*The Political Thought of Patrice Lumumba**

1 The Venture

Lumumba and Fanon: these two great dead men represent Africa. Not only their nations: all of their continent. Reading their writings and deciphering their lives, one might take them to be implacable enemies. Fanon, the great-grandson of a slave, left his native Martinique, a country which at that time had not yet become aware of the Caribbean identity and its needs. He espoused the Algerian revolt and fought as a black among Muslim whites. Drawn with them into an atrocious and necessary war, he adopted the radicalism of his new brothers, became the theoretician of revolutionary violence and underlined in his books Africa's socialist calling: without agrarian reform and without the nationalization of colonial businesses, independence was an empty word. A victim of Belgian paternalism – no elite, no bother – Lumumba, despite his vast intelligence, did not possess Fanon's learning. On the other hand, he did appear at first sight to have the advantage over Fanon of working on his own soil for the emancipation of his brothers of colour and of his own native country. On countless occasions he said that the movement he was organizing, and whose uncontested leader he

* First published with the title 'Lumumba et le néo-colonialisme', as preface to *Discours de Lumumba*, Présence africaine, 1963.

became, would be *non-violent*, and apart from the provocations or a few local initiatives of which he always disapproved, it was by non-violent means that the MNC[1] established itself. As for structural problems, Lumumba clearly defined his position in his *Présence africaine* lectures: 'We do not have an economic option.' By that he meant that political questions – independence, centralism – came first, that political decolonization had to be achieved before the instruments of economic and social decolonization could be created.

In fact, these two men, far from fighting each other, knew and liked each other. Fanon often talked to me about Lumumba; quick to notice when an African party revealed itself to be vague or reticent on the issue of the re-organization of structures, he never reproached his Congolese friend for becoming, even unintentionally, the straw man of neocolonialism. Quite the contrary, he saw in him the uncompromising adversary of any restoration of disguised imperialism. The only thing he reproached him for – and one can imagine with what tenderness – was his unshakeable faith in man that was his downfall and his greatness. 'He would be given the proof', Fanon told me, 'that one of his ministers was betraying him. He would go and find him, show him the documents and the reports and ask him: 'Are you a traitor? Look me straight in the eye and reply.' If he denied it without looking away, Lumumba would conclude: 'All right, I believe you.' But Fanon only considered this immense goodness, which some Europeans have called naiveté, to be *harmful at that time*: as such, he was proud of it; he saw in it a fundamental trait of the African. The man of violence said to me several times: 'We black people are good; we have a horror of cruelty. For a long time, I believed that the men of Africa would not fight each other. Alas, black blood is being spilled, black men are spilling it, and it will be spilled for a long time to come. The whites are leaving, but their accomplices are among us, armed by them. The last battle of the colonized against the colonizers will often be that of the colonized among themselves.' I know: the doctrinaire in him

1 The Congolese National Movement.

saw in violence the ineluctable fate of a world in the process of liberating itself, but the man, deep down, hated it. The differences and the friendship between these two men symbolize both the contradictions that are ravaging Africa and the common need to transcend them in pan-African unity. And each encountered within himself the same heart-rending problems and the will to resolve them.

The whole of Fanon's story remains to be told. But the better-known Lumumba continues, despite everything, to guard many a secret. No one has really attempted to discover the causes of his failure,[2] nor why major capital and the bank were so bitterly opposed to a government whose leader never stopped repeating that he would leave invested capital alone and never stopped seeking new investments. The speeches you are about to read serve that end: they will allow you to understand why, despite the moderation of his economic programme, the leader of the MNC was considered by the revolutionary Fanon as a brother in arms and by the Société Générale as a mortal enemy.

He has been accused of playing a double, even a triple, game. Before an exclusively Congolese audience, he would get carried away; he was able to calm himself when he discovered that whites were present and blow hot and cold skilfully. In Brussels, before a Belgian audience, he became prudent, charming, and his first concern was to reassure. This is in no way false; but the same can be said of all great orators: they quickly judge their audience and know just how far they can go. Moreover, the reader will see that while the form may vary from speech to speech, the basics do not change. No doubt, Lumumba developed: the political thought of the young author of *Is the Congo, the Land of the Future, under Threat?* – written in 1956 – is not that of the young but mature man who founded the MNC. He may have briefly dreamed of a Belgian-Congolese community (we will see later why), but from 10 October

2 I would, however, like to refer to the very remarkable work by Michel Merlier, *The Congo*, published by Maspéro.

1958 on, his opinion, from which he was not to waver, was formed and declared: independence became his sole aim.

What varies the most, depending on his audience, is his judgement of Belgian colonization. He often emphasizes its positive aspects (indeed, sometimes with so much complacency that you might imagine you were listening to a colonist): the development of the land above and below ground, the educational work of the Missions, medical aid, hygiene, etc. Did he not, on one occasion, even go as far as to thank Léopold II's soliders for having delivered the Congolese from the 'Savage Arabs' who traded in black slaves? In those cases, he skates over the exploitation, the forced labour, the expropriations of property, the imposed crop-growing, the deliberately maintained illiteracy, the bloody repressions, the racism of the colonists. He limits himself to deploring the abuses of certain administrators or poor white settlers. At other times, the tone changes, as in the recorded speech of 28 October 1959 and, above all, in the famous reply to King Baudouin on 30 June 1960: 'Our wounds still are too fresh and too painful for us to be able to banish from our memory our fate during 80 years of colonial rule . . .', etc. Is it the same man speaking? Undeniably. Is he lying? Certainly not. But when he reveals now one, now the other of the two opposing conceptions of Belgium's 'civilizing' work, it is because they co-exist within him and translate the profound contradiction of what can only be called his class. In spite of itself, colonial exploitation endowed the Congo with new structures. Using the generally accepted vocabulary, in the 1950s, 78 per cent of the population were *coutumiers* – peasants subject to customary rule and tribal struggles – while 22 per cent were *extra-coutumiers*, of whom the majority lived in the towns. Despite the Administration's zeal in maintaining the population in ignorance, it was unable to prevent the rural exodus, the urban proliferation, proletarianization or, among *extra-coutumiers*, a degree of differentiation born of the needs of the colonial economy: a Congolese petty bourgeoisie of employees, public officials and shopkeepers was developing. This slender 'elite' – 150,000 people out of 14 million – contrasted with the

country people held back by their rivalries and their traditions, led by 'chiefs' in the pay of the administration, and with the workers who, though violent at times, lacked a true revolutionary organization, and possessed only an embryonic class consciousness. The position of the black 'petty bourgeoisie' was extremely ambiguous at the outset because it believed that it gained benefit from colonization, and that this benefit enabled it to measure the iniquity of the system. In actual fact, its members – most of them very young since the class itself was a recent product of colonial development – were recruited by large firms or the Administration. There were not yet any who, at the age of 30, were petty bourgeois by birth. Lumumba's father was a Catholic peasant who took him to the fields from the age of 6; it was the Passionist Fathers who decided that the child would go to school. Later, when he was 13, the Protestant missionaries pinched him from them. The role of the father and the child in all this seems to have been zero. Emile Lumumba disapproved of his son when, at the age of 13, he went to the Swedish mission, but what could he do? Everything was decided without them; 'The Fathers' wanted to make a catechist of him, while the more practical Swedish wanted to give him a profession that would allow him to leave the peasantry for the wage-earning class and live on his own land as an *auxiliary* of the *colons*, in one of the agglomerations created by the whites. Patrice spent his childhood in the bush: the misery of the black peasants' life is well known, and without the religious organizations that took care of him, that misery would have been his lot, his only horizon. Did he understand immediately that the Missions were the recruiting agents for the colonial system? No, he probably did not. Did he see that the condition of rural life was, directly or indirectly, the product of colonial exploitation? He probably did not see this either: at about the time he was born, the Administration was realizing the disadvantages of too visible a coercion and of forced labour. It was attempting to interest the peasant in production and encouraging individual ownership of property. Patrice regarded his father's poverty-stricken independence in the solitude

of the Congolese countryside as a natural state: far from being responsible for it, the whites were nice gentlemen who would rescue him from it. He must have been given, at about this time, some strange explanations of his situation: the Christian faith was the dues young Congolese made to the Churches who taught them to read. The Fathers gave him a burning ambition to understand the causes of his misery, and, at the same time, the desire to resign himself to it. He later noted this contradiction in a poem:

To make you forget that you were a man
They taught you to sing God's praises
And these diverse hymns, setting your Calvary to song
Gave you the hope of a better world
But in your heart of a human creature, you scarcely
demanded more
Than your right to life and your share of happiness.

Religion prostrates at the same time as it liberates. And then it offers salvation, and although a better world is only an alibi, they are obliged to teach that one can enter it thanks to merit and not according to the colour of one's skin. However hard many priests try to hide it, the egalitarianism of the Gospel retains its undermining effect on the colonies. It affects not only the catechumens but also the missionary himself, sometimes: either because they wanted to forestall a Socialist Party congress in Belgium, or out of conviction, or perhaps a mixture of both, in 1956 the Scheut missionaries approved a manifesto drawn up by Ileo, a 37-year-old *évolué* who called for independence – in the long term – for the Congo. The departure of the 18-year-old Patrice from the bush for Kindu, where the Symaf company took him on as a 'book-keeper', was part of the generalized rural exodus, and also the crucial stage in his developing consciousness. A young peasant who had read Rousseau and Victor Hugo suddenly encountered the town; his standard of living was radically transformed. He used to go to school in a loincloth; now, he went to work in a suit. He had lived in a

hut; now he lived in a house and was earning enough money to buy and fetch Pauline, his Mututela fiancée, who became his wife. He worked frenetically. The whites claimed to be surprised by his zeal: the Congolese, they said, are usually lazy. But these obtuse colonists did not understand that the famous 'laziness of the native', a myth upheld in all the colonies, is a form of sabotage, the passive resistance of the peasant or exploited worker. Patrice's frenzy, in contrast, placed him for a time in the category of those whom he was later to call 'collaborators'. The peasant's son was now an *évolué*; he applied for a 'registration card' and obtained one with difficulty – there were only 150 of them in the whole country – thanks to the intervention of the whites: in other words, he was *betting* on them; he had realized his importance, that of the young 'elite' which was forming everywhere. The *évolués* formed a social stratum which was slowing expanding and providing indispensable aid to major businesses and the Administration. As a black, Patrice Lumumba drew his powerful sense of pride from his post, the education he had received, the books he had read, from the vaguely deferential mistrust with which the whites surrounded him. When he talked later about the benefits of colonization, he was thinking about this extraordinary and common metamorphosis.

But his consciousness is twofold and contradictory: at the same time as he was enjoying his rise and the benevolent regard of his bosses, he was aware that he had, at the age of 20, reached his zenith. Above all the blacks, he would always remain beneath all the whites. Of course, he could earn more and, after an apprenticeship, become a third-class postal worker in Stanleyville. So what? For the same work, a Belgian clerk of equal merit would earn twice his salary. In addition, Lumumba knew that after a thundering start, the hare had suddenly turned into a tortoise: it would take him 24 years to reach first class, after which he would stay there until retirement. The European, in contrast, entered this junior rank directly, and could aspire to rise from there to the highest positions. It was the same in the *Force Publique*: a 'Negro' could not rise above the rank of sergeant. It was also the same in the private sector. The whites

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had raised him to the level they wished and then kept him there: his fate was in other people's hands. He experienced his condition with a sense of pride and alienation. Beyond his personal situation he caught a glimpse of naked class war; at 31, he was to write: 'A real duel exists between the employers and the employees with regard to salaries.' But the salaried class of *évolués* was not the proletariat: Lumumba's demands were based on the awareness of his professional worth – like those of the anarcho-syndicalists in Europe at the end of the last century – and not on need which motivates the demands of proletarians and the sub-proletariat everywhere. At about the same time, he realized – above all in Léopoldville – that he had been duped: the 'registration' that had been so hard to obtain separated him from the blacks without assimilating him to the whites. The registered black had no more right than the unregistered to enter European towns, unless he was working there; like them, he could not evade the curfew; when he went shopping, he met them again at the special counter reserved for blacks; like them, he was a victim of segregationist practices on every occasion and in every place. Now it should be noted that racism and segregation were a new experience for him: in the bush, one experiences adversity and malnutrition, and one is able to guess at that truth of the colonies, which is exploitation; but racism scarcely appears owing to a lack of contact between whites and blacks. The honeyed paternalism of the missionaries may have deluded him; the practices of discrimination only became evident in the towns and that is what made up the daily life of the colonized. But let us be clear about it: the exhausted and underpaid proletariat suffered much more from exploitation than from racist discrimination which is the consequence of it. When, on 30 June 1960, Lumumba denounced 'the exhausting work required in exchange for wages which did not allow us to eat our fill, or to clothe and house ourselves decently, or to raise our children', he was speaking for everyone. But when he added: 'We knew that in the towns there were magnificent houses for the whites and crumbling grass huts for the blacks, that a black was never allowed into the so-called European cinemas, restaurants

or shops; that a black travelled in the hull of the barges beneath the feet of the white in his luxury cabin', it is the *évolué* class speaking through his voice. And when he wrote in 1956 that 'registration should be considered as the last stage of integration', he was defending the interests of a handful of men and at the same time was contributing to their isolation from the masses. In fact, the interests of this elite, artificially created by the Belgians, day by day demanded a more thorough assimilation: equality of whites and blacks in the job market, access of Africans to all posts for which they possessed the required qualifications. As we see, he was demanding not the Africanization of the cadres, but their semi-Africanization. Was it not to be feared, in this case, that the blacks admitted to higher posts might be the accomplices of colonial oppression or, at the very least, its hostages? Lumumba was not yet aware of the problem. In fact, the very same year that Ileo was demanding eventual independence in his manifesto, Patrice got no further than sketching out a 'Belgian-Congolese community'. He called for the equality of all citizens within this community. But for a long time to come, this equality would only work to the advantage of the *évolués*: 'We believe that it would be possible, in the relatively near future, to grant political rights to the Congolese elites and to the Belgians in the Congo according to certain criteria to be established by the Government.'

From this period on, however, Lumumba was the opposite of those whom he was later to call 'collaborators'. It is simply that he experienced the full extent of the contradictions of his class: he knew that it had been artificially created by the necessities of colonization, had been cut off from the masses by Belgian capitalist companies, and had a future only in the colonial system. But at the same moment, he drew the conclusion from his city experience that that future was definitively denied him by the colonists and the Administration. At the very moment he was proposing the 'Belgian-Congolese community', he no longer believed in it: he had finally discovered the rigidity of the system which had created him the better to exploit him. No reform was conceivable for the sole

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reason that colonialism maintains itself by coercion and disappears when it makes concessions. The only solution would be revolutionary: breaking away, independence.

As we have just seen, Ileo had called for it before him; likewise Kasavubu, the leader of the powerful Abako. Lumumba did not 'invent' independence; others revealed its necessity to him. If he was, however, its promoter and its martyr, it was because he wanted complete and full independence and events did not enable him to realize it. In fact, most nationalist organizations were necessarily formed in a regional framework: the PSA was set up in Kwango Kwilu, the CEREA in Kivu. They managed, with difficulty, to reconcile the ethnic groups, but for that very reason, they found it hard to expand beyond the provinces. Their nationalism – where it existed – was in fact federalism: they dreamed of a very limited central power whose principal function would be to unite autonomous provinces. In Léopoldville, the situation was even more extreme: the numerical superiority of the Bakongo enabled Abako to be both a regional and an ethnic party. To take just the last case, this resulted in two consequences: Abako was a powerful but archaic movement. It was at the same time a secret society and a mass party, and its main leaders were *évolués* who were not cut off from the people because they had adopted their fundamental demand: immediate independence for Lower Congo. Kasavubu, the most important, was an ambiguous and secret character who, though recruited by the Administration, could be said to have succeeded in staying in direct contact with his ethnic base, and yet at the same time never had the means, the opportunity or the will to raise himself to a clear awareness of his own class. A seminarist without faith and later a teacher, he was united with the Bakongo by an obscure, messianic bond; he was their religious leader, their king, the living proof that they are the *chosen people*. When he was elected president of the independent Congo, he was suddenly to find himself in the most complete contradiction: his office required him to preserve national unity – in particular against the Katangan secession which threatened to destroy the Congo – while his people

demanded that he himself should be secessionist and, by taking back territory from French Congo, restore the ancient Kongo kingdom. Incapable of mastering the situation, he would oscillate between an anarchic federalism and a dictatorial centralism supported by military force. Above all, he was to play the game of imperialism, at first unconsciously and then very consciously. It is not a question of psychology here, but of objective determination: separatist by nature, Abako, *after* independence, would destroy the work of the nationalists to the advantage of the foreign powers. *Before* independence, however, while Lumumba was awakening to national consciousness, this confused movement, being both obscurantist and revolutionary, did more than any other party for the liberation of the Congo. From 1956, it responded to Ileo's manifesto and Lumumba's reflections on the 'community' by demanding immediate independence and the *nationalization of big businesses*. One might have thought that it had a revolutionary and socialist programme, or, at the very least, that the demands of the rank and file were reaching the top. But as events proved, that was not so. It was only an attempt to outdo the others: Abako had to be the most radical party; as indeed it was, in the sense that the Bakongo made up 50 per cent of Léopoldville's black population and supplied the town with its unskilled labour. As they were disciplined, they could be mobilized at any time by secret instructions: they were the ones who went on strike and mounted disobedience campaigns. Their leaders only had to ban voting for no one to go near the ballot box. It was also they who rioted in January 1959 – whether under precise orders or despite a strict ban is a question that remains unresolved. Except in the Lower Congo, the *évolués* had no power over the masses, their small numbers and way of life making them incapable of taking direct action. It has to be admitted that they carried little weight in the events of January 1959. In fact, it was the economic crisis, the colonial recession which hit the mother country hard, coupled with the agitation of the proletarianized masses whose standard of living was deteriorating noticeably, along with the clumsiness of the Administration, that urged the Belgian

Government to grant the Congo its independence so abruptly, or in other words, to swap – with the approval of the large companies – the colonial regime for neocolonialism.

Lumumba did not make the Congolese revolution; his situation as an *évolué* cut off from the urban proletariat (and even more so from the countryside) prevented him from having recourse to violence: his commitment to non-violence – which he maintained until his death – can be attributed not so much to a principle or a character trait but to a keen recognition of his powers. From 1956 on, he was the idol of the crowds in Stanleyville. But an idol is not a leader in the style of Nkrumah whom he admired, and even less a sorcerer like Kasavubu who disturbed him. He knew this: he knew he could convince an audience with his gift of being able to speak anywhere to anyone, and with the education that he had received from the Belgians and which was now turned against them. But it takes more than a gift with words to be able to send men empty-handed against submachine guns. And yet it was he who would catch the Revolution as it passed, put his stamp on it and orientate it. Why? Because his condition as an *assimilé* and the nature of his work enabled him to raise himself to the level of universality. He had known the bush, small towns, provincial cities and the capital; from the age of 18, he had escaped provincialism. His reading and Christian education had given him an image of man which was still abstract, but free of racism. In his speeches, it is striking that he explained the situation of the Congo by constant references to the French Revolution and the struggle of the Netherlands against the Spanish. And there is, of course, something of an *ad hominem* argument in these allusions: how could you whites prevent the blacks from doing what you did? But, beyond these polemic intentions, he is guided by a humanism of principle which cannot avoid being the ideology of the *évolués*: and indeed, it was in the name of *homo faber* that the latter claimed equality between Belgians and Congolese in the labour market. This universal concept immediately placed Lumumba above ethnic groups and tribalism: it allowed this wanderer to benefit from his travels and to interpret

local problems in the light of the universal. It was from this point of view that he was to understand – beyond the diversity of customs, rivalries and discords – the unity of needs, interests and sufferings. The Administration placed him above the ordinary level: without a doubt this isolated him, but it also allowed him to understand the condition of the Congolese in its totality. From then on, whatever his audience, he constantly affirmed the unity of his country: what divided people was the legacy of a pre-colonial past carefully preserved by the Administration; what united them, at that time negatively, was a sort of common adversity that went deeper than traditions and customs since it attacked their lives at the root through overwork and undernourishment; in short, it was Belgian colonization which created the Congolese nation by perpetual and omnipresent aggression.

This is both true and false. Colonization unifies, but it divides at least as much, not only by design and Machiavellianism – that would be nothing – but through the division of labour that it introduces and the social classes that it creates and stratifies. In the towns, socio-professional bonds tended to win over tribal bonds, but, on closer examination, divisions based on work, standard of living and education were superadded to ethnic divisions inside black districts. To this had to be added the conflicts between the first and the last to be urbanized. The proletariat of the camps was not the same as that of the towns, and above all, the rural *'coutumiers'*, ruled by conservative *tribalism* more often than not sold out to the Europeans, did not enter into the field of view of *évolué* town-dwellers. But the nascent petty bourgeoisie could not avoid making the same mistake as the French bourgeoisie at the time of the Revolution: confronted with a disorganized proletariat with confused demands, and a peasantry from which it had emerged and whose aspirations it imagined it knew, *it took itself to be the universal class*. The only differentiation which it was willing to acknowledge had nothing to do with the economy: the *évolués* defined themselves, according to the wish of the colonial administration, by their degree of education. The culture they had received was their pride and their most

vital substance. The best among them believed that this imposed upon them the strict duty of leading their illiterate brothers from the camps and the bush to autonomy or independence. I say that this illusion was inevitable: how could Lumumba, who went to 'The Fathers" school *in a loincloth* and would maintain peasant ties until his death, really consider himself as the representative of a new class? If he lived better, it was simply due to his *merit*. The abject and very skilfully chosen word *évolué* hid the truth: a small privileged class regarded itself as the vanguard of the colonized. Everything conspired to deceive Lumumba: in August 1956, the *évolués'* demands were supported unanimously by the delegates at the general assembly of the APIC.[3] He saw in this agreement between the masses and the elite a sign of the profound unity of the Congolese. In the light of events, we now see that it was an abstract entente: the indigenous masses were proud of their *'évolués'* who proved *for everyone* that blacks, provided they were given the opportunity, could equal or surpass whites; they supported the demands of the privileged elite – mainly in word and applause – because they saw in them a radical stand of the exploited against the employer. It was an example and a symbol; from this, the delegates could envisage a radicalization of the workers' demands. But when circumstances produced this, its effect was abruptly to break up the alliance between the masses and the petty bourgeoisie.

Lumumba was mistaken about this, but this inevitable error did have positive consequences; in short, *he was right*, historically, to make it. It was that which enabled him to assert with so much force that unity alone would allow the Congo to gain independence. This formula, so often repeated, is nevertheless perfectly correct provided that one adds that the unitary movement should come from the base and flood the country like a tidal wave. Unfortunately for the Congo, social divisions, the timidity of the demands and the absence of a revolutionary apparatus springing from the masses and controlled by them made, and continue to make, such a flood

3 APIC: Association of Indigenous Personnel of the Colony.

impossible. That will be the history of the next decade. Lumumba, listened to everywhere with enthusiasm, had reason to believe that the masses would follow the *évolués* all the way. This unity, which he considered to be both already realized and still to be created – half *means*, half supreme end – was in his eyes the Nation itself. The Nation: the Congo becoming unified through its struggle for independence. But the future prime minister was not naive enough to believe that this unification would occur spontaneously. He simply stated this negative principle: as the Administration divides and rules, the only way to cause it to lose its power is to remove everywhere the divisions that it has created. Tribalism had to go, along with the provincialism, the artificial conflicts and the water-tight barriers that it maintained. Democracy, yes, but it should not be confused – as it was by Ileo – with federalism. Whatever the intention, however minimal the regional autonomy demanded by a party may be, federalism is the bad apple, it rots everything and imperialism *immediately* exploits it. Lumumba understood that Abako would for a while be a remarkable tool for overturning colonialism, but that autonomy would later prove the best instrument for restoring it. His work as a postman integrated him into the colonial Administration and enabled him to discover its principal characteristic: centralization. This discovery was all the more easy for him because chance made him a cog in the centralized communications system. The Post Office network extended into all the provinces and even into the bush; through it, the government's orders were relayed to the local gendarmeries and the *Force Publique*. If one day the Congolese Nation were to exist, it would owe its unity to a similar centralism. Patrice dreamed of a general uniting power which would apply everywhere, impose harmony and a community of action everywhere, would receive information from remote villages, concentrate it, base the direction of its policies on it and send back information and orders by the same route to its representatives in every little hamlet. The Government atomized the colonized and unified them *from outside* as subjects of the king. Independence would be just an empty word unless this cohesion

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from without were to be replaced by unification *from within*. The Belgian Administration could only be replaced by a party of the masses, one that was omnipresent, like itself, and democratic; that is to say, derived from the people and controlled by them. But it would be all the more authoritarian because – at least until the liberated Congo established its institutions – it alone would have the responsibility of defending the nation against the still virulent effects of an atomization practised for 80 years. Lumumba was so conscious of the dangers that he wished to replace the useless multiplicity of nationalist movements by a single party. We have little information about this project. But we do know that what he had in mind was a party *à l'africaine*, not a restricted organ which co-opts its new members (like the Communist Party of the USSR), but the entire population, men and women, each becoming *both* citizen *and* member. He feared that the opposition, if it were to remain outside the Party, would lead to some form of separatism, and therefore to the death of the Congo. He would not have rejected it within the Party. He often repeated that discussions there would be frank and free. What he did not say, but what, as in all cases of extreme urgency, was self-evident, was that following a vote, the minority would be forced to adopt the point of view of the majority and that the opposition, each time dissolved only to be reborn elsewhere in connection with other problems, would simply represent the free exercise of each individual's judgement in the present circumstances and would be deprived of the means to establish a collective memory and structure itself as a party within the Party.

He attached less importance – at least during the initial stages of independence – to the elaboration of an economic and social programme than to the vital function of the Party as a claw holding the Congo together in place of the old colonial talon: the falling apart of the country should be prevented at all costs. But even this concern had economic motives: he was fully aware of the Conakat party's manoeuvres and was in no doubt about what the result of Katangan secession would be. Thus his political Jacobinism was essentially inspired by a practical knowledge of Congolese realities.

His speeches prove that he foresaw everything that happened subsequently. His only mistake was to believe that one could avert disaster by creating a large modern party that in time would replace the coercive power of the occupier.

We know that Belgium, very much in spite of itself, on the occasion of the Universal Exhibition, served as a meeting place for Congolese of different ethnic groups. The unity of their white oppressors revealed in a negative way to these blacks isolated in Brussels their unity as an oppressed people, stronger, they believed, than their divisions. Indeed, *in Belgium*, the Congolese were only aware of what brought them together. On their return, they maintained the abstract hope of uniting the colonized, wherever they might come from, into a supra-ethnic party. Lumumba alone was qualified to found this party, which was to be the MNC. But the composition of the movement soon revealed its nature: it was universalist beyond ethnic groups and frontiers because its active members were people who had been universalized; in short, it was the movement of the *évolués*. It would find members almost everywhere and without much trouble – at least in the towns – because the Administration and the large companies had distributed the civil servants and the employees they had created all over the country. But the dream of creating a mass party collapsed: at best, it was a party of cadres and agitators. No one was to blame: it could not be any other way. The MNC was the Congolese petty bourgeoisie in the process of discovering its class ideology.

Lumumba was the most radical: clear-sighted and blind at the same time, he may not have seen that his unitarianism was socially conditioned and impossible at that time, but he understood full well that the Congo's problems were those of the whole of Africa; better still, his country would only find the strength to survive independence in the framework of a free Africa. He attended the Accra conference as a representative of the MNC. In a speech there, he commented in the following terms on the need for unity which was coming into being all over the continent and of which the Accra meeting was the direct consequence:

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> 'This conference (. . .) reveals one thing to us: despite the frontiers that separate us, despite our ethnic differences, we have the same consciousness, the same soul that is steeped day and night in anguish, the same desire to make of this African continent a free and happy continent, released from anxiety, fear and all colonial domination.'

Replace Africa with Congo, continent with nation, and you have the phrases he repeated every day in all the provinces of his country. This was because, for him, the Congo appeared to summarize all the differences which perpetuate African separatisms: here were provincial frontiers, ethnic and religious conflicts, economic differentiations of both a vertical (social strata) and a horizontal kind (geographical distribution of resources). In his eyes, therefore, there was only one task: to struggle for independence was to struggle not only for national unity, but, at the same time, for a free Africa. Conversely, as he made clear later, everything which hastened the integration of the many states into a single federation brought nearer the hour when the last of the colonized would rid themselves of their colonizers. The course of events has shown that on this point he had a practical and very clear-cut opinion: states that had attained independence should aid countries still subjugated to reject all domination in every way possible. Two and a half years later, as we know, when he felt that the frail Congolese Republic was on the brink of disintegrating, he asked for the support of Ghanaian troops. If he had won the game, the Congo would no doubt have aided Angola and all the neighbouring countries: Lumumba's professed pan-Africanism attracted some of his most fearsome adversaries – the whites of Rhodesia and South Africa, and, more insidiously, the British Conservatives. A pan-African Congo would have been, first, an example, an encouragement in all those hearts that were still enslaved. But above all, that great country would have provided in countless ways the most effective support to the revolutionary organizations of the neighbouring countries, not only out of fraternity, but because it was the only viable African policy. The liberated Congo remained

surrounded by deadly enemies; the blacks had to break their chains in Rhodesia and Angola and overturn Youlou's neocolonialist government, or they would return to slavery in the Congo. What Lumumba hinted at – but as we know, he understood it immediately – was that Congolese independence was not an end in itself but the beginning of a struggle to the death to win national sovereignty. The Belgians' departure could be obtained by an *internal* organization; after their departure, danger could only be averted by an *external* policy. The young nation, having lost its masters without finding the means of exerting its freedom, would be obliged to rely on less young states that had already attained sovereignty; it would have to support national movements in the colonies which surrounded it. For this reason, Lumumba emphasized in his Accra speech the interdependence of the two objectives that the conference finally established and which for good reason are, in his mind, one and the same thing: 'the struggle against internal and external factors that constitute an obstacle to the emancipation of our respective countries and to African unification'. He was, however, too involved in the political struggle for liberation to stress the fundamental aspect of pan-Africanism: that Africa cannot create itself without producing, *for itself*, an African market. The organization of a common market for the whole of the black continent involved other problems and other struggles: for the MNC, it was not yet the moment to envisage them. Neither was it the moment to discover and unravel the mystification contained, in many countries – for example in French Congo – in the prestigious word 'independence', especially since de Gaulle, by pronouncing it that year in Brazzaville, prompted real enthusiasm in the Belgian colony and at a stroke won over the most hesitant to hard-line demands. Be that as it may: what Lumumba lacked was an in-depth knowledge of the new nations and their infrastructures, with the result that he would realize too late that certain black states were by nature sworn enemies of Congolese independence. Above all, shaped by the most severe oppression and the most despicable segregation, he was unable to conceive of any adversary other than the old colonialism, an ancient machine that was so stiff that it had to crush or break up. It

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was against this that he was preparing to fight, and indeed, there it was, represented by the small colonists and the Administration. But the black leader did not suspect that this ogre, still so vigorous and vicious, was, in reality, already dead; nor that the imperialist governments and the large companies, confronted with the colonial crisis, had decided to liquidate the classic forms of oppression and the detrimental, ossified structures that had developed during the course of the preceding century. He was unaware that the old mother countries wished to entrust nominal power to 'natives' who would govern, more or less consciously, according to colonial interests; he was unaware that the accomplices or straw men had already been chosen in Europe, that they all belonged to the class recruited and trained by the Administration, to the petty bourgeoisie of employees and civil servants, *to his own class*. This ignorance was to be his downfall. He belonged to the elite, it is true, and was therefore cut off from the masses whom he was supposed to represent: his supporters were all petty bourgeois; if he won, he would have formed the first government with them. But his intelligence and his deep commitment to the African cause made him a black Robespierre. His project was both limited – politics first, the rest would come in time – and universal. 'The Fathers' had uprooted him from the traditional world of the *non-évolués*; at the start, intoxicated by his precocious knowledge, he had even made himself the spokesman of the elite, and demanded complete integration for them. But in the end it was his universalism which triumphed. This was doubtless an ideological principle of his class, and was, as we have seen, an optical illusion. But this humanism, which for other people masked the specificity of class interests, had become his personal passion; he devoted himself to it entirely. He wished to give back to the subhumans of colonial exploitation their native humanity. Of course, this could not be done without a reworking of all the structures, in short without agrarian reform and nationalization: his training as a democratic bourgeois prevented him from discerning the necessity of this fundamental restructuring. That was not so serious: how could he have discovered it without proletarian organizations channelling and clarifying political demands? Had he

stayed in power, people and circumstances would have forced him to choose: neocolonization or African socialism. Let us be in no doubt about the choice he would have made. Unfortunately, in founding the MNC and establishing contact with the leaders of the other parties – that is to say with other *'évolués'* – he was putting in place, totally unsuspectingly, the most active elements of his own class, that is to say, men whose shared and individual interests had for a long time disposed them to betray him and who, from the first days of July 1960, considered that he had betrayed them. Indeed, the conflict between him and his ministers and between him and the parliamentary minority, had no other cause: these petty bourgeois wanted to set the petty bourgeoisie up as the ruling class, which amounted *objectively* to changing positions with the imperialist powers. He looked upon himself as a guide, believing himself to be classless, and refusing, in his centralizing zeal, to take differences of economic origin any more seriously than tribal divisions: the single Party would break down these and other barriers, and reconcile all interests. It may be that he planned, however vaguely, to reorganize the economy in stages and that he kept his intentions secret out of prudence. He was suspected of it, at any rate: and the affair of the Russian planes was not the only thing for which he was suddenly accused of communism. The most astute of the parliamentarians and ministers certainly feared that his Jacobinism would end in socialism by virtue of his unitary humanism. The important thing, at any rate, was that he placed his class in power and then set about governing against it. Could it have been any different? No: during the last years of colonization, the proletariat did not do a single thing that would have made these petty bourgeois accept it as a valid interlocutor.

2 *The Reasons for Failure*

On his return from Accra, the leader of the future single Party did in fact become the man of reconciliation: under his influence, the MNC attempted to form alliances with the main nationalist move-