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Article — Digitized Version

The plight of an African State

Intereconomics

Suggested Citation: Cohn, Hans (1968) : The plight of an African State, Intereconomics, ISSN 0020-5346, Verlag Weltarchiv, Hamburg, Vol. 03, Iss. 4, pp. 111-112, <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF02930239>

This Version is available at:

<https://hdl.handle.net/10419/137924>

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Rather overlooked in recent discussion is the need to maintain viable and economic shipping services, whether these are domestic- or foreign-owned. The major question here is whether these services can be improved by alterations in the organisation and planning of shipping conferences. This question is a very sensitive one for shipowners in what is a heavily-capitalised, high fixed-cost industry serving frequently seasonal and fluctuating trade. Certainly too many constraints on shipping enterprise might result in inadequate responses to alterations in the direction and composition of foreign trade.

Australia's shipping is likely to see increasing growth of producer-owned ships as minerals continue to be

exported in greater quantities. Similarly, more specialist ships are likely to operate as Australia develops trade links with newer markets, particularly Japan.

For Australia, the most important question of the future in the area of shipping and trade is whether the continuing growth and transformation of its export trade will be adequately responded to by shipowners. This question in turn depends on a whole complex of factors including the adequacy of existing policy-making and organisation of shipping services, government intervention or non-intervention in shipping matters, technological changes and improvements in ancillary services like port facilities.

CONGO

The Plight of an African State

by Dr Hans Cohn, Port Elizabeth

Since it became independent political disorders prevented the Congo from settling down. The rebellion of Katanga, riots in the Northern region and mutinous mercenaries contributed to bring this state—so rich in natural resources—to disaster. Today even the moderate administrative and economic foundations, that the Belgians left behind them, have been disrupted. In the following article the author outlines the prerequisites to the Congo's economic rehabilitation, which naturally are to be found mainly in the political sphere.

The industrial history of what was known in former years as "Belgian Congo" and is called today "Congo Republic" commenced on October 28, 1906, when the "Union Minière Du Haut-Katanga" was established. Sole purpose of the company's activities was the large-scale commercialisation of the enormous copper deposits in this part of the colony.

Colonial History

The presence of copper in Katanga was—of course—already known some centuries ago, but the first official reference to the Katanga deposits was made at the end of the 18th century. After the occupation of Katanga by the Belgians laboratory tests were made, and the results of these tests led ultimately to the foundation of the "Union Minière Du Haut-Katanga". The amazing development of this company is reflected by the fact, that it started in 1906 with a capital investment of 10 million francs, and that the 1952 figure was 5 billion.

What the "Union Minière Du Haut-Katanga", however, meant to the country's economy, can be judged by some production figures published on the company's 50th anniversary in the year 1956. Within 50 years of activities the "Union Minière" produced altogether 4,761 million tons of copper, 76,000 tons of cobalt, 1,580 million tons of zinc and 276 kilograms of platin. The company maintained at that time the third place amongst the copper producers of the world and the

first place amongst the cobalt producers. That was in 1956. Ten years later, in January 1967, the Congolese Government withdrew the concessions of the Union Minière Du Haut-Katanga, because the company had failed to move its incorporation to the Congo Republic. In place of the old company a new one was established under the name "Société Générale Congolaise Des Minerais" (Congolese Ores Company) and the European technicians of the former Union Minière were asked to work for this new company. Now happened something rather extraordinary. Of 1,071 European technicians formerly employed by the Union Minière only one chose to stay in the Congo and to work for the new Congo-based company, while all the others preferred to return to the home-country. What had happened meanwhile? How could it come about, that people living for decades in the Congo were prepared to leave their homes rather than to work for a Congo-based company?

The Congo's Independence

The answer is that the Congo meanwhile had become an autonomous Republic. The time of colonialism, slavery and disgrace, as it was officially called, was finished and a new era of freedom had started. As it has already become a habit in Africa, the new era commenced with a chain of civil wars, coups d'états, political murders, outrages, etc., and the rage of the natives turned especially against their former European masters. Homesteads were devastated, white

people were murdered and terror ruled the country. The economic results were catastrophic. To quote only one typical instance: The Congo-Kinshasa cotton crop dropped from 147,289 tons in 1959 to 16,846 tons in 1965, because the plantations were abandoned. The once rich country was impoverished, and European lives not safe anymore.

It is not the purpose of this article to examine, if the feelings of Congolese natives towards Europeans in the Congo were justified or not. They definitely were to a certain extent, as "colonialism" had ruled the country rather ruthlessly in the past, and the Belgian authorities had given "freedom" to an absolutely unprepared nation. These facts cannot be denied and are the main reasons for the practically uninterrupted chain of civil wars and cruelties in this unhappy country. It is now only the question, how the Congo can rebuild its devastated economy and—at the same time—how it can be fitted economically and politically into the new Africa slowly emerging out of the ruins of the old Continent.

Struggle for Peace

What the Congo needs is in the first place peace, in the second place peace and in the third place peace. The chances for a period of peace and reconstruction are at the moment not too bad. Colonel Schramme and the mercenaries are beaten, Moise Tshombé sits in Algeria and President Mobutu seems to be firmer entrenched than ever. Furthermore: One of the most encouraging events in the year 1967 was the signing of a treaty of co-operation between Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania, after years of difficulty and bitterness. These three East African states have been developing along very different political lines. While Kenya under President Jomo Kenyatta is rather conservative, in Uganda President Obote has managed to overcome tribalism and to give the country a new constitution. President Nyerere of Tanzania has launched the country on the ways of pure homegrown socialism by nationalising the banks, the flourmills, etc.—In spite of these differences in their interior structures the three countries managed to sign a treaty of co-operation, and this may give the neighbouring states some food for thoughts. It is definitely not impossible, that Ethiopia, Rwanda, Burundi, Somalia and perhaps the Congo may join the pact. At least it is known, that President Mobutu is not opposed to this idea.

A development like this would mean something, but certainly not everything. The sickness of the Congo Republic, like the sickness of most of the African states, is called tribalism. As long as Congolese natives don't consider themselves Congolese, but only members of a certain tribe, the Congo Republic exists only on the map. There must be a strong central power to rule the country and to create something like a Congolese national feeling, but how can this be achieved in view of the lack of an effective infrastructure? Means of communication are extremely primitive, not only in the Congo, but in most African countries and it is to a large extent this fact, which

hampers their development into states. Before the Congo can achieve the badly needed peace, President Mobutu must overcome tribalism, or there will be always one or the other tribal chief to start a rebellion against the Central Government. It cannot be stated as to whether President Mobutu is the right man for a job like this, or not. That it can be done, President Obote has proved in Uganda and that it must be done, is a certainty.

Need of European Help

But what will the position of Europeans in the new Congo be? It has been proved beyond any doubt, that the country's economy cannot be rebuilt without European aid and that behind all slogans of freedom, anti-colonialism, etc., is nothing but a feeling of insecurity. Yet the Congo will definitely be a "black" country, ruled by natives and in the interest of natives. The Congo may be a temporary domicile for European technicians, skilled workers, etc., but even the most daring Europeans will think twice before settling there for good. The horrors of the last decade are still in too fresh a memory and won't be forgotten for years to come.

It goes without saying, that money-offers for economic aid are pouring in. The wealth of the Congo is too attractive to remain untouched for any length of time. America, Belgium, France, England, Russia, China, Japan, Germany and many more countries are interested in this rich country, which offers most promising prospects for future developments. It is not only the copper, the cobalt, the zinc and the platinum which make the Congo an investor's paradise. A short time ago the Portuguese "Cabinda Gulf Oil Co." struck oil offshore the Portuguese enclave of Cabinda north of mouth of the Congo River and it is easily possible, that the Congo may contain more oil deposits.

Improving Economic Development

President Mobutu has started some promising economic developments. In place of the franc he has—as from October 1, 1967—introduced the "zaire" as a new currency and at the same time granted a 25 per cent wage increase, he has signed an agreement with Zambia about using Congolese railways for the transport of Zambian copper if Zambia contributes staff and rolling stock and he intends making the Congolese port of Matadi the harbour for the country's copper exports in place of Lobito in Portuguese Angola. Furthermore there will be a central marketing authority set up for raw cotton, as this crop was 21,000 tons in 1966 thus showing a slight improvement compared with the 16,846 tons in 1965. The country needs 15,000 tons for domestic use while the balance is exported to Belgium, Britain and the neighbouring country of Congo-Brazzaville.

These are rather promising signs and the years of economic disasters may soon be past, if there is peace in the country.