

**United Nations Oral History Project**

**Jean Paul van Bellinghen  
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JK            Ambassador van Bellinghen, could you explain what your position was during the time of the United Nations operation in the Congo in the early sixties and where you were located at that particular time?

JB            Well at the time it all started I was a young man in the embassy in Washington. I was dealing with economic matters but I was very critical both of our embassy and of our Permanent Mission to the United Nations for the way in which they dealt with information at large and the way they dealt with the American press in particular. Having been very very critical on the way we dealt with this, I was then given a job of dealing with it myself. I was then sent to New York and was responsible both in New York and Washington for trying to explain our position. The tragedy for us was, because it was a tragedy, we had been almost fervent supporters of the United Nations all along. We worked, I think, nicely with the UN in terms of trusteeship counsel for Rwanda and Burundi and although we had a view that the UN was overextending its mandate in terms of overseeing what happened in the colonies, we never had a big discussion with them on that. As soon as the first signs appeared of a desire from the Congolese leaders to get political autonomy and even independence, we negotiated this with

them rather quickly and, in fact, surprised the world with the speed in which we then granted them independence. It is true to say that they weren't prepared to have independence in 1960 because this had never been our estimate of the time that they would ask for it. These were the days, 1950, 1955, when the Indonesian people asked for independence, when the Indians got their independence, when the Pakistanis seceded from the Indians. But we considered that there were countries of various points in their preparedness to become independent and that Africa, being the last continent to be colonized, would probably also be the last continent to be de-colonized, and had not foreseen that decolonization would have happened almost at the same time, both in Asia and in Africa, and in Africa countries which had already been colonized for centuries would come to independence at the same time when countries like Congo, which had only known the presence of foreigners on its soil for a small number of years would come as quickly as it would come for the others. So there you have the gist, I think, or you have the basis of the tragedy. On the one hand, a country that was prepared to work along with the United Nations mandate, on the other hand, the claim by the United Nations that we had done nothing to prepare them for independence.

JK

Well, on that note, what I wanted to ask you was, and I wanted to mention for the record also, that you had written a chapter in a book, recently published, called "Modern Belgium" and your chapter, "Belgium and Africa" I believe is the title, was very interesting and discusses some of the historic background of the settling of the Congo which I think would be very interesting for people to read. In that, what we were discussing earlier before we were on the record here, you were talking about the missionaries and that there were Belgian missionaries as well as British missionaries who had eventually settled the area and had set up schools. You also mentioned that in the Congo there was a rather broad base of education and that the literacy had reached a rather high level as compared to the rest of Africa. But you also mentioned that there was a reluctance to provide university education - higher education. I was wondering why that was and, in your opinion, did this contribute to some of the later problems.

JB

Well, this brings us back to the root of our dispute with the United Nations in 1960, and in fact, our dispute with the whole wide world. This has to do with the timing of the independence. We had a progressive thinker in this country, Mr. Van Bilsen, who is still alive, and who had written a small book with a number of speeches in which he had daringly predicted, in 1956, that the time had

come to prepare the Congolese for independence. The timing he, a great brave thinker, was thinking of, was thirty years. It meant, that had we followed him, this sort of leftist, radical thinker, we would have given Zaire independence in 1986. Most people were horrified by that idea in 1956. People accepted the notion that Indonesia was independent and India was independent in the same way as all the countries of Latin America are independent. But in terms of Africa, people made differences and said, in Africa you have countries like all those of northern Africa, which have had contacts with the rest of the world for the last 3,000 years. You have countries in western Africa on the Atlantic Ocean, which have had contacts with the whole wide world for the last 300 years. You even have countries on the eastern shores of Africa which also have had contacts with the whole wide world for the last 200 years, but what was called the African central base of the Congo has been out of contact with the whole world up til the day of 1876, I believe it was, when one lonesome journalist crossed it from east to west and we felt that before real contact was made, you can argue that real contact was only made in 1920, because Stanley went back with a couple of people who accompanied him. Then Leopold II administered this country with a maximum of 900 people. What is 900 people for a country which is almost as vast as all of



Brazil? There's nothing you can do. Before Belgium took it over from Leopold II we were in 1909, and we were quickly thrown into World War I so that our own colonial regime in Africa only starts in 1920. Now in 1956 we only had 36 years of contact with that country and we said there's not a single mind that is sane that will say that coming from total isolation from the world, absolute total isolation from the rest of the world, in 36 years' time you develop into a sort of Californian type of society. Obviously not. And we felt that even van Bilsen was wrong to predict 1986. Therefore, one has to make a formidable distinction between basic fundamental investments and the state of preparedness in 1960. In 1960 our fundamental investment was huge. I will give you one single example to illustrate this point. We had, in our forty years of presence, built a network of paths which was approximately 90,000 miles long.

JK These are roads you're talking about?

JB Yes, but in Africa you would usually use the term path because they do not get concrete or asphalt. It's just too much for the budget that you have.

JK But you have a cleared, dirt road.

JB These are cleared, dirt roads which are strengthened and which of course go along with bridges, Bailey bridges or any other type of bridges. But on these 90,000 miles of roads, as you call them, but I would rather say they were

large paths, the cars we used in those days were American Dodges, Plymouths, Chevrolets and Fords and most of them were station wagons because people driving down in Africa needed that enormous space. As you know, station wagons are low to the ground and these cars could go through these roads at an average speed of 35-40 mph. Since independence, that is, since 1960, we now also have 31 years of independence, almost the same period as when we were there. And this time there's a huge amount of money flowing from all countries of the world into Zaire. And one can argue that not one mile more has been built. The only thing that has been done is that out of those 90,000 miles there is approximately 1,000 miles that has been asphalted, where you now have a huge amount of traffic. But on the 89,000 left, as we had left them, there are no longer any Fords, Dodges, there are only Land Rovers or Toyotas with four-wheel drive and their average speed has fallen down to 7 mph. That is the example which I would foremost take. When I was in Zaire as ambassador, Mobutu once said in one of his speeches that he could not be attacked for violating human rights because ever since its existence the Zairian continent had not built one single jail. One distinguished ambassador next to me said, and neither has it built one single school or one single hospital. Despite the huge amount of money that has been flowing there too, I don't want to blame the



Zairians for this because I know that the infrastructure that had been built in colonial days was so immense that the upkeep of that infrastructure in itself is an enormous burden for a country which has to work without the tools which developed countries like ours have in their own hands to help out. But this is only to readdress the situation which is often mistakenly given that the Congo had had no investment either in social or economic or welfare. It had a huge development. But it is true say that this development was one that went with a time scale which was totally different from the time scale that in fact occurred. A time scale was for the end of this century and time scale that came as sort of a tidal wave over all of Africa was one that was for 1960.

JK

But it seemed educationally, for example, that the goals were to build as I was saying a broad base rather than to educate a few Congolese and then take them up through the university. But in your chapter you mentioned something about that - there was some resistance to even bringing Congolese to Belgium and educating them in the universities there - why was that?

JB

Well, I think the very broad education basis was one which was accepted by everyone as a goal. The people said there was no reason to try to select just a few children of chieftains and educate them because this

would be unacceptable from a political point of view. For the missionaries also it was totally unacceptable that they would devote a lifetime to the development of these people while giving their best efforts only to the children of the better families or of the chieftains and they said everybody must be able to go to school. Our criteria was, therefore, one of available schools. Now in the domain of primary education this was not too difficult because in Africa a school is quickly built. The problem was finding teachers. You must know that we had an average of 6,000 missionaries during our stay there and, of course, each missionary was able quite rapidly amongst the Congolese students to recruit the best to become teachers themselves and to take them on their own payroll and, in fact, had gotten them on the income of the colony, found enough income to pay quite a number of Congolese teachers. And that is why, in the statistics of the World Bank of 1960, you discover that although Congo was one of the last countries to come into contact with the Western part, it is one that had achieved already in 1960 one of the highest literacy rates. Now why is it that we did not put as much energy into secondary education and into university education? Well, the reason for that is that it is far easier to discover or to find teachers for primary education than it is for secondary education. In secondary education we

were, perhaps it's a failure, but we were unable to develop a secondary education which would be one for them. We came with a notion that there was no class distinction to be made or no racial distinction to be made and, therefore, that if you want to train someone as a doctor, or as a lawyer, he had to go through our whole entire curriculum. And we should not assume that they would be unable to follow our own full curriculum. Now you can find quite a number of missionaries who can teach primary education from one day to the other, but you can't find missionaries - lay volunteers, or civil servants - who will come to classes and teach Roman law or Latin or Greek as it was in our secondary education. If you were to ask UNESCO, for instance, to go to a given country that has been out of contact with the world and say, you start knowing a primary educational system but also secondary educational system and a university educational system and you've got to fill it with international civil servants and you've got to have about 20,000 of them, well there's no way you can find the financial means to support that effort. You must see the effort in terms of what it was, before 1960 no country in the west was helping countries in Africa or in Asia. We were saying these countries can help themselves and with our colonial taxation system there's more than enough money, if we say, to support their own development

programs. The only thing we did before independence was to borrow monies for investment purposes in public works in the Congo which our own government guaranteed. That's the only form of help we did but there never was a flow of money from Belgium down to the Congo. So we worked for the local needs. Now as far as the university education is concerned there is great ambiguity here. A number of European countries did develop not university education on the spot, but they did ease access to our own universities in Europe to a sort of better-off class of Africans where they hoped that they would gain the loyalty of those new classes to themselves and thereby would be able to construct sort of Euro-African communities built upon the class comradeship, or school comradeship, where Africans had gone to school. This did not prevail with us for two reasons. One, we never dreamt of a sort of Belgian-African community because we never encouraged the settlement of Belgian nationals in the Congo feeling that this was too wide a country, too vast a country, too great a country to have but the slightest hope that one day we might do like the British or the Portuguese and go and encourage our people to go and settle. We felt that this country would become independent, it would become far more numerous in terms of people. We were a small country and we would take an enormous risk in sending our own people to settle in that

country. Therefore, the very notion of an African-Belgian community was not one that prevailed with us and therefore, also, not the notion of class comradeship in Belgium in our own universities.

JK Now was there any fear though that by educating a certain number of Congolese to the university level that there might be greater pressure for independence by those people?

JB Absolutely. I was coming to that. You see, you can see the presence of an African or an Asian in your universities in two ways: you can either say, ah, but they'll be so delighted and so grateful that they have come to your university that they will tend to be your own friends once they're back in the country and, therefore, will contribute to the Franco-African community or the British-African community. But you can also it differently, you can see it in the sense that they will come and learn in your country the reasons to take power to themselves and in fact oust your own people out of their country. And this was a fear in the case with us. Since we had no hope of ever creating a Belgian-African community. Now take the example of Algeria, the French had 2-3 million Frenchmen in Algeria - that's a substantial number. And having a substantial number of people who were wine growers and industrial leaders and whatnot, they were hoping to create a Franco-



Algerian community by having a number of Algerians sent to French universities. The same is true for the British and Rhodesia, they were hoping for a number of Rhodesians to be sent Cambridge Oxford in London to become British citizens since there was a basis for a development of such a community in Rhodesia. But with us there was no intention of creating a Belgium community in Africa and we simply said, if that is the case and they come to our universities in Belgium then they have only one outcome which is to become very quickly harsh, radical, nationalists who once trained by us will go back to their countries and will then excite their own people to get rid of us so that these young nationals of those countries can take over. And we would have agreed with that except for the fact that we said, look at the number of examples we have where it's a tiny minority of educated locals who are going to act as the exploiters of those masses there and, therefore, the only guarantee we have in a sound development program is to locate these schools, the higher schools, and the universities, inside their own country so that we make sure that it is a vast number of students that can go there and that we shall not be blamed later in life for having educated one small tiny minority of an elite which in turn is going to take over from us with demands on their own people which we wouldn't agree with and you can also argue that obviously



our own civil servants didn't want to get ousted from one day to another and that they wanted long term programs because it's very hard to ask people to devote a life to learning the languages of that country, to learn the medicine of that country, to really become someone who can only make a living in that country and then tell him that he's taking the risk that one day to another he'll be ousted out of a position and will have to come back to this country where perhaps no jobs are going to await him. Therefore we were considering the whole matter in a sort of idealistic view without seeing that the demand for independence would come, not from that one country, but would be a total world, global wave which would be irresistible. There we made a formidable mistake in not seeing that point.

JK So then what actually happened then that independence in the Congo came so quickly if the country did not seem to be prepared by having its own leadership ready to run the country, why was independence given so quickly?

JB I must make a distinction between two points - one is the international context and two is the Belgian context. In the international context we felt quite secure that the tidal wave would not come before Algeria would become independent. To us Algeria was a country that was highly developed and it looked like it was a country that was survivable as such without French management. And yet

our French friends who are progressives, on the whole, were telling us that there was no way we could consider Algeria anything else but a part of France. Therefore, we felt that there was no reason to fear that there would be any acceleration of independence movement in Africa as long as Algeria remained an integral part of France. What was shattering was, to begin with, the failure of the Suez expedition which proved that European powers no longer could dictate their will at a simple decision by an African country to nationalize one of its main industries - that came as a great shatter. What also came as a great shatter was the independence of Ghana. Now Ghana is not to be compared to Congo, Ghana's been centuries in contact with the West, which Congo had not been. But Ghana had a fierce leader, Nkrumah. And Nkrumah was a man who each day went out of his way to preach for independence and General de Gaulle, we had misread him. We felt that he had claimed that Algeria would remain French and yet one day he granted Algeria independence. Then said to all French colonies that they should opt either to stay in the French community or to get out altogether. One country, the Guinea with Sekou Touré, a neighbor to Nkrumah, had already been influenced so much by Nkrumah that Sekou Touré said that he would opt out of the community with France. The French withdrew all of their civil servants, all of their

technicians, all of their dossiers, but in the other French colonies they gave them the notion that they were independent within the French union. One of these countries was Congo, Brazzaville. Congo, Brazzaville is right across the river. It was not even the Congolese who were so much upset by this than our own people who said, it's impossible to conceive that we shall keep a colony fully under control if 500 yards over the river, here, the other edge of the river, you have a country which, though belonging to a country far more colonial than ours, France, is going to be autonomous. Therefore, I would claim that the leaders of the University of Kinshasa (Leopoldville) began to think of the future and they began to stir themselves - their black students, their local students - into a thinking mold of, "Boys and girls, what is happening - historical times - and you should think seriously about your own country." And that gave rise to what is known to this document drafted by the students called "Congolese Consciousness".

JK Now this was in the university in Leopoldville.

JB In Leopoldville, yes. That's where it started. So this is the international aspect, namely the caving in of Algeria. The 180 degree change, of course, by de Gaulle, the opening up by de Gaulle of the road to autonomy for the French colonies within the French union, and the impact it had on the Congo. I'm now coming to the

Belgian situation and that's a rather interesting one. The Dutch had a class of merchants who were eager in the past to have their ships, their great companies, and their colonies - so were the British, so were the Portuguese. We Belgians, on the contrary, did not have many ships, nor many navigators, no overseas trading houses. All we had was, in fact, a foreign born king, Leopold II, the son of Leopold I was a German and Marie Antoinette, the daughter of the French king, Louis Philipe, and he has a worldwide vision for our country, but our people here are people with very parochial views - their own village, their own clan, their own beliefs - and they looked upon Leopold II's venture in the Congo with a great deal of weariness. They didn't like it much. It was a sort of oddity. Some distant cousin had gone there too, he had died there soon because there was this malaria and all kinds of African illnesses. They didn't like it very much up until 1930 when all of a sudden the first airplanes began to go and where the papers reported that we had achieved a number of real issues, like the mines in Katanga, the bridges, the dams, the electricity, and the whole world began to speak about it. Then came World War II where it was considered that our government in London had been able to survive financially and our diplomatic service had been able to survive and our army was well equipped and our finances

were in good order and the National Bank of Belgium after the war found itself again in good prosperity because all during the war this colony of ours had produced a great deal of wealth. And all of a sudden came a great deal of satisfaction and people said this was a genius, this man, and nobody questioned him and nobody questioned the colonial experience. But neither were we prepared to totally change our minds. We were proud as long as it went well. If difficulties were to arise we would not, like the British or the French, be prepared to fight for it because contrary to the British and the French, we had only one colony. Rwanda and Burundi are two other little colonies but they're too small to be really compared to Zaire. The British had had their fights in India, had their fights in Burma, had their fights in Kenya, they knew and they had a sense of perspective. We had no sense of perspective. Our main difficulty with Zaire, that we ourselves as a territory are only 1/80th a part of Zaire. The contrast is absolutely amazing and we had only one ball to play with, instead of other countries, it becomes repetitious once you do things. I think our country still has to come into its own for participating in major global or European efforts. But basically we are a bit like Denmark or the Scandinavian countries, sort of in ourselves - happy in ourselves - and without a great world cause. So that the Congo experiment is



very much a sort of an injected history on us by Leopold II. We went along with it as long as it worked well, we were happy and were proud about it, but once it turned sour because they would turn against us and we would see the world powers beginning to criticize us then we would withdraw again in our cocoon and say well, let the others deal with it. So that in 1958, when in fact the leaders of the University of Navania were teaching their own students that they, the younger ones, ought to begin to think of independence. All of a sudden in our countries, people on the left, in the trade unions, in other movements than this one in the University of Kinshasa, which was a Catholic university, began to say, well, we too want this country to be independent, and we came in a sort of "outbidding" one another in telling our friends it's about time that you should wake up. Despite the fact that two years before we had laughed Van Bilsen out of the door for predicting 1986 as a time for independence. Now all of a sudden confronted with the tidal wave that we saw coming and which was already in Brazzaville. We said, what the hell, they may prepared or unprepared, it doesn't matter too much. What we will do is that we all make an agreement with whoever comes into power. We all make an agreement that henceforward all of our civil servants will stay there and they will be put at the disposal of the government of Zaire. Truly



we recognized the fact that the government of Zaire will be unable to pay them the salaries which they had now. They enjoyed then, in the colonial days, a salary which was about three to four times what a salary of a local native was to the great horror of the United Nations, but today any United Nations person going to Zaire earns about 100 times what the local natives earn. A World Bank representative in Zaire earns at least 100 times his equivalent Secretary-General Minister of the treasury or Minister of Finance in Zaire three to four times was quite obvious. You could not feed a family out in Europe with less than that. We said to the Zaireans we will pay the largest part of the amount ourselves. It was quite new. In colonial days it was spent by the colonial government thus by the income of Zaire itself. From 1960 onward we would pay 2/3 ourselves. The same was true for the army. The same was true for the medical corps. And here I come to the main accusation that we have been hearing over and over and over again and which I think deserves to be corrected. It was said that we, after 70-80 years of colonialism, that we had not produced one single doctor. To begin with, as I said, our colonial period lasted, in fact, from 1920-1960. It takes forty years to produce a doctor. We should have started training them, we should have started with a boy of 10 in 1930. So that even in timing this was not that easy.

Secondly, it is not true that we have not prepared for doctors. Our problem was that we wanted to keep to the foreign, the Belgian, presence in Zaire a sort of upper-ladder professional situation so as to keep our authority unchallenged and we therefore said, in medical terms, you can be a doctor if you have a Belgian degree, or a French degree, or a British degree, or an American degree. As you well know Americans with a Belgian degree can practice in America and vice versa. But we do not want what we said was "medicine a bon marché" we do not want medicine at a cheap price. Therefore, we developed what we called "assistants medical", medical assistants. Now these medical assistants were people who could do quite a bit. When, in 1960, this accusation of not forming people was spread through the world the WHO (World Health Organization) Dr. Candau of Brazil was its Director General. He taught about 100 of these people - send them for about six months to Geneva and to France, then gave them some kind of degree, then sent them back to Zaire and said the Belgians didn't do a thing in 50 years time, but we, in six months, have produced 100 doctors.

JK But they took the medical assistants that already had been trained, and trained them further and thought that they were then qualified.

JB And our great mistake was that we should have foreseen this in 1958 already and we should have said considering

the fact that this country may be independent, perhaps not in 1960. We expected the Zaireans themselves to say to us, listen, we want you to stay here for another ten years and we will ask you to grant us the status of autonomy and then a status of semi-independence, and then a status of independence, and this is what we should have obtained from them and this is what we should have striven for. But the problem was that the Zaireans amongst themselves, and this acceleration of the tide began to outbid one another and say, ah, you say that you will ask for semi-autonomous status. You are a traitor, what you should ask for is full independence. And with us, on our side of it, we didn't negotiate with only with the government, we negotiated with a number of important people in the country - we wanted to have a consensus.

Also amongst us there were people who said no, we don't want to hear anything about an intermediate state. We wanted it straight away. We wanted to have it right away. So in this acceleration process we should have said, listen, it's about time that all these systems should become, let us say African doctors, because what the French did in Congo presumably was that. The French had also medical assistants, but they called them African doctors. Therefore, people said they were doctors. I mean, it wasn't worse than that. It was that we had not done that. We made the same mistake in the army. In the

army, again, to maintain a sort of supremacy, we said, in order to be a lieutenant, you should go to Belgian military school and you must know your mathematics up to this level and your geography up to our level and you must go to all of our classes and if you succeed in all of our classes you may become a lieutenant. That was good as long as the system was moving slowly and we might have had a number of their officers trained in our military schools. But once we were in this acceleration and that we had to recatch the timing, we should have said, none of this nonsense. All those who are adjuncts will become captains, all who are sergeants will become lieutenants. That's what the Zaireans themselves did. Mobutu, for instance, Mobutu was a sergeant in June 1960 (JK: He was a sergeant in the Congolese army...) in the Congolese army. But Mobutu was a man who could very well read and write. He knew everything about accountancy because we trained him as an accountant in the army. We had trained him as a journalist also - he came to Belgium for learning how to write newspaper articles and he was for some while, in Congo, a journalist for a Belgian paper in Zaire. We should have said, Mobutu, you're no longer a sergeant, you're going to be a major. But we didn't do that because we remained with this concept that we would have, with whatever government that would come, a relationship whereby this government would ask us to

stay on and to do the things and then gradually move into the higher echelons for Zaireans all the time and our people would fade out. We knew there was a risk and one of our competent ministers, his name is Raymond Scheyven, spoke of the "pari Congole", which means in English, "The Congolese Bet." The notion was that politicians went out in the streets and said, we are not going to make the mistake the Dutch made. The Dutch were thrown out in fact by the Japanese during World War II. When Indonesia was liberated by the Americans, the Dutch asked to come back in and they went back in. They were hated by the Indonesians who had collaborated with the Japanese and the Dutch then seeing their position they could not reinstall, sent a whole army into Indonesia. And they fought until 1947-1948 and we said, none of this with us, never shall we have one man fight one bullet or kill one person down in Zaire. This country has a sort of notion of passivism which is extraordinarily high, even in reactions now towards the Gulf War, though we sent four ships, although we sent so many planes, the government themselves is reluctant to have them play minor roles because public opinion in a country that has, as battlefields, places known as Waterloo, as Wipers, as Passiondale, WW II, there is a great weariness of war. The Israeli prime minister complained about 25 scuds they've had. We've had, in Belgium, almost 1,300 scuds in World War



II. The whole city of Antwerp has been fully scudded the German B-2 - exactly the same thing. So this country, being extremely weary of using force, we said no force. Some people then said if no force, you risk the run of chaos and the notion was, no, you are backward looking, you're a reactionary, you must be optimistic and so forth, well. This country is basically very wealthy and our daily contacts with Zaireans has always been excellent, absolutely excellent. There were several marriages and we speak with them easily. They have grown now, most of them in our own universities. Most of them are Christians, through the work of about 6,000 missionaries. There was a good relationship. There is one personal element which has been a disaster on all this and that is the personality of Patrice Lumumba.

JK

Yes, and I wanted to ask you about him. I'd like to ask you a little about him, not only at independence, but a few years prior to independence. What were some of his activities and how did the Belgians view Lumumba at that time?

JB

Well, Lumumba was not at all considered in the early days as a possible candidate for power. Why not? One, he was not a university-trained person. He was a postal clerk. He was a postal clerk out of Stanleyville, which is not the heart of the country. We were expecting the leader of the Congo to come from what we now call lower Zaire or



lower Congo. Lower Congo includes Kinshasa, and the whole are from Kinshasa to the sea. This is the part of Congo that has been in contact with the rest of the world for the longest period. That is Leopold II and Stanley in the early days and from Matadi to Beaumont, there they have been in contact with the world for 300 years. And this is a very lively part of Congo, very lively. It was also the first part of Congo that became a bit restive. Restive because of the example they saw in Congo Brazzaville. This is also part of the Congo that went first to university because university was founded in 1952 which is early in terms of Africa if you look at other colleges, Macarere (?) and whatnot, the real, true universities. But all faculties, you will find few, that started in 1950. And we were expecting, therefore, personality out of lower Zaire with a good education to be a leader. Lumumba was just this clerk. But Lumumba was a fierce orator and we had discounted this. We felt for this country it is not to have the fiercest orators at the helm of government. In those days we didn't speak of television, we spoke of orators. He was such a good orator that he had been taken at one time in to a war between breweries. There were two large breweries in Kinshasa and one of the two breweries had launched a slogan saying that anyone who was drinking the beer of the opponent would be sterile, they assumed. The

Africans don't like this notion very much and neither do we. The sales of that brewery had plummeted and that brewery recruited Lumumba to stand on a big Lorry filled with beer crates and with a microphone and he spoke to the people up until the moment they drank that beer again and even surpassed the first competitor. Because Lumumba was just a fierce orator. He was a man without education at all except his primary education in school, some part of secondary education, not even, and then nothing and he had one great, great example in his life - it was Nkrumah. He saw Nkrumah as the example that he, in Zaire, with Zaire as a country, would beat Nkrumah as an African leader. He had one quarrel with us. One day he had been caught stealing money out of the post office and we had arrested him and brought him to jail. His defense was that the money he had taken was not for himself, but was for the political party and oddly enough the party he then represented was a Belgian conservative party - the Belgian liberals. He considered he had done it for the purposes of his country and could not be held against him. He went to jail nevertheless. And ever since that time he began to hate the guts out of us...

JK Do you recall about when that was that that happened? He was jailed later also for being involved in riots...

JB Yeah, but that's a different story, that's after '60. The postal story, there's a book by a man named Brassine,

that book will give you all the details of life then. Lumumba had one great trump card. Whereas the politicians of Basayere (?) had an ethnical identity and could not go beyond their ethnical identity. Lumumba was often defined, tribal association, all one knew about him was that he came from Stanleyville. He had then moved to Leopoldville and he did not base his party on ethnical lines (JK: I see) he based it on pan Congolese lines and it was called "la movement Congolese Nationale". And he claimed, rightly, that he was the movement for all Congolese. He claimed secondly, that they had been humiliated by the whites for so many years and he could live himself, not into the skin I would say of the average Zairean, who was very complacent and who was, in fact, many times, very grateful. You know you must see Africa where he comes from. He comes from the village and in the village, the village is prosperous since colonialism. Whatever the UN might say, the village has profited, as a matter of fact, when the road was put there - the trucks could come along, they could sell their goods, they could import their goods. They went to school. For the first time they didn't have to go to the Sorcerer. Sorcerer in english is a witch doctor. They had nothing but Sorcerers before. Now they got, if not a doctor, at least a medical assistant, or a missionary. They learned how to read and write. They learned their

different respective trades. It is the beginning of the industrial era for them, the maso agricultural era. So the vast majority of people were happy with colonialism I would say and oddly enough, the notion of independence was instilled, not by our government, but was instilled by our own intellectual following there at the University of Kinshasa which was in itself a conservative fortress. But once this was done, the others woke up and said, and what about us? And all got in a turmoil and all began to be extremely excited and nobody believed that they would not be able to nurse themselves and the example of Nkrumah was there.

JK How did the Belgians view Lumumba? Did they fear him at all? Did they respect him? What was the feeling?

JB I think Belgians were divided towards Lumumba. Belgian Catholics, I refer to them because in those days those lines were that far stronger than they are today. Those lines, the country sociologically was divided amongst the people of the right and the people of the left. It's not quite true that ones are on the right and left, it's an ideological right and left, but the right had, and the Catholics had, by far the greatest influence on African matters because they could claim that it was out of their milieu that the 6,000 missionaries had gone. The 10,000 Belgian civil servants were also for vast majority out of the rather Catholic universities who had gone there. The

people on the right viewed Lumumba with a great deal of apprehension. He looked like, in all these turmoil situations, like the radical, the true radical. The conservative person by nature is of course weary of that kind of person. Secondly, the right felt that the whole scheme was nonsense. The right, although in their intellectual milieu they had themselves asked the Zaireans to come out with notions. These were the people in the field. But the people back home here said why speed this goddamn thing up? And the answer was because the movement was there and it's better to have it and to control it and to canalize than to ignore it. But people said isn't it nonsense in terms of reality? So, people didn't like it whereas other African leaders came up with far more modest ambitions but they were not well known because in any quarrel it's only the man who makes the harshest statements that gets the headlines. So the others didn't. Secondly, on the left, and especially the free University of Brussels, which is a hotbed, not only for liberal thinkers but also for assertionist thinkers and also for our communist thinkers. There were a number of young assistants totally devoted to Lumumba and saying we must feed him because what he's going to fight is not only colonialism he's going to fight the church and so do we. We fight the church and he's going to fight capitalism and so do we, we fight capitalism. So he's



our objective ally. So I would say that the minority in this country supported Lumumba but when 1960 came, and when in 1960 Lumumba became so unpredictable, I would argue that 2/3 of those who supported Lumumba became very quiet. And that today you may find a couple of romantics who will write one or another thing about him but by and large people have now dismissed Lumumba altogether saying he was a totally unpredictable man, just filled with hatred and that by the decisions he took in the early days of 1960, he is one of the greatest architects of the disaster into which Zaire went. The disaster was this: when the independence festivities were organized Lumumba had a speech made for him by assistants which was a nice speech and when the ceremonies then developed....

JK At this point now he is Prime Minister...

JB He is Prime Minister and Kasavubu is the head of state and everything is in order. But the way the festivities go on was, as they usually are in Belgium rather steady and boorish, there was a sort of very steady speech by the king which was not drafted by the king but was drafted by the government, because the king speaks the language and the government will submit it. And of course such a speech gives a great deal of tribute not only to the Zaireans but also to all these Belgians who volunteered in 1870 to go and who died on their shores from malaria and sleeping sickness and whatnot and who paid tribute to



the governors and whatnot. And Lumumba, in his boiling temperament, got a bit nervous and began to - his blood was boiling. He didn't like this. After the speech, he left his own speech in his pocket and made his own speech. And he said that his tribute would be exclusively and solely for his Zairean countrymen and that there was this and there was that and there was that and then there was, in fact, the toiling under the Belgians. He made a speech which was quite a good speech that you make during your campaign but that you can't make the day you win your election. You see what I mean. And we were scandalized by that speech and that speech we felt rightly or wrongly was a sort of declaration of war. On our own vision that the transition from this nominal day of independence to the day that they would be truly, not only independent, but truly operating themselves. All the power levels that we needed - a good agreement and a trust between the two of us. After all in the French former colonies, the French were still there and there's not a single man in these places who would think of changing places. The general understanding was that the date of independence that had been announced by them was considered by us far too early, both in terms of time we had since 1920 and in terms of the comparisons of neighboring countries. But they considered power as meaning - they would sit in the seats of command, we

would indeed agree with this but, we would not abandon them in terms of teaching, helping them on the technical side, helping them on the financial side, that was the basic agreement. And you might argue that I'm saying this today, forty years later, thirty years later, but I counter suspicion or that question mark with the examples of Burundi and Rwanda. Burundi and Rwanda were extremely impoverished hill countries with one crop - coffee. No mines, no wealth and great ethnical problems. We told them, in 1962, that they were not prepared for independence because for them, too, we were not considering 1962 as the deadline. But we made with both of them a basic agreement that said you be Prime Minister and you be Governor and you be Ministers, but we will pay our own civil servants to stay with you and they will obey you, but they will also counsel you with good counsel. And it worked. Rwanda, despite its formidable difficulties in terms of ethnical co-existence between Tutsies (?), the traditional over-lords, where only 5% of the population were the (other tribe?). They'd been able to work out a country which today is really in Africa despite all the difficulties they've had - an example of rather good management and the same is true of Burundi. These two countries were precisely in the same circumstances as Zaire.

JK

They had Zaire to look at as a bad example...

JB

That is true. And you see this is the great advantage of both the French and the British over us. The British had their tragedy in India. If you read today the book about the Queen's, Lord Batton (name of book?). It shows the horror of the independence and the partition of India, the French have Algeria, there's a million dead, in Algeria. But we all make mistakes. The larger countries have their tragedies. We've had only one which was Zaire. We learned how to make Rwanda and Burundi go better. Had another Prime Minister gone into the seat in Kinshasa, I would feel certain that we would have gone another way. Take a third example - Katanga. When Moise Tshombe said he was ceasing power he would make an independent Katanga. He would ask ourselves to come and help him. Well, he was able to manage his little problems for three or four years. There was no collapse in Katanga - the courts went on judging, the economy was prospering, the people were fed, there were no strikes. It could work. What failed in Zaire is the following reason - he could not even manage the King's visit and the proper functioning of the Day of Independence. (JK: He, meaning Lumumba.) Yes. After he made this awful remark he made another speech, we convinced him to make another speech. But it was too late. If you made one gaff it's made, the world press goes along with it. Then in the course of the next days the army became restless

because the army said how come that we have not been promoted? Well Lumumba, this simple clerk at the post office, who was not even a decent, honest chap and has gone to jail for stealing their money, he's now the Prime Minister and the Governor General, the one we used to listen to is gone. So something must change. The army became very restless. I think we made the mistake of not appointing a number of Congolese officers at higher ranks, let us say six months before, so that in case we would have had trouble, we could at least have a sort of native corps of officers to fall back on to. But instead the army said you know we are square - you hold us responsible for maintaining law and order, we'll do that. We'll do that but you let do our own kitchen and how we promote our people. Politicians are not going to interfere in this.

JK So, basically then, the Congolese were the general army but they were not the officers...

JB No, the Congolese army had about 1,000 Belgian officers and non-commissioned officers and about 25,000 Zairean Congolese soldiers. What happened was, that one night about the 11th of July, the rumor spread in the barracks of Kinshasa that the Soviets had arrived with planes which were on the airport at Ngiri and these were planes that were bringing Russian soldiers to make out of the Congo a communist state. You must realize....

JK What were the sources of those rumors?

JB Well, the sources are correct in the sense that there were many Russian transport planes because the Russians immediately saw the vacuum that now would exist in the Congo and felt that if the Congo could fall into their sort of influence they would make it in Africa.

JK So they were bringing in supplies?

JB No, these were mainly radio communications planes. These were planes filled with equipment of radios to communicate with Moscow. They had not yet in their embassy all their equipment, all they had was hotel rooms where to stay and they had no embassy as yet. So they needed somewhere, a sort of relay center, for their communications.

JK So they were bringing in basically things to set up a more complete embassy...

JB That's right. And the rumors spread. And the soldiers said we want to go the airport and kick those Russians out. Now you may argue, why is it that a poor African soldier all of a sudden is so upset about the Soviets. But then you must realize that a colonial army is one that is trained according to the laws of its master. And in those days, we were the friends of the Americans, we were the friends to the colonial powers of Europe, we were Europeans, and that we often told our Congolese friends that the Soviets were not our friends and that



the Soviets, whenever they could, would stir up trouble. This was partially true in the sense that Sekou Touré was not a government to begin with but, he finally called in the Soviets. Ethiopia is another example. The Soviets had been everywhere when they saw a chance to expel European forces. So this army was an army which still had very strong Belgian reflexes. I mean this is not to be pro-Belgian. I'm not saying this, but I'm saying they were educated by these 1,000 Belgians. And being educated - it's not the army that's made up all of a sudden by Congolese patriots, it's, they've been raised along the years, they've been drilled into a system - it was a very well organized army. In fact, in Africa they had really marvelous uniforms, equipment and whatnot. We had enough money. The Congo, you must realize, under the current system, was extremely wealthy. It is a wealthy country, basically, and we had devoted quite a bit of money to the army and the army was happy of its fate and was happy with everything, except that they said if the politicians can make to the top, so must we. But then comes in the news that the Russians are there. They said, what have these God damned Russians do there? We'll clean them out. So they asked for keys of the locker room where all the weapons are and the Belgian non-coms went to their officers and say they want to go to the airport, do we have any instructions on it? No we

have no instructions. So they won't go, no they won't go - so we keep it locked. And that's how they rebelled. That is the early start of the mutiny against the Belgians.

JK I've never heard that story before, because I had heard that they had not been given raises, that the government had been given raises and that the army.....

JB There's one document you should have but I have never kept it for myself. When I was in Washington, very unhappy about the way we were dealing with the press, although this was not my domain, I started a daily paper, a daily sheet, which was made up of events as we could read them, either in the American press or in our press or along short-wave radio. And I said to the Ambassador, "Mr. Ambassador, before you counter American arguments or accusations about us and having cut so many ears in the past or having mistreated the Congolese, you should forget about the past - this is no time to speak of the past, this is the time to speak of the present. And on the present, you must inform people of the real significance of events. Why don't we publish a daily sheet that says Kinshasa or Leopoldville, Elizabethville this happens, this happens, this happens.

JK Because the series of events of how things start....

JB But I saw your paper there you see and I thought the first thing you now need is to go back to the paper I

wrote from July, I think the 6th, down to September 30th, I had it all down per day what happens. And that paper exists, I'm sure, I will ask my son over the phone to find it in the archives at the Embassy because we distributed up to 300 copies a day and people began to ask us to have it, the Russians, the Poles, and a number of people said, you know we can't understand Belgian, so we said, instead of understanding us, read us. So, we sent them that paper.

JK What was the importance - for us to have here at least a reference to where that could be found. So would you say in the Embassy in Washington...

JB I will try to call someone here in the archives department and say can she look it up in the archives and I'm afraid that in our archives it's going to be a huge amount of work to find it.

JK If we could just find a citation as to where it can be found.

JB Well, I tell you, there are two places you can find it - one is I think that by and large it was copied by a friend of mine in his book Congo Year Number One, by Benoit Verhaegen. Is that name familiar with you?

JK No, how do you spell that?

JB B-e-n-o-i-t V-e-r-h-a-e-g-e-n. He's our greatest specialist on Congo and he has written two or three books Congo, Année Un , Congo Année Deux, Congo, Année Trois.

In the annexes of Congo, Année Un there is this chronology of events. And although it's written in French, I've often had the suspicion that it was a summary of what we had written in English, because we had done it in Washington. We did it for the American press. So you should find it, well reading your paper and your chronology I think there are some very interesting comparisons you can make with that paper that we made at the Embassy in Washington. I will ask my son to find it. There are other events because there are pay raises but the main demand was - all one step up - sergeant to adjunct, adjunct to lieutenant, lieutenant to...etc. They wanted that. There also was a tribal problem in the army. I think the army had recruited many Balubas? Balubas are from Kasai and they are supposed to be toughest and also the most intelligent of all Congolese and I think our army whose main military school was in Luluabur (?) had recruited many Balubas. And all of a sudden there was amongst the Baluba non-commissioned officers and soldiers a great anxiety about Lumumba who was not a believer and who was a communist, they said.

JK I would like to ask you also, was Lumumba a communist and was there really a communist threat in the Congo at that time?

JB No. I will say this, in terms of geo-politics I don't think that you can argue that any man in Africa was

really a communist because all of them were fiercely nationalistic and, therefore, were not going to be subjected by any doctrine - be it through the right or the left, religious or anti-religious or whatnot - but they were playing, they were playing with whoever would help them get rid of existing influences. And I strongly believe, and I would argue this with all my Belgian colleagues and all Belgian professors, that Lumumba was determined to get us all out. There are many reasons for that. One is the basic fact as I once said that it's very hard to be a very small metropolitan power with a very large colony. The opposite is very easy - our relations with Burundi and Rwanda were very easy. We have the best of relations with them. If I take the British - the British have a very difficult relationship with India and Pakistan - today it's better but it's been awful and the British have for all practical purposes disappeared out of India. But when you look at where are the English, there are no English left. Technical assistance in India is now made up far more by Canada than it is by the UK. The French have a hate relationship with Algeria. Algeria is a country that doesn't at all like France and, yet, they profit from France in a very big fashion. So our relationship with Zaire was, from the start, difficult for that relationship. The second thing is that in those days, if



you really wanted to shine in the firmament of stars, you have to be anti-colonialist, anti-European because those were the ones that were greeted with the greatest honor - both in Washington and Moscow and elsewhere. You take Nkrumah. Nkrumah was the star of all African leaders there, and yet he was full of the anti-West. I would not equate anti-West immediately with communists because communism holds in itself a Marxist concept which many of them had practiced a long way off - Nkrumah ruined Ghana by his marxist concept but was he a full communist? I'm not quite sure. I truly believe that Lumumba would have played a long way with the powers in Moscow. In those days, 1960, you must see the line, Moscow, Cairo, I believe this was still Cairo with Nasseem and then Cairo, Stanleyville because, if you remember, after the dispute between Lumumba and Kasavubu, Lumumba tried to have his own troubles instead of playing the game of democracy well. Here I come to this incident with Lumumba where you referred a while ago. What happened was that Lumumba overruled his Ministers all the time and that Kasavubu, who was a very stead, old man, who had been the mayor of Kinshasa, he let it be done, but he became wary and those young ministers, they were all graduates from Leuven University, or from Brussels University or from Roubaix University. The main from Brussels University, oddly enough, Brussels University is a leftist university and

its main product in Zaire became an ultra-right sort of person, Bamboko. Bamboko is still alive today and still is kicking around and was their sort of perennial taleron (? french word). He was a foreign minister. And instead, the man from Leuven, who was a rightist university, became their extremist left politician, Tomas Kanza, who is now teaching at Oxford and who has been, for a long while, their representative at the United Nations and was kicked out when the majority of the United Nations decided not to recognize the government of Stanleyville but instead to recognize the government of Leopoldville.

JK Kanza is in Oxford?

JB Yes. He had been dealing with also with a British tycoon, the owner of the Observer.

JK I have a few more questions about Lumumba...

JB Benoit Verhaegen is a man who worked with Lumumba. Benoit Verhaegen is a man of great standing in this country, long-standing tradition of generations of political philosophers. He was very left and he was with Lumumba. He became aware that Lumumba was, how do you say, a psychiatric case almost. Many people here don't want to talk about it because they supported him in the early days and, of course, now resent the notion that this is being talked about. He's dead, he's dead and they say we should no longer speak about him. But he was

a man who loved the explosion of feelings and whatnot, and the tragedy of this was - and here I come to core of this problem - that when the soldiers mutinied against their Belgian officers, and this very specific case, for going to the weapons, guns in their bags, they went to the airport. Lumumba should have listened to the Belgian General Janssen, who was commanding the forces, and should have said I, of course, side with you. There is no question that the army has the right to mutiny. I mean, if you, yourself are in power, you're not going to say to your army that they can revolt because a revolt will finish up by eating you. And he stupidly, in his hatred of the system, and this hatred of the past, said, aaah, our black boys are against their white officers, well done, well done. The next thing he knew was that having said this on the radio, the Belgians felt that they no longer owed an allegiance to him since he was supporting the mutiny. If we had a Prime Minister saying that those who mutiny, are being given encouragement by the Prime Minister, what is the purpose of the exercise? So the Belgians then brought their wives out of the barracks, because they were frightened by the notion that the wives would be raped by the black soldiers. The Belgians made much of those rapes and I would like to put them in perspective.

JK

Now I wanted to ask you about that too... How much of

this was actually happening that had been reported in the press?

JB

I tell you it's a very sad story and it's very political. Our Foreign Minister, (name?), who went to the United Nations Security Council said that they should try to understand our reaction because he said so many of the wives of our officers and non-commissioned officers had been raped. And in our country itself there are a number of people saying, ah but you know, most probably many of these officers or non-commissioned officers have themselves raped, or if not raped, have slept with wives of Zairean soldiers. I think that both are totally wrong. I think that our Minister should have never mentioned this situation of rape, neither should we say that the officers may have slept with some African woman.

To begin with, the comparison doesn't work very well. To an African, sexual behavior is a daily affair and even a multi-affair per day. They are absolutely crazy about sex and you see with AIDS today, this is a hot climate, this is an easy climate, and the situation is totally different from your culture in North America. It's all the time. Therefore, the whites indeed always had affairs with black women, especially if they were not a citizen, they were outside, and what is the notion between willing and not-willing and rape and non-rape - that is one situation. Secondly, it's not really

pertinent to the matter. There are a few African soldiers that may have attacked. It was shameful but, you must do away with this and this no possible justification for a military intervention afterward. I think it is a good reason to evacuate people. I mean you Americans have evacuated American colonies out of Liberia in time, both not to be harmed in the process, nor to be raped. No, because rape in Africa is a thing that goes on every day - all the time. One nun in my house one day who said that she was working at night with African girls and she said, you know, I'm teaching them sexual education because from the age of eleven onwards they are being raped by the little boys in the school all the time. It's like that in Africa. So you, this is one of the great difficulties of perceptions, we perceive different situations abroad as we perceive them home. And I wouldn't make too much of that story. The basic fact is that the Prime Minister of that country said, I'm siding with the mutineers. Having said that, all of a sudden, all the Belgian officers and non-commissioned officers began to have questions about their status. And said, what are we doing? And so a number of them waited for 24 hours and then discovered that Lumumba went from bad to worse - he fired General Janssen, and said, you go home. Well, the next thing he knew then was that a number of top officers resigned and said, we'll leave the



country. Now amongst the Belgians who were there in Kinshasa the very notion that the whites in the army were resigning and going, that gave them the signal that there was no longer purpose in staying. Here I would plead with you, perhaps another word than the word fled, because, to me, to flee is an army like the Iraqis that fled before Schwartzkopf. But when you have civilians with many wives and six children, to flee, to flee from what? To flee, it was not real, they not only fled they simply left their houses, their homes, went to Brazzaville and gave up the whole thing. They put an end to their lives there with no hope of ever returning. They said, this is no longer any sense....

JK But they left so quickly, they were fearing for their lives...

JB Yes. I've been in one such situation, I was in Africa before independence for one month in 1959, I went back in '62 when Stanleyville was between the two. And I know what it is - you sit in a hotel, the people look at you in a very stern way and then the rumors. And the rumors said, you know this person's been killed, yes last night he was killed. There is a tension growing and if you are a bachelor, or if you are low like the missionaries were low, they didn't leave. Missionaries have never left, not a single missionary has ever left, not a single nun has left. But people with families had two problems, one

that the children might be killed, accidentally or not. Secondly, what about my job? If I return to Belgium as the last person who will leave Zaire, there will be no jobs left in Belgium. That has been. So I would not really think they fled because of an immediate danger, there are only very few who saw danger. It's the people in Thysville, that is a little town between Kinshasa and the sea. There there was major mutiny in the army and there, in the barracks, a few Belgians were shot because they resisted the mutiny. If, of course, your guard was to say, no mutiny and I don't want and go back! - obviously you are going to have a few people shot. And women were raped. You know, there is a moment, you must look at it this way, where a group of men in uniform all of a sudden storm four or five houses and they scream, you probably have seen this in Latin America or in Central America - every single country that has populations from these areas, once the turmoil sets in, there is the moment of the wine drinking, the whiskey drinking and the women. It all goes together. In our country it does not. In our countries people are rational about this - there may be a fist-fight or whatnot, but there is no raping and hardly any drinking, but in Africa it goes together. The people who've really seen danger are very very few and far apart. But it the rumor that spreads and, in the rumor, what was certain

was that Lumumba was no longer supporting the white presence. He was no longer supporting what the government had said that our people were at his disposal. Therefore, the system we had so laboriously negotiated with them, all of a sudden collapsed. And that is when, then, the whole world came down and said, now there is chaos in this place and the T.V. did like they do today. The cameras were focussed on an African beating another African. I've never seen on the cameras or on T.V. an African beating a white. It was always fights between Africans and it looked awful and people said, and the Belgians have fled. The word "fled" to me was very hard to hear in those days because many had remained despite this Lumumba attitude and they remained because they had come to love that place and to see, with tears in their eyes, how it is crumbling to them. And then came two decisions which altered the picture all together. Our ambassador in Kinshasa, Jean Van den Bos(?), who had been my boss in Cairo in '56 received the report that, in the city which I just mentioned, Thysville, there had been a mutiny and said the report, if the mutineers were to hold that city it would mean that they could stop all trains coming from Matadi to Kinshasa and, therefore, we could suffer total exhaustion from resources in Kinshasa in terms of food in three days time. And the ambassador, who was a very brave man, was sort of a great Belgian

anglophile, felt the time had come for him to act and he said to his military attache, he said, but in our agreement with Zaire, we do have three military bases don't we? Yes. This was in the agreement. These were bases to help the Zaireans defend themselves against outside danger or inside danger. We, of course, would not use these troops without a request by the Zairean authorities. But the ambassador said, now take it that in three days time we will no longer have bread in Kinshasa, no longer have beer, no longer have meat or whatnot, you're going to have a major revolt in Kinshasa itself. Yes said the military attache. Well we must see to it that the government of Kinshasa asks us to liberate Thysville. And he was a man of action. It is my belief that although he reported it to Brussels he had reported it in such a way as not to ask the government for real authority, that he could do it with his own authority. I must add that in the meanwhile already the Belgian government had sent reinforcements to these bases. We owned in those days a huge fleet of transport planes and with those transport planes we brought them into Kitona and into Kamina (Kamina was in Katanga and Kitona was close to Matadi). We also had some navy units. Hey you know what it is? You have a small buildup, nothing to be compared with the Gulf operation, but you do have a buildup of military forces. There comes a time when you

begin to imagine easily an intervention. And I think the military attaché and the ambassador were saying, we must free the road between Matadi and Kinshasa for the trains to come through. And they sent over displaced airplanes to watch. One of the airplanes was shot down and inside that airplane was one of our most remarkable young colonial administrators, Reichmans (?), who was the son of the former Governor General, and it was a tragedy - he had a wife and children and all he was doing was trying to observe what was happening in this mutineering town. He was simply, the plane was shot down - came down - it was believed that he had been shot after the plane had come down. So people became extremely anxious. And I think that the military attaché and the ambassador ordered our naval units to come up to Matadi and to seize Matadi militarily. There was a harbor. And then send an armed convoy to Thysville to liberate Thysville. When the first shot was heard in Matadi that was a time that Lumumba had said, now we are at war with Belgium. Not only did we have greatest apprehensions about Belgium, not only is it in the past that they treated us badly but, now they are declaring war against us and it is true that the number of people felt that once you start a war you either have to go with it all the way and know where you end. And that we were not prepared for, we were prepared only to go and free Thysville. When the



government learned of this effort, penetrating Matadi, the government promptly halted the situation and said, what is this all about?

JK This is the government in Brussels?

JB And the Ambassador replied and said, we've gone to see Bomboko, the foreign minister, and he, himself said we should do this. But he was not having the Prime Minister's view of it. The Zairean government was totally divided on this and the question was then who is entitled to speak here? And quit honestly I think the Prime Minister is the final word. The Prime Minister or the Head of State will speak. But you can't just go to one - it's a sort of a finesse to say we've gone to the foreign minister and that suffices. Anyway we put a stop to it. But this brought them, the Congolese government to go to the United Nations to say what are you going to do for us? So then came the first resolution of the Security Council whereby Hammarskjold, as you rightly pointed out, devised this notion of a technical assistance in the security field which was not yet an intervention force. The demand to the Belgians to rescind from actual fight, which they, the United Nations, considered a fight against the Congolese to perhaps recapture Zaire which was not at all the case - it was the case simply to prevent this chaotic situation to grow further. But once this had happened, you know

one of the tragedies in life is that people are against violence up till the day the violence occurs and once you put yourself in a syndrome of violence all of a sudden all those who have been pleading against violence become a little bit waving or a little bit vague and tend to turn towards violence and then turn towards full violence. So what happened was that this event, I think, provoked the Belgians of Katanga to go to their local provincial Prime Minister because that was his title, that was legally his title and say you know, this madman Lumumba has undermined, totally, the cooperation of Belgium, has undermined the presence of the officers by refusing to support them in the case of the mutiny, is permitting the other Belgians to waver and to go home and in fact, what he's doing is trying to empty the whole of Congo from Belgians in order to fill in with Russians later. Well, the Prime Minister of the Congo can ask for its independence because every nation has a right to self-government, why can't we ask for self-government and why don't you ask for self-government? Tshombe was only too glad to oblige and to say that he proclaimed the independence of Katanga which is why the report has been Belgian-sponsored and here I must make a distinction if you need Belgian government sponsored that is not true at all. We have always been from principle for one strong Congo, you need a united Congo. That slogan was spread

by us before it ends, long before it ends. I, myself had my doubts that this was such a wise policy because if you look at the map of Africa these maps are totally artificial and I mean French colonies are no, none of them are much larger than 6-7 million people, even less. Angola has become one country because the Portuguese had united them but they did this for 300 years. Nigeria has its own great problems internally and I'm not so sure that it was a wise thing to say that we would put one big country - I wonder sometimes whether it might not have been better to have a Kasai, a Kivu, not as an independent country but forming a sort of condominium, or forming a sort of configuration of central African states, something of that sort. We would have had far better relations with them, but our problem was that we said this country can only live because of the receipts from Katanga. It is Katanga that makes the whole thing live and we said, and repeated, that we should not have one wealthy Katanga and then a poor Kinshasa. And it was really a very just consideration on our part to keep this country united. Had we been very egotistic in this and thought of our own interests we should have split the Congo into various provinces, which the French in fact did, because then it would have been far better for the interests of our business people.

JK

So, what I wanted to ask you though, in terms of the

Belgian government itself, it did not support the secession at the time?

JB No.

JK Were there then divisions though within Belgium between the private industries that were involved in Katanga and the government policy?

JB To come back one moment to the government I will not claim that there were no people in the government who at one time felt that we should take a wait and see attitude. I think there was a lobby within the government, not within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, but there were other departments that said, why take this absolutely suicidal lane of having this madman in Kinshasa and supporting him by saying his country must be united and then seeing all of our interests disappear and, therefore, the people pleading for a wait and see attitude, but at no moment did the government under the Prime Minister or the Foreign Minister ever recognize Katanga as an independent state. The most we did I think was to tolerate a representative of Katanga here in Brussels. In the business community there was a great deal of tradition. The Union Minière was practically exclusively in Katanga and The Union Minière felt that we were really very dumb, that we should have probably opted for an independent Katanga because all of their monies were only in Katanga. But the majority of the shares of

Union Minière were with the Société Générale or with the Congolese government you know that Société Générale had 51% and the Congolese government had 49%. So that in fact the Union Minière was talking a language which it was not permitted to use because Société Générale said, boys I'm the owner of your shares and I have interests elsewhere in Zaire - I have interests in rail, the dams, in agricultural products and I'm also close to the government. I, Société Générale de Belgique, we are so prevalent everywhere we must listen to what the government tells us and if the government is not willing to recognize Katanga, there's no way we're going to oppose this. So that I would argue that the tandem the Société Générale and the Union Minière were sort of having a double policy. Union Minière on the spot supporting Tshombe with monies and vices to do one or the other and Société Générale taking the general line that, no we will not go that far, but as long as this madman in Leopoldville is continuing we'll have - we're not unhappy that there is someone crying another cry elsewhere. If I may just report here very briefly, a little anecdote that will interest you, the first time I went with Paul Henri Spaak, the Foreign Minister, to one of these lunches for the press it was at the New York Times and I have it there in my file. Paul Henri Spaak at one time...



JK Were you his assistant at this time?

JB No, no. Having made my papers there in Washington, I was sent to New York to help out Loridan, the ambassador to the UN. We had an information office in New York but this was an information office that was good for distributing books on music and art in Belgium and general information on the Congo, but it was made up by one of the best novelists in Belgium who was a man who was in his sixties and was no longer going to visit the press or speak to the press or do what I do with you now because that was not his interest - he didn't know the Congo situation well. And I was saying, "Don't count on this office. This office is doing good work in terms of cultural relations but you can't ask this man to be on that file all day long, and to go and see the press individually. If you want me to go to New York, I'll go and be a press attache." When Spaak came back to power, he had been Secretary General of NATO, he met me first, or I met him first in a meeting and I happened to be with him in the lift down in Rockefeller Plaza and said to me, what are you doing here? I said, "I'm with the press." He said, what should I do? I said, "You should go in there and eat with them in a sort of editorial lunch." And we went to the New York Times, with all the top people from the New York Times. And one of their men said to Spaak, Mr. Spaak, here in America there are a

number of people who are saying that Belgians, in fact, threw independence at the Congo when they were not prepared for it because they knew very well that if they did it that way chaos would ensue and that with this chaos they could come back. Spaak pondered and did reflect on this a bit and looked at our ambassador in Washington who was outraged at the question and said, I must make a distinction - if you think (he spoke with a french accent) if you think of the government and our view, the government at no time did think of such dirty trick and such a devilish proposal. If you think of business, I think that business has to accommodate to whatever circumstances prevail and that business no longer had any confidence that the Belgian government politically had the nerve or had the courage to withstand the demands of the Congolese and therefore if we didn't have this courage the sooner we got over this thing the better it was. That is the distinction he made. I think that indeed there was no devilish, Machiavellian trick in this, it was simply the Belgian population did not want blood to be spilled over this thing and that examples of Algeria, when you think of one mission dead, so many French men, French soldiers there. We, in our constitution situation cannot send troops overseas. The troops we now have in the Gulf, the army we have in Turkey, now they had to sign a special contract. And

according to our Constitution we can't send them. The paratroopers are the only ones we can send, but that's a very small unit - 2,000 men. Anyway, the division that came with Tshombe being the man to meet in independent Katanga which, to the outside world, the United Nations crowd, and the Americans looked very much like Belgians have granted this country independence but, that they're taking back the richest part of Katanga, which doesn't rhyme at all in the sense that Brussels has never had an embassy there, Brussels has never negotiated with them, Brussels has never taken one penny out of Katanga, firms did, not the government in Brussels. Then came, I think the \_\_\_\_\_ (?) government lasted until January '61 and then came \_\_\_\_\_ (?) government. That was the government in which Spaak came back.

JK

As Foreign Minister

JB

As Foreign Minister. The previous government was Christian liberal. Liberal in Belgium means conservative, the next was Christian Socialist. After the elections, the Socialists were, of course, following a rather pro-UN line, much more so than the liberals of Belgium who were far more keen on our private interests. There came a time, and that's when I moved down to New York to speak to all the correspondents. My task was extremely hard, extremely hard. To begin with, Belgium has hardly any press attachés in the world. All the

great embassies have staffs but it was hard for a small country to have press attachés. I had never been trained at that. Secondly, I came there just after Lumumba had been murdered and it was largely argued in New York that we had arranged his murder.

JK Do you think there was some western complacency in his murder though?

JB Yes in a sense that there were a number of whites who technically from far or near were more or less aware, but that does not change the fact that he was murdered by his own people. You see, what brought up to begin with, let us put things right, if you take the case of Nigeria I think you have a list of Prime Ministers and Presidents who have been murdered which is not very impressive. If you take most African countries I would say that the chances of ending murdered rather than dying in your bed is about 2-1. Three, in the case of Lumumba, came the tragedy that after two months, as reported by your paper, he was dismissed by Kasavubu. It was constitutional right of Kasavubu to dismiss him. But, of course, Kasavubu was then constitutionally obliged to call upon a new Prime Minister and to respect the will of Parliament. First, their constitution was copied from our constitution. We had no other reference to go by. I mean we said we will build a country, this self-governing country, now whatever they wish is good but we

had one constraint which was it cannot be a dictatorship. We wanted democracy which is a bit, of course, like an omen and say that we want a sort of representative democracy, omen. A bit nonsensical. But not a single country can more or less say that we want a pluralistic democracy in Africa when we can't even have one in the Soviet Union and elsewhere. Anyway, we wanted a pluralistic one and we had, therefore, with them, drafted a constitution which was very much copied from ours. So he had the right to dismiss the Prime Minister, then he appoints a new one, then this new one goes to power, and this new one is either enjoying power or he doesn't. If he doesn't then he's no Prime Minister. If the President tries again and again and again and again and fails, the Prime Minister is to go back to Lumumba and say, I've lost. I'll remain President but I'll have to ask you to do it again because I've not succeeded in finding a successor to you. So, Kasavubu was constitutionally right. Lumumba was not right. Lumumba dismissed the President...

JK Yeah, you can't do that...

JB The President has been elected by Parliament and that election remains valid for a period of five years. Mitterand cannot be sort of put down by "haute car" in our system. So there the Lumumba was acting outside their constitutional framework. Once this happened



Lumumba considered himself to be still Prime Minister and kept the authority over things which put the United Nations in a great dilemma because the United Nations no longer knew who was the responsible leader in Zaire. He then went to Stanleyville. But on the road to Stanleyville he was stopped by the army and the army - and again that was done because the army and no instruction from no one - the army did whatever the local commander said, and the unhappy fate of Lumumba was that when he crossed the river the soldiers who arrested him were Balubas - his enemies - and they did it strictly on the tribal lines. And on the tribal lines they sent him back to Kinshasa. In Kinshasa they said he's such an impossible man, we'll put him the toughest of all of our garrisons in Thysville, that same little town that I spoke of before. In Thysville he became such a formidable orator within the walls of the jail of the army that his own soldiers who were guarding him became enthusiasts of Lumumba and were going to open the gate for him to leave again. He was a sorcerer and that is the time when Mobutu himself came up with the notion that if no one in lower Zaire could keep him in jail, he knew of a few people who could keep him in jail. Mobutu decided that one of his closest associates would drive down and speak to Lumumba and I know this man, I've known him very well - a Zairean who was also a very good friend

of mine and, therefore, no friend of Lumumba but he had worked with Lumumba. And he said that Mobutu had decided to free him. And he took him in his car and they drove down to a little airport in Brazzaville where there was a plane waiting to bring him back to Leopoldville. He stepped into that plane, but that plane didn't go to Kinshasa, instead that plane flew to Kasai where there was a man in charge of Kasai who was also a Baluba and it was felt that once this man would take Lumumba on, he would be remain in jail. Instead that man in Kasai said, the plane can land and refuel here but I don't want Lumumba here. So the plane flew on to Katanga and landed in Elizabethville and in Elizabethville it landed with Lumumba already knocked out altogether by the soldiers that were in that plane.

JK Were the soldiers on the plane Balubas?

JB Balubas, yes. And he came down quite wounded and was brought to a small jail in Katanga and about three weeks later the Katanga government said he had escaped from their jail and they didn't know where he was. In fact, it is argued now, that in Katanga that he was shot. The Katangese now say he was shot because he was almost dead and that had we not shot him we would accused of having tortured him to death. Instead, this was a mercy killing by us. Whatever the true situation, the full significance is that Lumumba had a spell which was a

formidable spell and that the whole political class, the whole administrative class, military class, they all feared the worst of him. I would argue that they could make a comparison with Saddam Hussein today. This was a man fully in control of the real nerve that makes people move. He talked to them in a language they liked to hear - the revolutionary language. Zaire was not a country prepared for that at that time but by calling consistently on international solidarity, on the revolutionary aspect, he made the moderates feel unbelievably uneasy and that once in power he was not relinching one bit of power and that they all were determined that he would come to an end but nobody dared to do it - except Mobutu who at one time felt moment had come because had it not been that he, Lumumba would have been expedited, he would have come back to Kinshasa and would have installed his own regime. Mobutu, mind you, was one of his associates. Mobutu belonged to the same party - the NNC - Mobutu had been promoted by him from sergeant to colonel, he was Chief of Staff. But Mobutu had felt that being Chief of Staff his duty was to restore the army - to restore the army's unity, integrity, and whatnot - and that in fact there was no one else to rule the country except those young students coming out of the University which was called a group of \_\_\_\_\_(?) and that with them he would then

deal with the United Nations and whatnot.

JK We don't have too much more time and I wanted to just ask you a question that has to do with the United Nations. From the Belgian point of view, do you feel that the United Nations did a good job in their Congo operation or were there things where they made mistakes - what would your evaluation be in terms of the UN in the Congo?

JB Well, I believe that by and large, and now it is 30 years ago, we should say the United Nations has played an absolutely major role in trying to extricate Zaire from the power struggle that laid the basis of this whole episode, that I've been relating about Lumumba but one must, of course, very well see who was behind Lumumba. If Lumumba carried so much weight it was because he had behind him Nkrumah. He had behind him Sekou Touré. He had behind him Gamal Abdel Nasser. He had behind him Khrushchev. And the Russians were prepared to come with massive aid because they had felt that you couldn't lead that enormous piece of central Africa, after all, Nigeria, was the remaining commonwealth, Nigeria was very much western oriented, the rest of Africa was under colonial rule - everything below Zaire was still under colonial rule. The French territories, except for New Guinea, remained with the French, so these Soviets, Angola you must realize was still Portuguese in those days, so the Soviets had no foothold in Africa except

Somalia and Ethiopia but were very much an abandoned part of Africa. Zaire then was a prize, an enormous prize, and that was what was behind Lumumba. I think that the western world, the British, French, Americans, those in particular, saw very well that game of the Soviets and were desperate to stop this demagogue playing the cards of the Soviet Union. And that the way they handled it through the United Nations was, in fact, a great success in extricating this area out of this East-West struggle. The Soviets will say that the United Nations did not extricate it but kept it in the Western world.

JK

This is an interview with Jean Paul van Bellinghen and this is the second phase of the interview and this is Tuesday, March 5, 1991. We were speaking yesterday about the operation in the Congo and I had asked you to give an assessment or an evaluation of the United Nations operation there and so we can continue with that discussion and you have some background that you wanted to fill in around that, also.

JB

Yes, well the background is, our assessment the day before independence. I think the day before independence, the 29th of June, 1960, we were rather proud of what had been achieved and you will find that in this chapter in Modern Belgium. If you compare it, even in international terms, that is World Bank statistics, you discover all of a sudden that in terms of the



infrastructure we had done pretty good work. We knew that we hadn't yet come to forming massive numbers of university people because we started much later than anybody else. As I said to you we only started really in 1920. We also were very proud that we would be the first of all colonial empirists not to wage a war. We knew that the Dutch had gone for what they call the police action between 1945, 1947 and 1948. We knew the French had been fighting a bitter war in Algeria. We knew that the British had had their Mau Mau fight in Kenya and we had said, no, if they want to be independent they can be independent then we'll make an agreement with them that we henceforth will pay about 2/3 of the salaries of all civil servants who are Belgians and therefore, if only they succeed in managing to have a good president and a good prime minister and good ministers, this will work beautifully and the world will admire us. I was there in Washington and the day before independence the Swiss ambassador then in Washington invited us all Belgians into his embassy and said he congratulated us for this very first example of a country that is faced and confronted with a demand for independence and instead of trying to delay it, was saying, whenever you wish, we're ready to give it to you. So there was euphoria in Belgium. We called it "Le pari Congol  " (?) - The Congolese Bet, which meant nobody else has done it. We

know that from an educational point of view, our work, which was meant to last 'til the year 2,000 isn't finished, but since they wish it, we're not going to be the ones to make it impossible. Then came the first disappointment, the Lumumba speech. Then a couple of days later came the mutiny of the army in Kinshasa itself and in Thysville. And all of a sudden the mood in the country changed. Those who had predicted this, those who had said it's impossible, it'll be chaotic, had been always dismissed as reactionary people, as colonialist minded as trying to hold on to their privileges and they'd been thrown out of the political decision making process. And here we were seeing for ourselves that these people seemed to have predicted this situation as it would evolve. And there was a formidable disappointment - those who had pleaded for a quick caving in, into the independence situation, no longer dared to give any advice, no longer dared to come. And on the contrary, there was some violence which had erupted in Kinshasa and in Thysville. There were our own people who were either slaughtered or were killed or maimed or brutalized or women were raped. Rape is a phenomenon all over Africa in any circumstance. It comes extremely quickly which has a total different significance in Europe - it is the ultimate humiliation and the ultimate thing that you cannot tolerate. Brought about a

formidable reaction inside a country where we said, we cannot tolerate this. We have an agreement with the Zairean government that if they can't keep law and order we have troops there in Belgian bases - there were two of them, Kitona and Kamina - and we must see to it that the government of the Congo does come to us and ask us to interfere. This we did. We got the agreement of the Foreign Minister, Bamboko, but Lumumba reneged on it and therefore we found ourselves in a chaotic situation where, at the United Nations, on the one hand, we had a letter from the Foreign Minister saying, do restore law and order. And then we heard statements over the radio by the Prime Minister saying that he was not in agreement with this demand. Right. We in Belgium were absolutely convinced that the only ones able to restore law and order were us. Simply because we still had the Congolese army and despite the mutiny we still had 1,000 officers - commissioned officers and non-commissioned officers - who knew this country extraordinarily well. We knew that we had the 6,000 civil servants there who knew this country extremely well and we had, on top of that, I can't remember the exact figure, a couple of thousand of our best troops, para-troops, commando troops, in these two bases. And they too didn't know the country as well as the officers of the Congolese army but they were already well trained in that country. By saying at the

United Nations this was Lumumba's responsibility, that they didn't want us to interfere but wanted the United Nations to come. Our first reaction in Belgium was great gasp saying you know before United Nations will be there, so many more hundreds of people will be maimed or murdered or whatnot, so this is a deliberate attempt at trying to promote chaos still further, not that we blame the United Nations for it, but that we said the United Nations are incapable of doing this kind of a job in a short period of time. Secondly, we felt quite humiliated, not quite the word, we felt it as a kick in the face that the United Nations would say, we're ready to come and help the Zaireans restore law and order but the precondition is that the Belgians should abstain from interfering. Now here was a basic misunderstanding which I think was unavoidable. The United Nations already in 1960 consisted of a majority of third world countries which themselves had had their revolution against their colonial masters which had fought to gain their independence and who had no illusions about the ultimate goal of the colonial masters. Yet we, as I explained yesterday, had from the start had never wanted a colony. The colony was an accident of history because Leopold II thought that this country needed one as Holland had, Britain, Germany and France had, but the people here were not interested in gaining an economy and we had not

pursued the line of sending people there to settle there. And we said, whenever they want us to leave, we'll leave. And now that we said the army must interfere to restore law and order, they will restore law and order for Lumumba, but Lumumba said, I don't need them. I'd rather have chaos. And I think that in the man of Lumumba the more chaos meant the more Belgians would leave - the more Belgians would leave, the more of his crowd would seize their villas, their cars, their furniture, their belongings and they would install themselves in the place - that was crudely the aim. This did not equate with the views of many other Zaireans. It did not equate with Kasavubu, the president of the Republic, who knew very well that he was needing assistance for a long time and that you could not, overnight, change a whole picture. It did not equate with then Colonel Mobutu, Chief of Staff, who had just been promoted. It did not equate with most politicians in Zaire, but it did equate with Lumumba and his own crowd who said that the sooner they get out, the better. And we, to our dismay saw all of a sudden in this quarrel about who should restore law and order in a country where the army has mutinied. The United Nations as a body telling us that we should abstain from this despite the fact that part of the government had asked us to do it and that we should let violence continue and just wait 'til the United Nations



could deploy. If you realize the size of Zaire, the second largest country, in geographical terms, in Africa, it was sure that the United Nations could not deploy in less than two or three months before they could do it. Therefore we were taking a huge risk, whereas we ourselves had paratroopers there, had planes there, we could do the job in a week. We did it in Katanga. We did it in Kasai. We did it in the Equator Province. We did it in Kinshasa, in Thysville, and Matadi. We could do it very rapidly. So there was enormous disappointment with the United Nations, not Dag Hammarskjöld, not the establishment in New York, but with this resolution, the first resolution telling us we had no further role because our presence there was being equated with a theory that was defended at the New York Times when Spaak visited the New York Times which was that we had thrown independence at them knowing that chaos would come and then we would profit from chaos to reestablish our own authority. Now this Machiavellian intention never had been the intention of the government, nor the people of Belgium. It was perhaps an expectation or a scenario that some people in the Congo had seen because they feared the chaos and then said, we'll see what we can do in this chaotic situation. But, therefore, there was a basic misunderstanding which came over here as a very negative phenomenon in the first days. Then in fact,

indeed, the first regimen arrived out of Ghana, commanded by a British general. That reassured us in a sense that here we saw Ghanaian troops under the command of a former British colonial officer who maintained the trust of Nkrumah and the former people who had commanded his army and we thought, this might work effectively on Lumumba. Lumumba has just dismissed the chief of the Congolese army - he's just done the opposite of Nkrumah. If Nkrumah sends a regimen commanded by British general, that may have a solitary effect on Lumumba. But it did not because although quite a number of Belgian officers stayed, they only stayed because they had a confidence then of the non-commissioned officers of the Congolese army and the newly promoted ones like Mobutu who wanted them to stay. But Lumumba, on the contrary, wanted them all to go. I do believe that not only did Lumumba ask this because he at heart was a hater of us - and don't forget he'd been condemned by us for his stealing at the Post Office when he was a postal clerk - but I'm pretty convinced that the extremist and radical advisors from foreign countries like Ghana, like the Egyptian government of Nasser, like the Soviet government of Khrushchev, was indeed insistent very much on the withdrawal of all the former colonial masters. If you do see the behavior of the NPLA in Angola, or the behavior of the Nationalist party in Mozambique, true they had a

civil war in those countries, but at the end of the civil war there was no room for the Portuguese and the Portuguese had been there for three centuries. I think that it was clear for the Russians that you could not install a sort of Marxist regime in the Congo unless all the Belgians would first go and then the government of Lumumba would ask in the technicians from the Soviet Union, from East Germany, from Czechoslovakia, from all these countries, as they did in fact fifteen years later when Angola became independent. So I'm pretty sure that if one were to be able to trace back all the contacts between Lumumba, the NNC and the Eastern Block of those days, you would find absolute evidence that the chaotic situation was one they could live with because it was a prelude of our going. Now to us in the early days the United Nations was on the contrary the basis of the hope of a quick re-establishment of law and order which would permit us to stay there and, therefore, despite the humiliation felt here about the resolutions that said that the Belgian officers had to go and whereby many people were a bit confused of what the United Nations asked. The United Nations asked us to withdraw all Belgian personnel from the Congolese army and many people felt that the United nations, de facto, was trying to ask all Belgians to leave Congo.

JK

I see. They had meant not just the military...

JB

That's right. This is not true. The United Nations one, never had resolutions voted upon that asked the withdrawal of all Belgians, that is for one. Secondly, depending on the kind of personnel you had at the United Nations, some did work well with the Belgians but the majority did not. The majority did not because the majority came from third world countries and the third world countries, in a certain way, despite their call for reestablishing law and order that may profit us, were in a certain sense, convinced that our chapter was finished. The colonial chapter was finished and the word colonialism was about the worst possible word you can use. I've always thought of colonialism as a phenomenon. A phenomenon that extends over 2,000 years, beginning with the Romans for us in Galia, Belgica, in Brittania, and I think that neither the French, or the Swiss, or the Belgians, or the Germans, or the Britains, today will speak of colonialism as an evil experience. When the Romans came they taught us how to read and write and lay the villas, the roads and build the vinlas (?) and build the villages. Colonialism is a fact which you can see in many different aspects.

JK

Now I wanted to ask you, when the UN troops then did come in, did they actually establish law and order in a timely way that the Belgians felt that they were secure, the ones who did stay?

JB

Well, let me distinguish here. This law and order situation in African countries, developing there really fast when people see a chance of total disruption of police and a chance for them to get rich quick. Take the latest elections in Haiti, you have the situation as long as the strong arm of order is not there you have it. Now the United Nations were not immediately all over the country, as I said it was a three months deployment situation that they were faced with. Now, the main place for restoring law and order was Kinshasa and there was a dispute about the airport that eventually we go to an agreement with the United Nations. And in Kinshasa, seeing these foreign troops, the sort of upheavals within the Zairean regimens quickly came down, although there still was a great deal of fighting amongst them and that the situation remained for a while chaotic but by and large no further violence. But you should not forget that in that same time framework elsewhere in Zaire, take Kasai, Equator, Kivu or Katanga, law and order was quickly, promptly reestablished simply by the fact that the Belgians, basing their action on the letter they had been able to secure from Bamboko, deployed their paratroopers and they deployed them a bit everywhere and by seeing the paratroopers, law and order was reestablished as the Belgians said that they would succeed in doing. It did, in fact, succeed. I was then



in Washington and I remember coming back from a sailing party in Chesapeake Bay and one night an American radio announcing that in Elizabethville, Katanga, Belgian paratroopers land and 400 Zaireans were killed, but first a word from friendly Chevrolet. That's the way it came over. We went to sit rather ghastly white with fear of what it was. In fact, not a single Congolese was killed in those paratroop exercises or deployments then. Of course once we had those troops deployed the United Nations interfered more and more to say that we had to withdraw them and there we felt very irritated, not with the United Nations as such, not with the Secretariat, but with those resolutions because we said, look we've been deploying our troops not with the goal of recapturing a country we've been giving independence to, but just to help them restore law and order. But we were confronted with Lumumba who said, I don't want you to restore law and order. I want you to go. And truly it must be said that except I think for Singapore and except perhaps for one or two African countries, all of the Third World voted as one man against us and said, no, you want to recapture this. And when, then, in Katanga law and order being restored by the Belgian paratroopers Tshombe ceased power and Tshombe didn't cease power, he was Provincial Prime Minister, but he expressed a wish and proclaimed the independence of Katanga. Then, of course, the Third

World said, see, this is what we always expected - you threw independence at the Zaireans, at the Congolese, you knew very well they would break down into chaotic situations and then you would pick out the plum, which is Katanga, the rich Katanga, and through your puppet Tshombe you're going to rule all that. This was the picture that was made. And although that picture may have been supported by a number of individual Belgian settlers in Katanga and a number of large Belgian companies operating in Katanga, this was never the view of the Belgian government in Brussels. And we maintained our diplomatic representation only in Leopoldville and never had a diplomatic representation in Elizabethville. We had a pretty strong consulate in Elizabethville because we had about 5,000 of our own people or 6,000 of our own people in Elizabethville, but never did we have a true diplomatic representation in Elizabethville.

JK

Right. So that the Belgian policy as far as the government was concerned was to support the unity of the Congo.

JB

Yes. I must add to this, it's now 30 years on, that there was one minister in the government who did plead for the other line and who did plead for not the recognition of Katanga, but for playing for time to see whether Katanga would be able to sustain itself and to get a clear picture in the world. It was quite obvious

that if we were the first country to recognize the independence of Katanga then, of course, Katanga would make no chance whatsoever to be recognized by a third world country and therefore no one thought of recognizing Katanga. But the vast majority of the ministers, the 24 other ministers, were all in the line of, we've given independence to this country and it's none of our business to try to promote any secession within that area. And there was one who indeed said, why don't we go along with that part of the country that is remaining absolutely friendly with us and where we can still do business.

JK

Well, there was an incident that came up in Elizabethville later on when the UN had, in the efforts to end the secession, had called for all the Belgian advisors and whatever mercenaries there were to be expelled from the Congo and as I understand it the Belgian consulate at that time gave some of those people safe (JB: Conducts?) Well, to stay within the consulate and not have to leave, asylum.

JB

The 95, I've seen that in your paper. No, the situation was the following one. To begin with as soon as the chaos erupted in Leopoldville, the people down in Katanga, who always had, when I say the people, I mean the Belgians, the foreigners, the Greeks, the Portuguese and also the Katangese themselves who felt that with

Congolese independence, they would have to foot the bill of the whole of the Congo and of Lumumba who was hated in Katanga, one because he was not either a Baluba or a Lunda; two because he was a Marxist and they went along very different lines; three it's a different climate situation there - it's a prosperous place and they saw the chaos erupting under Lumumba. They all had a rather genuine feeling of, we might do it by ourselves, right. So there were hardly great clashes and wherever there loomed some danger, we based our action on the letter from Bamboko and dropped paratroopers to make sure there would be no really bloody clashes, and that's where I referred to this American radio broadcast on that Sunday night. Indeed the paratroopers were dropped but I can't recall today of any great difficulties in Katanga. Now that means that the Congolese army that was in Katanga didn't rebel against its Belgian officers and non-commissioned officers. Therefore all these cadres remained. Here we had a whole, entire, large, immense province where everything was quiet - the business went on as usual and the army was well commanded and there was no problem and all of a sudden the people of Katanga had to hear that all the Belgian cadres had to go. And they said, for god's sake, do we have to import all those miseries and chaotic situations out of Leopoldville, why can't these officers stay? There's nobody asking them to

go. The answer was, well, Lumumba asked them to go. Whereupon the provincial man said, I don't want them to go. Whereupon then the provincial man said, I'm proclaiming independence and Lumumba is no longer going to control us. The United Nations did not recognize that independence of Katanga. Therefore passed resolutions and said all Belgian officers have to leave the Congo. That meant including those officers in these Congolese units that found themselves in Katanga. Now then Tshombe said, I don't want them to go and what I'll do is they may be dismissed as contractual officers of the Congolese army...

JK We were talking about the secession...

JB Yes, well I was saying in Katanga itself, although there had been deployments by Belgian paratroopers, in fact, there had been no major disturbances. There had been threats of disturbances, there were some minor ones and law and order was promptly reestablished. But the upshot was that the Congolese units in Katanga remained under Belgian control as they had always been and as it was intentioned to remain in Belgian control according to our fundamental agreement with the Zaireans who said they needed those people and gradually they would be phased out. Therefore, the Congolese army units in Katanga were very effective and here came, out of New York, a signal, the resolutions by the Security Council saying, no you



may have peace in Katanga, these units may work effectively but these Belgians have to go.

JK Well, the issue had been because of the declaration of the secession that there was a conflict between the unity of the Congo and the forces that were in Katanga that would not support that.

JB Yes, I see your point but I think the withdrawal resolutions from the Security Council ante-date, come before even a secession of Katanga. I think, you see, the root of the whole system is that the Congolese government was divided on whether the Belgians should stay in the army or should get out of the army. As soon as we had this clash in Matadi, where, as I had told you yesterday, upon the recommendation of the ambassador, the road from Matadi to Kinshasa was freed, or a beginning was made to free this road by the Belgian metropolitan units, Lumumba considered that this country was at war with us.

JK Now this was right after the mutiny...

JB Early July, this was about the 12th of July. As soon as he had this notion he felt that he asked for the withdrawal of all Belgian metropolitan troops to begin and to that the Security Council said yes. And then he said, and there I'm not too sure, there indeed I should do my homework to find out whether the departure of the Belgian officers and non-com's from the Congolese army

dates from before the secession of Katanga. One way or the other the secession of Katanga was of course a point that would increase the demand for the departure of all Belgians out of the Congolese army. That left Tshombe, who had decided to secede with a dilemma. And he solved this dilemma, the dilemma being that if he let them go, chaos would erupt perhaps in his own province or in his own state. So what he did was he said, you may go but you come back the next day to me and I'll use you and I'll pay you. So he simply said, you resign as officers of the Congolese army. I no longer consider these units in my province as a Congolese army - this is a Katangese army. And now I offer you all a resumption of contract or a new contract with the same conditions. You will be paid the same pay and you'll all remain where you are. Therefore, they became from one day to the other, Katangese officers.

JK Now, do you have any information on how they were actually paid, were they paid through the Katangese government or were they paid by the Union Minière?

JB Yes, I have a very amusing anecdote, if you can call it amusing, anecdote. That is that I think the advisors to Tshombe, the Belgian, said, you must change as little as possible in all this so why don't you maintain all these contracts and since you are having all the income, since you must remember that the Congolese budget was fed, not

so much by taxation, had you put taxation the Congolese wouldn't have paid much and the ex-patriots went, in fact, to Africa as they went to all colonies in order to make some money, you can't tax them either, therefore the resources the country were many coming from export taxes. It's a very, very rare phenomenon where you tax your own exports but they considered that the world price of copper was far higher than the cost price of digging it out and transporting it to wherever ports, which was then, in those days, mostly Angola and Lobito(?). Therefore, copper went out of Katanga. It was taxed at the border between Katanga and Angola and all these receipts would have gone to Kinshasa, to Leopoldville, in the days of the colony. Now the Katangese soldier with all these receipts would go back to Elizabethville. So they had plenty of money to pay the army. Now the United Nations was saying, we want these units out and we, in Belgium, abided by this resolution. Of course, it did take weeks before you could do it because you had to go and plead with those officers. These officers had never been Belgian officers of the Belgian army. These were officers of the Congolese army and their pay and their pension would always come from the Congo. Now in our agreement with Congo it was understood that Congo would keep paying them with our own help paying 2/3 of their salaries and 2/3 of their pensions. All of a sudden all

those who found themselves under the Lumumba influence no longer had one iota of confidence and the fact that Lumumba would keep on paying them but in Shaba or in Katanga, Shaba is a new name for Katanga, they were quite sure that Tshombe was able and willing to abide by our basic agreement. So that they kept on going and we said, you know, we cannot no longer pay you because the United Nations is telling us that you should go home, therefore don't count on us. So they went back to Katanga and they said to Katanga, will you pay the full salary? And Katanga said, yes, we'll pay the full salary. So many stayed on. And then we had to go to them and say, you know, we abide by United Nations resolutions and we ask you to home. And so gradually they started moving out of Katanga. I must add here an interesting anecdote and that is that in the Congolese army there were a number of Belgians as well who stayed on despite the fact the United Nations asked for all of them to go. In fact, there were a number of Belgians who were very well liked by the Zairean new officer class whom Lumumba had promoted and they were kept, shall I say out of sight from the United Nations and the United Nations, at the end of the day, discovered that these people were not at all the messengers of orders from Brussels, but that they were performing a very useful task for the restoration of what you could restore in the Congolese army. Never

mind. What then happened was that in Katanga something very new developed which we had not foreseen. Tshombe knew that he could control the Belgians in his army to keep discipline and to make them go, but that they would shy away from sort of direct confrontations with either other provinces or with the United Nations process if they were to come. And he then resorted to a new technique which was a technique of the mercenaries. The mercenaries are in fact people who live in Africa an odd life of officer or retired officer, officer for the service of so and so and they were paid huge salaries. The majority of these people were not Belgians, they were either British like Mike Hoar or they were French people, I forget the names now, there were a few Belgians as well. And these officers, together with Katangese soldiers, were sort of sent in for the rather difficult operations. There again, you can argue that the contracts that were proposed by Tshombe were inspired from the contracts in the Belgian army. And the amusing anecdote that I have is that one day, Zorin, who was the Soviet ambassador, made a great speech to the UN Security Council saying, that Mr. Spaak had denied that Belgium had anything to do with the recruitment of the mercenaries, which was quite true. The mercenaries, Tshombe opened an office in Brussels to recruit them. We let it go for a while and then we closed it, we advised our people not to go. But



Zorin at the United Nations said, I have a contract here he said of such a mercenary. Now I would like you to know what he gains if he loses a thumb, he will have about \$2,000 for that. Now what does the Belgian army contract say for a soldier in Belgium who loses a thumb? Oh it happens to be \$2,000, but Mr. Spaak says he doesn't know of any Belgian influence in all of this. Now what if he loses a leg? Well, the contract for a mercenary says \$50,000. What does the Belgian army contract say? \$50,000, but Mr. Spaak, he says he knows nothing of this sort. And he went for a half hour with this tirade. And Spaak very quickly and promptly answered, it's not because Tshombe used the Belgian contract as a model for the contracts he signed, that you can claim that we are in the business of helping him in gaining his recruits or his mercenaries. The fact of the matter is that Katanga, like Rhodesia, were very heavily ex-patriated, rich places, and that it was very easy to ask one or the other to fly to Europe and say, when you pay these people come back with the right kind of contracts and recruit them. And as I said a while ago a majority of mercenaries were not Belgians, the majority were of different nature of all kinds of European nationalities.

JK

I wanted to ask you some questions also about Dag Hammarskjöld, what was the Belgian view of the way he handled the operation?

JB

Well, I think there is a great deal of respect for Dag Hammarskjold. The former Soviet line would thereby claim that here you see it, the Belgians were happy with Dag Hammarskjold's handling of the situation, therefore, Dag Hammarskjold was nothing but a puppet of the colonialists. That would have been the line that Khrushchev would have taken or Brezhnev. But the Soviets, of course, in those days had their simplistic line that our country is a sort of cradle for pure capitalism and colonialism and whatnot. I think their present line is that we are a country which has a standard of living which is about three times theirs and is in fact a social security system which is about ten times theirs, has a medical insurance system which is about twenty times theirs and that it's a little more complicated than the simplistic view they sold their people. And also our attitude towards Zaire is a little more complex than the simple way they propose it. So I no longer have to fear or to counteract, shall I say these very sort of negative views of Hammarskjold which they have been spreading. I think, we think in Belgium, that Dag Hammarskjold, to begin with, had the ideal nationality to deal with this unbelievably intricate situation, being a Swede. Secondly, he was a man who could devote his whole entire time to it. Thirdly, and perhaps not so common in Scandinavia, he was a rather

daring person. The Scandinavians, I've worked at the United Nations in the days of Trygve Lie - the Norwegian - very, very prudent, rather neutral, although Norway later joined NATO. Scandinavians are sort of wait and see and let's not be hasty in these matters and in fact Hammarskjold acted decisively, when I think that only seven days after independence, he himself was the one to find out this first resolution whereby he would suggest to the Zaireans to ask for a technical assistance in the field of law and order. That was very astute because it did not yet prejudice on our own agreements for the Zaireans, because our own agreements were clear. They had what we call "la loi fondamentale" which was their constitution which they then would further refine in independence and then there was a basic agreement with Belgium. And in that basic agreement with Belgium we had said, we maintain, not for our own sake, but for your benefit which, of course, included our interest a number of metropolitan troops to support their own army. We had in those days about 80,000 Belgians spread over this immense continent. It was impossible to ask those people to remain there and take a risk of life and death for their wives and their children. You know, we're a normal European country and most people, except the missionaries because they were Roman Catholics - they were not married, but all the rest of the people were young

couples. You must see, the average young Belgian doctor or engineer was a man of 35 with a wife of 30 and 3-4 children, how can you ask these people to remain in the inside posts with a total breakdown of law and order? I mean, you have these situations which we have known in the world in the last 30 years of ships that come or airplanes that come and evacuate people. These days you find that about every two months you have an operation somewhere in the world where you say that big planes go and take the civilians out. Now that was something we wanted to avoid and therefore we had said to them, you do realize that you need technical assistance for many years to come. They said yes. We said, we don't want to impose ours if you can change it with someone else, you can do this and please bring in the Americans, the Canadians, the Chinese, the Russians, you can bring in all you want but don't dismiss our people before you have gained someone else. No, we want you to stay. Right, we said. Now you must make sure that if anything happens to your army, you can count on us. We have troops in Katona and Kamina. These were two huge bases. All you have to do is pick up the phone and ask us. That was the scenario. Hammarskjold knew this and Hammarskjold felt that perhaps we would save the situation anyway. I think that Hammarskjold had seen Bunche, who had come back, you had mentioned it your paper, from the independence

festivities, he didn't come back he stayed in Kinshasa because he foresaw trouble.

JK Yeah, right. They had anticipated that there would be trouble.

JB He had anticipated it and he had anticipated it because he knew, as many would, as your very famous American Deputy Secretary of State, Dean Rusk. He had been ambassador to India. He made a statement which is a most prophetic statement that I've ever seen and which we should've paid far more attention to. He said, of us, in 1956, he said, the trouble with the Belgians, is not that they are going to be absolutely radically negative towards the demand of independence for the Zaireans, the problem is that they do not want to face now what we should foresee as this great tidal wave of independence coming through Africa. And by the time this tidal wave will reach the Congo they then will cave in quickly. That is the problem with them. And, I think I put it somewhere in the paper, if I can find it, I'll give it to you, and I think that many people in America felt that way and that Hammarskjold felt that way because he had, of course, lived in the New York atmosphere and he didn't believe in what we called the Congolese bet. He said something will happen. He also, that I know, because I once had with our own ambassador in Washington in the early days - Louis Scheyven - an intimate discussion, it



had nothing to do with the Zairean embassy. But I went to the ambassador and said, you know we're not handling our information policy right. Then he gave me a few hints of what was going on and he said that what many people were fearing most was the personality of Lumumba. He said, Lumumba had, of course all the attributes of the great political leaders with formidable talent, but the speech he made on the 30th of June was an indication of a lack of restraint, a lack of maturity. And that is the moment where a number of people in Belgium already, who had supported Lumumba, all of a sudden felt cold. All of a sudden felt their backs getting cold and I think the same feeling, all of a sudden, got over our western world - people saying, this is not going to be an Nkrumah, this is not even going to be a Sekou Touré, he's going to become the fiercest of all African leaders and God knows where it'll bring us. And that's where Hammarskjöld, I think, foresaw a role for the United Nations. In fact, when you look at the whole post-war situation, it's called by the East-West confrontation, but which has been sort of put under control, stalemated by NATO and also the Warsaw PACT, and by the great American involvement in Europe. But the other thing is the decolonialization process with its tragedies - tragedies in India, tragedies in Algeria, tragedies in many small countries, and all of a sudden here was this central African region

which had started under Leopold II as no man's region. And again it had been a Belgian colony because of this solution bearing conference and the takeover by Belgium later and all of a sudden it again became no man's land. And in a no man's land situation I think that Hammarskjold very wisely saw that we were too small to be able to command a lasting influence position. After all, the British didn't maintain their predominantly British position in India. The Dutch after three centuries didn't maintain their Dutch predominant position in Indonesia. Why would we, who had only been there for 40 years maintain our dominant position and if we didn't, who would fill the vacuum? And he then saw, in fact, two contenders, the two superpowers. America had never really been interested in Congo except from a missionary point of view. Except also somewhat but I would say very little from a business angle in a sense that the uranium no longer played a role, the uranium, it's unsensible to say that America was interested because of the uranium. In those days uranium was closed and finished but Zaire remained, kept this myth of this enormous wealth in non-ferrol ore and also it kept the myth that it might influence one African one way or the other.

JK

Now I wanted to ask you also, what was the Belgian relationship with the United States during this process and at one point, one of our Senators, a Senator from

Connecticut, Senator Dodd, became an advocate of the Katangese secession and was very vocal about it. Was Belgium at all aware of what the American right was doing in the United States and were they at all in contact with any of those people?

JB

Oh yes, yes, yes, absolutely. We have here to deal with President Eisenhower and then Kennedy came in. I watched Kennedy coming in in January 1961. That was the time I think when Kennedy came in. The Americans had a very positive attitude towards what we had done in Zaire and a number of people, to begin with there was of course the negative American view that I mentioned yesterday, Joseph Conrad and Heart of Darkness. It's very complicated, she was a Pole and he had an aunt in Brussels and he himself had gone there and he had worked on a little steamer and on the little steamer he had discovered the greed of all these people and that book is widely spread in England as it is in America. Oddly enough on the continent it was totally ignored, no one here knows about this book by Joseph Conrad. Conrad you must read in English and I think the French translations, I don't even know where a French translation would be made, but therefore this early notion of the greedy adventure is something which is alien to our own world and when we speak of Africa and Heart of Darkness people don't know what you really mean. Secondly, the rubber story called by this Englishman

Morel in his book, Red Rubber is known here but it's sort of a tribute to the greedy rubber companies which, of course, knew they had only a few years, after the Dunlop invention of the ----(?) tire to make their monies and they probably exhausted the resources of local villages and it's considered one of those mishaps that you can have in these situations but it never was construed as a major scandal. However, it's true to say that Parliament became worried about it and although Parliament had a weaker role then and acted more as an advisory body to Leopold II, Parliament was able to impose on Leopold II to send to the Congo a team of three foreign magistrates - went, saw for themselves, brought back a report and made recommendations. To us this was a mishap, but it was not the major condition. In America, on the contrary, the rubber situation is, should I say, inherited from the reputation of England and you take that english view, I would even say you take the Liverpool view, because it's a Liverpool view. This man Morel, was a man from Liverpool, was a pamphleteer in Liverpool. Liverpool was the African port of England and Liverpool saw, with great dismay, the trade in ivory and the trade in rubber, move from Liverpool to Antwerp. On top of that, this man was, I'm speaking of Morel, a passionate man who hated the guts out of us and he got his detailed information on Zaire from the British

honorary council in Beaumont, Casement. Casement who also began to hate the whole system because he felt that it was a joke to speak of an independent sovereign nation, it was simply a personal fiefdom.

JK But what I wanted to ask you was about the Belgian relationship with the US during that period.

JB Well, I would say that during that period I would assume that the relationship was both cold and warm. Leopold II had, as I told you yesterday, this American colonel whose name I have to remember. (JK: No, but I mean during the period, the Congo period - during the 60's.) But they have improved tremendously because after Belgium took over Congo, and especially during World War II, the Congo became one of the main contributors to the allied efforts. You must not forget that for instance in terms of rubber, Indonesia, Malaysia, which were the traditional rubber places in the world, fell out and, therefore, the American war effort had to rely heavily on Africa and the Belgian Congo during the whole of World War II was 100% behind the Allied effort.

JK So there had been a history of cooperation.

JB Yes, there was an immense effort of cooperation, as I told you yesterday, the uranium, cobalt, copper, all went to the American war effort. After the war this went on and although the Americans did not support our view at the UN early on, we had then what we call the Belgian



Thesis at the United Nations which was that we were ready to come and explain the fate and the evolution of the native populations. It was all right. We would abide by what the Brazilians were asking us and the Peruvians and the Bolivians and the Dominicans, we said, our thesis is that you Brazilians who coming here to the United Nations always the same kind of story about your own native populations. The Indians left out or the Africans left out of the main circle. This was the Belgian thesis. The Americans didn't approve of our thesis and said, these are sovereign nations and you cannot ask sovereign nations to come forward and explain about their own basic native populations. That was a point of discord we had, but in real terms, in daily business terms, it was very good and you had one American journalist named John Gunter who wrote this book, Inside Africa and if you read Inside Africa you discover that although he takes it at face value, there's an assertion by Morel that in the rubber harvest, seven million Congolese died which is absolutely absurd. As a figure, it's not 7 million, it's not 1 million, it's not 70,000, I mean we (JK: Yeah, he discussed that in the book.) That's right, in concrete terms we have only four witnesses to speak of. Nevertheless the gist of the book of John Gunter is good, it's very positive about Congo. It says they've done amazing progress, although he then states a few idiotic

statements, he says, unfortunately they haven't yet built motorways as we have them in America, as if you could build waterways in Africa, but this I leave aside. Then America made a number of films which I would recommend for you to see...

JK

Oh, I have to just say that we're right at the end of the tape and I wanted to thank you very much and we really covered everything that I had wanted to cover and I appreciate your taking your time to do this, thank you.



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