

Against Colonial Oppression

The Situation in the Belgian Congo

Statement by the League Against Imperialism

Owing to the world crisis and the difficult economic situation in the Belgian Congo, a strong insurrectionary movement has been developing during the past few months, especially among the Bwaka Ngombe and Banza tribes, and the Libenge district.

According to the "African World" of December 23, a revolt has now broken out in the Nono tribe. The trouble began in the village of Duna, and it is attributed to the influence of witch doctors. In reality the revolt had nothing to do with sorcery, but is due to the discontent caused by high taxation, by wide-scale unemployment, and also by the system of paying for the wood which the Congolese bring in by a system of check-vouchers instead of cash.

Troops were called out by the Belgian authorities, firearms were used and three Congolese were killed; while one African soldier was wounded.

The Belgian oppression in the Congo equals the rigorous rule of British imperialism in Nigeria and India, and of French imperialism in Madagascar and Indo-China.

The following report of Belgian cruelty and administration of justice has just reached the League Against Imperialism:—

A few days ago the captain of a vessel belonging to a European company, the National Union of River Transport (Unatra), struck an African fireman working under his orders with a log of fuel wood. The fireman fainted from loss of blood and was taken to the native hospital. On the second day lock-jaw set in and the Negro died in atrocious suffering.

The white staff of the Unatra has the wretched reputation of being "Nigger-drivers," worthy of the reign of Leopold II. On board their boats the captain and the owners of their barges are absolute masters and hold the Negroes at their mercy.

The inhabitants of the native village, and especially the black workers of the Unatra, will remember the murder of the native worker n'Gito, by a white boat owner. The circumstances of the crime must be told in order to show up clearly the state of mind of the white colonists.

After having taken on board a cargo of wood at the station of Poto Poto, near Dima, the stern wheeler tug "Wangata" continued her journey. Barge O9 was one of the string of boats which the "Wangata" was towing. A discussion regarding the ill-treatment which the captain inflicted on his men took place between the Negro steersman, n'Gito, and the barge master. The white slave-driver knocked the black worker down with a blow from a stick and stunned him with a heavy earthenware dish. He then had him handcuffed and thrown overboard. The other workers, horrified by such a spectacle, did not dare to intervene, and the unfortunate n'Gito disappeared into the water. After which the master went off tranquilly to enjoy the charms of his native housekeeper and was picked up in the morning dead drunk. Two days later the corpse of the poor Negro, which had escaped being devoured by the crocodiles, was found in some bushes on the edge of the river, with the handcuffs still on and the horrible wound caused by the earthenware jar visible.

The native village of Leopoldville, roused by such cruelty and cynicism, demonstrated in solemn indignation at the public port where the "Wangata" was to touch. However, under this menace, her captain deemed it more prudent to land at the dockyard of the Unatra.

The white barge master, after a brief interrogatory, was allowed his liberty, and a short time afterwards the Unatra, desiring to get rid of an embarrassing person, sent him home to Belgium. In the Correctional Court of Antwerp he was condemned for having killed a native worker in the most cowardly manner, to one month's imprisonment, which was subsequently remitted. Such a scandalous verdict shows clearly how the whites in the Congo understand their so-called civilising role.

The Congo is a vast territory, the area being estimated at 918,000 square miles. It is especially rich in minerals. Copper is the chief export, and the Congo expects to become one of the world's greatest producers of tin. There are great diamond deposits, which are worked profitably, and this year nearly ten tons of gold will be exported from the Congo.

The high profits which are derived from the exploitation of the Congo are due to the exceedingly low cost of production, especially wages. The workers of Belgium are directly the victims of Belgian imperialism in the Congo. In Belgium to-day nearly one-third of the working-class population is suffering from unemployment; the Means Test is being increasingly applied, with a view to reducing the payment of unemployment benefit. While slavery exists in the Congo there will be no possibility for the Belgian workers to free themselves from exploitation.

So little is the meaning of imperialism understood in Belgium that the funds of the Belgian Labour organisations are actually invested in business undertakings in the Congo. This investment by the workers of their own funds in the capitalist and imperialist enterprises of their own ruling class has its parallel in Britain, where some of the funds of the British railway unions are invested in British railway stock.

But the exploitation of the Congolese is not the work of Belgian imperialists alone. The vast riches of the Congo basin have long attracted the envy of international financiers (particularly British) as well. In the time of Leopold II. the first Governor-General of the Congo to be appointed was the brutal English imperialist, H. M. Stanley, and to-day British imperialists have enormously extended the profits which they derive from exploitation of the Congolese, as is exemplified in the 49 per cent. share of the British Company, Tanganyika Concessions, in the Union Miniere. It is the Union Miniere which practically monopolises the vast wealth of the Katanga region in copper, coal, radium, etc. Again, the huge British super-trust, Unilever and its subsidiaries, practically monopolise the vegetable-oil industry of the Congo, as they do of other parts of West Africa.

The position of the Congolese in Belgium is particularly hard. In the first place, none of them is ever permitted to return to the Congo. Many of these Congolese have been brought to Belgium as the personal servants of Belgians, who discharge them as soon as they land in Belgium. These Congolese are completely unorganised, unless it be that they are enrolled as members of a charitable organisation under clerical direction. They eke out a precarious existence as hawkers or pedlars.

It is necessary to establish unity of organisation between the Congolese and Belgian workers with a view to securing full liberty of movement for all workers, full rights of organisation, and self-determination for the Congo, with right of complete separation from Belgium.

It is not in the Congo alone that the Africans are treated inhumanly by white imperialists. The British are as callously cruel to the Negroes as the Belgians and the Americans.

The International Secretariat of the League Against Imperialism believes the time is now opportune for establishing a National Section of the League in Belgium, which would enable the Belgian workers to take up the fight on behalf of the Congolese, in solidarity with other fighters against imperialism throughout the world.