failed to take his advice seriously, things went wrong. His superiority complex is very much felt throughout his work. In fact, he projects the image of a mercenary-technocrat when he writes:

Within that team I felt an outsider, I did not really feel that I was one of the government. I still seemed to be in my old ambiguous situation of a privileged but solitary Congolese. I was a minister of no political party; and though certainly a friend of Lumumba's, not one of those completely in his confidence.
(Pp. 120-121)

Hence, after a long and rather pompous introduction of himself, Citizen Kanza turns to the heart of the matter -- "The Rise and Fall of Lumumba." It must be pointed out that the title is misleading. Indeed, despite apparent personal esteem and respect for Lumumba, Citizen Kanza's evaluation of his former friend and prime minister is a devastating, knockout blow to Lumumba's private and public character. In a nutshell, Kanza's low opinion of Lumumba can be summed up as follows: Lumumba was essentially a very jovial person; as a politician, he was inexperienced, naive, demagogic, undiplomatic, easily excitable, a man who seldom knew what he was doing.

This assessment can be captured through several passages of Citizen Kanza's book. Here is one of the kind:

I had done my best to become a friend of the secretary general's from the moment of our first meeting in New York. I had urged upon Lumumba the need to recognize the immense role

that Hammarskjold could play in contributing to his political survival or downfall, as long as UN troops remained in the Congo. Hammarskjold evinced the same friendship for Bomboko as for myself. We had created the necessary trust between ourselves and the "boss" of the UN, who was wholly disposed to help the Congolese government to maintain the unity of the Congo, and preserve the integrity of our country: two of the major points in Lumumba's political programme. Yet, alas, on the advice of those who intentionally or ignorantly served his downfall rather than his success, Lumumba himself saw things in very different terms from the realistic diplomatic policy which we were advising so strongly. It was in August 1960 that the fate of the Congo and the Lumumba government was finally decided. Rather than have one or two personal meetings in which they might have come better to understand each other, Lumumba chose instead to exchange a series of letters with Hammarskjold, and neither Bomboko, Minister of Foreign Affairs, nor myself, Minister-Delegate to the UN, were among that group of experts and friends of Lumumba who helped him compose those letters. (P. 262)

Thus, for Citizen Kanza, the failure of Lumumbism must be explained in terms of Lumumba's own failure to understand the diplomatic world as Kanza and Bomboko saw it -- "realistically." It also follows that the recuperation of the Congo by imperialist powers ought to be blamed on Lumumba's inability to establish a personal friendship with the "boss of the UN," Mr. Dag Hammarskjold. Citizen Kanza also implies that Lumumbism failed because Lumumba was relying on foreign friends while he was listening with both ears to his unfit and ill-informed Congolese entourage. Thus, according to this logic, Lumumba could not possibly produce a coherent political thought, i.e., Lumumbism.

To believe this is certainly naive. No one would suggest that Citizen Kanza was naive here or that he misread the situation. Such an assessment is typical of right-wing opportunists and reactionary scholars who, in their effort to separate the trees from the forest, advocate the theory of personality conflict in the conduct of political and public affairs. Who, in his right mind, would think and suggest that at that time Citizen Kanza had not yet come

to grips with the essence of the dialectical nature of the relationship between the Congo and the UN? Between the representative of the Congo and that of the UN? In fact, better than anybody else in the 1960 Congo, Citizen Kanza knew who the enemies of the Congolese people were and what Lumumba intended to accomplish. Indeed, despite his tortuous way of putting things, the "big" scholar shows in the following passages how well he understood Lumumba's political thought, and we quote:

Lumumba never made any secret of his intentions or his objective: to free the Congo -- even, and indeed particularly, after it had been given nominal independence by means of a popular revolution, and the mental decolonization of its people, and also through the moral support and practical help of those African countries that were already free. Popular revolution implied a revolution in institutions, society, politics, economics and culture. (Pp. 329-330)

Elsewhere, he defines Lumumbism better than any real Lumumbist has done so far, stating the following:

In my view, Lumumbism should mean the ideal Lumumba dedicated himself to; the ways he recommended for achieving it and along which he trusted others to follow him. The essence of Lumumbism is the awareness that everyone must fight, in his own sphere and according to his own abilities and chances of success, to take part in the whole liberation struggle of oppressed peoples and subjugated countries. (P. 329)

This popular revolution -- meaning a people's revolution -- implied, again to quote Citizen Kanza, "a revolution in institutions, society, politics, economics, and culture." In other words, Lumumba stood for rapid, well-planned and well-guided transformation of the Belgian Congo into an independent people's democracy. This naturally meant getting the country rid of all forms of colonialism and/or imperialism. Hence, in the economic sphere, for instance, Lumumba's commitment to unitarism translates his determination to give the Congo new and revolutionary sociopolitical and economic structures, thanks to which Shaba's and Kasai's mineral wealth were to be exploited by the people and for the people of the Congo. Such a political line, if followed and

implemented, would have given birth to two processes: on the one hand, it would have accelerated the economic development of the Congo, while on the other hand, it would have put in motion the process of Belgium underdevelopment by depriving her of her main source of revenue. Moreover, the nationalization of the mining sector and other private means of production and distribution would have given the Congo its second independence -- its economic independence. This is why the United States of America and her allies could not tolerate Lumumba's proposition of a politically and ideologically unified Congo under the leadership of the MNC. Once it became equally clear that American and Western imperialist interests could not be served adequately in a balkanized Congo, Western interventionists opted for what became their only alternative: the physical elimination of Lumumba and the transformation of the newly independent republic into a neo-colony. This became a *fait accompli* as of January 17, 1961 at which date Lumumba's meteoric career came to an end with his assassination.

The West took over the state political power, ruling by proxy, thanks to such strawmen as Lleo, Adoula, Mobutu, Ndele, Bomboko, Kasa-Vubu and the whole of Binza's clique. Simply put, America and her allies had to prevent any territorial fragmentation in order to maintain their control over Katanga's uranium, cobalt and other mineral resources -- and this they were determined to accomplish by any means necessary. It is from this perspective that one should view the heavily Western-financed UN military operations in the Congo. It must be added that, at the time, the NATO bloc was the commanding voice within the United Nations. Kanza knew all this very well. It is therefore puzzling to follow his reasoning when he states:

I knew that Hammarskjold was committed to assisting the Congo and the central government; but contrary to all my hopes, he gave no hint of any intention to collaborate with Lumumba as an individual. I was most disappointed; Hammarskjold was a man of deep feeling, and from my arrival in New York I had succeeded in creating an atmosphere of trust between us. He had more than once helped and advised me, not as the secretary general of the UN speaking to the Congo's ambassador, but as friend to friend. I had hoped that Lumumba would be enough of a diplomat in his private comments.
(P. 238)

The UN was dominated by the NATO bloc and nobody could be elected without its backing. In the light of our past experience with the West, it is hard to believe that Dag Hammarskjold,

an agent of the hegemony, would be committed to the cause of African masses.

As Citizen Kanza is certainly aware, the mining fields which were at stake here were acquired, exploited and kept under control by violent means. Citizen Kanza is also aware of the fact that it is not in the essence of capitalism to quit. Thus, Lumumba could not give the Congo that real independence by socializing with Hammerskjold, neither could he do that without facing strong resistance on the part of imperialism. In short, diplomacy was not and has never been the appropriate response to Western violence. All said, there was no personality conflict between Lumumba and Dag Hammarskjold. This was, as already mentioned, a conflict of national interests. While on one hand Lumumba was struggling for his people's independence, Hammarskjold was doing his best to perpetuate Western domination in the Congo. Thus, by its very nature, the relationship between both men had to be antagonistic. Of all this, Citizen Kanza is not unaware. In fact, to prove his ability to engage in futile intellectual gymnastics, Citizen Kanza, in his typically oblique way, recognized the fact when he conceded:

Deep in myself, I understood the rules of the game. The UN forces were conducting in the Congo a holy war against communism. They had not come to help and assist the Central Government. To make quite sure of this, I made special inquiries as to the financing of the UN operation in the Congo. Basically, the Western powers were providing more than half the expenses involved and by "Western," I mean the NATO countries and their allies, whether military, political or economic, all over the world. (P. 337)

Having said this, Citizen Kanza does a turnabout, blaming Lumumba for being a revolutionary. In Kanza's words,

From Conakry, Lumumba went to visit President Tubman of Liberia, from whom he heard the same phrases of careful assurance and prudence that he had heard in Washington and New York. But Lumumba only listened with half an ear to Tubman's advice; he felt far more attuned to Sekou Toure and above all to Kwame Nkrumah. Indeed, he visited Nkrumah the same day as leaving Monrovia. (P. 250)

One wonders how much Citizen Kanza understood then and

understands now about imperialism and the world socialist revolution. To begin with, Liberia is an American colony even though nobody dares to call it so. Moreover, the Liberian president was not known for his progressive ideas, either. While the Tubmans and the Tolberts lived well, where is Liberia today and what are the living conditions of the Liberian masses?

In suggesting Tubman as a model for Lumumba to follow, Kanza was in effect disclosing his intentions to undermine the revolutionary process in the Congo. He made every effort to turn Lumumba into another Tubman, an agent of imperialism. When this failed, Citizen Kanza elected to sap the former prime minister's political authority by overtly collaborating with the enemies of the Congolese people -- the NATO bloc -- through the auspices of the secretary general of the United Nations. Here is what he had to say:

Hammarskjold followed with interest what I told him of Lumumba's internal problems on both personal and political levels. (P. 219)

Could Citizen Kanza have been a double agent? Whose ambassador was he? Did Adlai Stevenson brief the UN secretary general on Kennedy's personal problems? Only a lackey of imperialism like Citizen Kanza could think of such a possibility. Poor Lumumba, who briefed him on Hammarskjold's personal problems?

Let us now turn to one of the most disturbing points of the book: the author's sense of history. These political memoirs are, in effect, the political history of the Congo from 1960 to 1977. Several major developments are either given marginal treatment or forgotten all together. As a point of fact, from 1961 to 1965, Zaire (then the Democratic Republic of the Congo) occupied the front pages of the world's major newspapers as the Congo crisis or the "Rebellion in the Congo," as it came to be known, dominated the international political scene. This was a logical development in view of the fact that the so-called rebellion was the people's response to Western interventionism which culminated in the murder of Lumumba. This, Citizen Kanza could not forget. After all, was he not the minister of foreign affairs in the revolutionary Gbenye government? What did the National Committee for the Liberation of the Congo (CNL) of which he was a member stand for? It is common knowledge that huge quantities of Zaire's National Bank's gold reserve were smuggled from Kisangani into East African state capitals (Nairobi, Kampala, Dar-Es-Salaam) and that Citizen Kanza, in his capacity as foreign minister in the CNL, was at one time negotiating with East African authorities for the return of this gold. Why is it that no mention is made of the whole issue? Upon leaving his UN post in New York, Citizen Kanza joined the Adoula government, serving as his ambassador at the

court of Saint James. This too is nowhere to be found in the memoirs. Why are Pierre Mulele and the Kwilu armed struggle for the second independence sent into oblivion by Citizen Kanza? Why did the revolution fail? Precisely how, when, and why did Citizen Kanza join the CNL? To what tendency of the movement did he subscribe? Precisely how did Lumumba rise to power? Why isn't Mobutu's rise to power and the ideology of authenticity analyzed in connection with the fall of Lumumba? For whom does Citizen Kanza write these political memoirs? One could raise such questions which Citizen Kanza avoids endlessly and he does not have anything like an answer to them. Could the professor be suffering from amnesia? He can hardly prove it to the reader. After all, he had a perfect recollection of his glorious adolescent days in Belgium.

All this opens a great question of credibility for Citizen Kanza, the historian. Indeed, the period so conveniently forgotten by the author is, and will remain, an important and indelible chapter not only in the history of the Congolese people, but also in that of the liberation movement in the Third World, insofar as the Congo tragedy represents a classic case of imperialist recuperation. This kind of "information black-out" tells us a lot about Kanza the man, the scholar, the politician, the diplomat, the citizen -- in short, about the real Kanza: an enemy of the Congolese people, an agent of Western hegemony.

Objectively speaking, history is essentially the recollection of the sum total of a people's achievements, recorded or not. Unfortunately, since the human race invented the art of writing, that which is written takes precedence over that which is spoken, and in many instances only the former is recognized and accepted as history. Thus, the more literate people become, the more they respect and depend on the written word as the ultimate proof of truth. This is why a history textbook, for example, written by an individual on the basis of personally selected information with a particular objective in mind, may have such an impact upon a generation that in time, it becomes history itself. Thus, it is fair to say that in the final analysis, in the literate cultures, history means nothing more and nothing less than the sum total of documents accumulated during a period of time on this or that aspect of a people's past.

Unlike mechanical and physical processes, history and the historical process can neither be reproduced nor tested in vitro. Because of this, the historian's responsibility vis-a-vis his people is double: on one level, the historian is the hand and the mouth that records and tells their story, while on another level, he is a maker of it. This is why, in African cultural traditions, such a heavy responsibility was entrusted to a few selected good men and women: the griots, whose special education

began early in life and whose progress was followed with great interest by the whole community.

History tells us that griots who attempted to distort history by either misrepresenting or withholding the truth were stripped of their "license" to practice and, in some extreme cases, they lost their lives. This is no longer the case because, thanks to the introduction of the literate Western educational system, one becomes a historian by choice and not as a result of his community's decision. Understandably, such a choice is dictated by one's personal goals which, after all, do not always coincide with the community's needs and/or well being. This may help explain the failure of many of today's African historians to come to grips with their role and their responsibility to their people. The author of the Rise and Fall of Lumumba is certainly an eloquent example.

It must be made clear that despite his claim of being a man without a specific political affiliation, and perhaps because of this, Citizen Kanza is a dangerous right-wing opportunist who tried to capitalize on every situation, always siding with the stronger -- or what appeared to be the stronger -- party at any given moment.

In his introductory autobiographical note, Citizen Kanza tells the reader how the powerful Roman Catholic Church facilitated his admission at Louvain University. He did not forget to mention how he worked with Kasa-Vubu's ABAKO, especially before the tensions between the two major tendencies (Kasa-Vubu's vs. Kanza's father) led to a split which reduced ABAKO's power and influence on the national level. When this happened, and Lumumba's MNC victory became apparent, Kanza smelled it. Though he never bought a MNC membership card, he became one of Lumumba's closest aides.

His loyalty shifted one more time soon after the nationalist leader's assassination. He became Cyrille Adoula's ambassador to Britain. For the record, let it be stressed that Adoula was Washington's handpicked man as part of a CIA master plan to recolonize the Congo, a plan that began with the murder of Lumumba. Kanza's appointment to the court of Saint James was probably his reward for assisting the West to destroy Lumumba through Dag Hammarskjold, whom he briefed regularly on Lumumba's "personal problems" (as he put it). Interestingly enough, this was not to be Kanza's last trick. For reasons that he never disclosed (and he may never do so), he rejoined Lumumba's camp, becoming foreign minister of the CNL, an offspring of Lumumba's MNC. Heaven knows what role Citizen Kanza played in the revolutionary government. As soon as he joined it, the West launched a series of successful attacks which led to the defeat of the Peoples Liberation Army (ALP). Ever since, the leaders of the CNL have been recuperated

and put to the service of the neocolonial and oppressive regime of General Mobutu. Meanwhile, Kanza is in a self-imposed exile, among his friends in England and in the United States. While professing opposition to Mobutu's regime, Citizen Kanza meets with him on every occasion that the president of Zaire visits a Western power. Moreover, he has maintained close ties with people like Ndele, Nendaka and Kamitatu whom he himself identified as Lumumba's enemies.

With all this in mind, it is safe to assert that Citizen Kanza never was a Lumumbist and that his book is, in effect, part of a well-thought-out strategy for a political comeback on both the national and the international scenes. The book seems to accomplish a threefold objective. First of all, it adds to the professor's publications; secondly, it assists bourgeois academic institutions in further confusing the minds of the youth, the very people who so badly need to know the whole truth about the liberation movement in the Third World; and finally, in capitalist America, a book is a source of income for the author.

In terms of the Zairian political conjuncture, such an assertion is neither presumptuous nor gratuitous in the light of the precedent established by his colleagues, Kashmura, Mandungu Bula, and more recently, Kamitatu.

Mak Basunga