CHAPTER 9
BELGIAN AFRICA

In 1908 the Belgian state took over from Leopold II responsibility for the former Congo Independent State. This huge territory (2.5 million sq. km, one quarter the size of Europe) encompassed great ecological contrasts: savanna and woodland in the north and south, equatorial rainforest in the centre, and high mountains and plateaux in the east and south-east. Most people spoke languages of the Bantu family, but languages of several other types were spoken in the north-east. There were great differences in terms of social and pre-colonial political organisation, while by the end of the nineteenth century the expansion of trade had engendered six spheres of political and economic influence: the Luso-African zone bordering Angola; the Swahili zone in the east and south-east; the hills and pastures of the Great Lakes region; the Sudanese savanna in the north; the riverain zone between Stanley Pool (Lake Malebo) and Stanley Falls (Kisangani); the coastal triangle between Loango, the Teke plateau and Ambriz.

Colonial domination introduced new lines of division, and new attempts at integration. The frontiers of the territory posed one major problem. Although it had been formed as a result of explorations from both east and west coasts, the Congo Independent State had been left, after Partition, with only one point of access to the sea, where the Congo (now Zaire) river enters the Atlantic. The capital was sited here, at Boma, until 1929. Any attempt to strengthen economic or political links within the colony, and with the Belgian port of Antwerp, was bound to pull it westwards, turning it into an enormous funnel, in defiance of much economic and historical logic. Mineral deposits were mostly situated in the remote north-east (gold) and south-east (copper, cobalt, tin), and the latter were most easily exported through other colonial territories. Regional cleavages within the colony were aggravated by the fact that for economic purposes it was mostly
parcelled out into areas within which European firms exercised monopolistic privileges in running mines, plantations or networks of trade and transport. Onto these were grafted, not always harmoniously, zones for evangelisation by Christian denominations which varied greatly in doctrine and national origin. Of the government’s major administrative divisions, Katanga (Shaba) and Orientale provinces aspired to autonomy up to at least the 1930s. Furthermore, the Belgian presence in the Congo was very limited before the 1920s: in terms of investment and personnel, the Independent State had truly been international. Hence Belgian colonial attitudes tended from the first to be xenophobic. To fear of the British and Americans was later added fear of Germans and communists, and while Africans were commonly regarded as fundamentally inferior, Portuguese, Greeks or Jews were often thought inferior to other whites. Besides, the Belgians brought with them the conflicts of their own society, notably that between Fleming and French-speaking Walloon. Meanwhile African societies were profoundly disturbed. Few people lived near the mining areas in the south-east or around Leopoldville (Kinshasa), the entrepôt of the middle Congo and the capital from 1929. It thus became necessary to organise large-scale migrations and the centralised management of both human and agricultural resources. Social relationships were transformed both by capitalism and by individualistic ideas introduced by missionaries. All in all, the Belgian Congo epitomised the contradictions inherent in colonial Africa, and one tract of the Third International called it ‘the weakest point in the capitalist colonial front’. ¹

and administrative framework congenial to capitalist enterprise, and large-scale capital investment in the economic infrastructure.

For the time being, the colony was thrown largely on its own resources to achieve these ends. Its budget had to be approved each year by the Belgian parliament, which took precautions to spare the Belgian state the cost of any future bankruptcy. The constitution of the Belgian Congo, the Colonial Charter of 1908, specified that the colony had a distinct legal personality and was obliged to service its debt. This was a much heavier burden than in most African colonies, since Belgium transferred to its new colony all the financial obligations of the Independent State, and these had been swollen by Leopold’s large expenditures on public works in Belgium and military expeditions in Africa. In a sense, the burden of debt was offset by the extensive portfolio of investments, chiefly in mining and transport ventures, which the colony had also inherited from the Independent State, but these were slow to yield much income. Yet further investment was hard to raise in Belgium: even though the average Belgian taxpayer regarded the Congo as a pit dug by the grande bourgeoisie, the latter were not yet prepared to invest in its economic growth. The shares of the three great companies formed in 1906 — Union Minière du Haut-Katanga (UMHK), the Société Internationale Forestière et Minière (Forminière) and the Compagnie du Chemin de Fer du Bas-Congo au Katanga (BCK) — still seemed like lottery tickets.² Forminière and UMHK were largely financed from non-Belgian sources. In order to attract investment, use was still made of Leopold’s methods, despite strong censure. In 1911 Lever Brothers received concessions of 750,000 hectares for palm plantations in order to set up the Huileries du Congo Belge (HCB). The administration levied forced labour on behalf of one railway company, the Compagnie du Chemin de Fer du Congo Supérieur aux Grands Lacs Africains (CFL) and called on foreign capital for another, the Compagnie du Chemin de Fer du Katanga (CFK). Despite such efforts, the total net contribution of company investment from 1911 to 1920 amounted to 8m francs at 1959 values; this represented on average a slightly lower annual level than for the whole period from 1887 to 1959.

Before 1914 the Congo accounted for less than 1 per cent of Belgium’s external trade. Belgian commerce found it difficult to

² This is a paraphrase of remarks on Forminière by the financier Jean Jadot.
adapt to the economic liberalisation of the new regime, which encouraged competition from small businesses run by both Europeans and Africans. The sharp fall in the world price of rubber in 1913 made the situation worse, and the progress of the mining industry was not encouraging. The Kilo-Moto goldmines had nearly exhausted surface deposits. The position of UMHK was precarious. The gold deposits of Ruwe proved small, and copper metallurgy presented many problems: in 1911 the extraction of copper in Katanga cost twice as much as the selling price. Forminière had not yet found riches; the first diamonds from Kasai came on the market only in 1913. In 1910 three-quarters of the value of exports was still derived from the collection of wild products, mainly rubber and ivory from the central Congo basin and its surroundings. Transport was provided by the river system and the Matadi–Leopoldville railway, completed in 1898. The CFL linked Katanga and the eastern Congo to this ‘national’ network by building sections of railway, in 1906–10, to bypass the rapids on the Lualaba river. Between 1910 and 1914 the CFK linked the mines of Katanga to the Rhodesian railway system and Wankie colliery. Telegraph lines were extended and some wireless stations set up.

From 1908 to 1918 the minister for colonies was Jules Renkin, a lawyer who had been a director of the CFL. Under his guidance, the ministry prepared the Congo’s transition from a robber economy to one of capitalist development. No major change was made in land policy: the state continued to be the self-appointed trustee of almost all land not occupied by Africans or granted in freehold to concession companies. In 1906 the governor-general had been empowered to allot groups of Africans more land than they actually occupied, in partial recognition of the needs of shifting cultivators. But from 1910 Africans were obliged to pay a poll-tax, in cash, with a supplementary tax for polygynists; from 1914 non-payment was punishable by imprisonment and distraint on personal effects. Along with the re-establishment of freedom of trade, these measures served to precipitate Africans into the market for goods and services, and to open up the Congo for

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1 Between 1910 and 1913 the contribution of small traders to ivory exports rose from 1.7 to 36.4 per cent, while their share of rubber exports rose from 0.2 to 18.6 per cent. Cf. Alexandre Delcommune, L’Avenir du Congo belge menacé....le mal. Le Remède (Brussels, 1919), 279.
‘The map which appears here in the printed edition has been removed for ease of use and now appears as an additional resource on the chapter overview page’.
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capitalist enterprise. The cartel formed among the three main river-transport companies was dissolved a year later, and the government ordered a 40 per cent reduction in tariffs. In 1907 it had bought the railway line north of Boma, and this was later extended; meanwhile the government modernised the port of Matadi and gained a controlling interest in the CFL. However, a reorganisation of the fiscal system, together with the fall in rubber prices, resulted in a fall in revenue and the enforced stabilisation of ordinary expenditure. The colonial budget, burdened with many expenses in Belgium (such as the Musée Royal du Congo Belge at Tervuren), did not expand until 1920. Since metropolitan expenditure for colonial purposes was almost exclusively limited to the support of the Ministry of Colonies, the resources for African administration were slight. Thus progress in the effective occupation of the Congo was very slow.

In Belgian Africa the legislative and executive powers were not responsible to the society they governed: this was as true of Belgian settlers as of Africans. In theory, the executive was ultimately responsible to the Belgian parliament; in practice, it exercised very wide powers of legislation. The Colonial Charter recognised three sources of law: parliamentary statute, royal decree and African custom. The first was rarely used; colonial government was chiefly shaped by decrees drawn up by the colonial minister. These had to be scrutinised in Brussels by the Colonial Council. In one sense, this was an independent body, since it excluded not only members of parliament but also colonial officials and employees of colonial business firms in which the government had an interest. But eight councillors were nominated by the king (Albert I from 1909), as against only six appointed by the two houses of parliament, and its president was the colonial minister. Most councillors had spent some time in the Congo; several were academics but these, like their colleagues, often had business connections. The council’s advice was normally accepted, but it concerned itself with matters of detail rather than basic principle. In the Congo, the Colonial Charter had established, in

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<th>1912</th>
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<td>Expenditure</td>
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response to missionary pressure, the Commission for the Protection of Natives. This was formally independent of the governor-general but consisted wholly of royal nominees. It was meant to meet annually, but it published reports less frequently; it was mainly influential in drawing attention to the physical condition of Africans. In 1914 advisory councils were introduced at the capital and in the provinces, but non-official members were heavily outnumbered by officials. The main counterweight to executive power was the judiciary, which, in reaction against the misrule of the Independent State regime, enjoyed considerable freedom. Magistrates challenged local European abuses of power, for missions and traders often behaved like petty kings. There were many conflicts between the judiciary and the executive, since the former believed that its duty was to ensure the strict application of the law without regard for economic necessities.

In 1910 the Belgian government ended by law the reign of the Comité Spécial du Katanga, which had enjoyed many privileges, including the management of state lands. Katanga retained a measure of its special status, but its ‘army’ of 1,500 men was placed under the command of the police. In 1912 the territoire became the basic unit of colonial administration; territorial administrators were in turn subordinated to district commissioners. By 1918 the various districts had been grouped into four provinces: Katanga, Orientale, Leopoldville and Equateur; each was ruled by a vice-governor-general who exercised a wide measure of autonomy. Patterns of recruitment also changed, though slowly. For some years the administration of the Belgian Congo, like that of the Independent State, consisted largely of military officers, many of whom were non-Belgian, but in 1911 an École Coloniale was established in Belgium to train civilian Belgian administrators. A new cadre of colonial magistrates was also created, though they dealt mainly with Europeans.

African administration was organised by a decree in 1910 which gave official recognition to approved chiefs. Each chiefdom was divided for legal purposes into sub-chiefdoms. In the absence of clear rules as to how these should be constituted, the result was near-anarchy, with 4,000 recognised chiefs in 1918, as against 2,200 in 1911. Many had in fact been colonial auxiliaries, without local roots, and they were agents of direct rather than indirect rule.

The First World War profoundly altered the relationship
Belgian Congo: administrative divisions, 1926 and 1933
between Belgium and the Belgian Congo, though this only became clear around 1920. Belgium herself was almost entirely occupied by Germany throughout the war; her colony took on a vital strategic role. The colonial army (the Force Publique), consisting of African soldiers and Belgian officers, expanded to more than 20,000 by 1917 and enabled Belgium to defeat German forces in Kamerun and East Africa. The Congo's copper was diverted from Antwerp to London; it was used to manufacture Allied munitions, and from 1914 to 1917 production steadily increased. Exports in general from the Congo doubled in bulk between 1913 and 1917, and the share contributed by palm-oil rose very considerably. The war also prompted the colonial government to expand the railway system, from 1,483 km in 1914 to 2,048 km in 1918. The CFK line through Katanga from the Rhodesias was extended in 1918 to Bukama, on the Lualaba, which greatly eased the supply of men and materials, while in 1916 Kabalo, further down the Lualaba, was linked by rail to Albertville (Kalémié) on Lake Tanganyika.

The war, however, retarded modernisation. The robber economy was prolonged by the urgent need for short-term gains. Labour was forcibly conscripted on a huge scale, both for mining and for porterage in the East African campaign. Some farmers were compelled to revert to the collection of forest products for export: copal in the equatorial basin, palm-fruits in Kwango. In Orientale province Africans were forced in 1917 to grow cotton and rice. Administrative constraint was still the rule, whether legal (help for recruiting agents and traders) or illegal (private contracts between government agents and traders for the supply of goods). The amount of money in circulation increased, but the franc diminished in value, especially after the return in 1919 to parity with the Belgian franc, which the war had interrupted. At the end of the war, wage-earners numbered about 100,000, including state employees and civilian porters, while 100,000 men had been conscripted for military service; this placed a heavy burden on the rural economy, especially in Lomami and Tanganika districts.

African labour was most obviously exploited in the mining industry. While the labour needs of Katanga were partly met from outside the colony, the price of local labour was forced down by the creation in 1910 of a labour bureau with a monopsony on
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recruitment within Katanga. This received much assistance from administrators, while helpful chiefs were paid bonuses. Recruiting agents scoured villages for men and often took them away in gangs roped together. Contracts ran from six to nine months and accommodation consisted of temporary camps. Desertions were common, and in 1917 mortality in the copper-mines exceeded 10 per cent. Forminière and the Kilo-Moto mines, which extracted precious minerals, were able to impose a closed economic system: their migrant workers could only buy from the company, and wages and prices were independent of those outside. In the Lower Congo, people were forced into wage labour by rural impoverishment, due to the disturbances of the Independent State regime and the spread of sleeping-sickness. The railway drew many to Leopoldville or Matadi, while in the Madimba area wage-labour was used to produce each month hundreds of tons of prepared cassava for Leopoldville.

All in all, the war and its aftermath were collectively a traumatic experience. To the recruitment of porters and workers, and the requisitioning of crops, were added the influenza pandemic of 1918–20, which killed many thousands, and the post-war price rises. Africans voiced their discontent. In 1919 a prophet in southern Equateur, Marie aux Léopards, promised speedy deliverance by the Germans. Where Africans were drawn more completely into the cash economy, as along the main waterways, they began to think of taking matters into their own hands. In 1920 one sailor on the Kasai remarked to another, 'The white man eats big food and takes a big sleep in the middle of the day and you ought to do the same thing. The company that owns this boat has much money and you should be getting more wages.' There was isolated strike action in 1920–1 in the Lower Congo, at Dima (lower Kasai), and probably at Kilo-Moto, and in 1924 at Albertville.

The subjugation of the Congo was by no means complete. In some areas, as in those inhabited by the Tetela, Mongo and Songye, or that east of the Lomami, the colonial government had had to perpetuate the Independent State's alliances with brigand chiefs, some of whom remained virtually independent. As other areas began to feel the pressure of tax-collectors, labour-recruiters, missionaries and trading monopolists, these independent chiefs

became centres of opposition. Colonial forces crushed Tetela rebels east of Lake Kisale in 1909, suppressed armed bands near the Angolan border in 1913 and put down resistance in Kivu in 1916. In Katanga, the Luba chief Kasongo Nyembo beat off several attacks before his capture and deportation in 1917. Some areas, such as northern Kivu, southern Kwango and Dekese in the Kasai, were still beyond the reach of colonial officials in 1920.

The final stage in establishing a modern administration in the Congo was the reform in 1919 of the Force Publique. Its establishment was set in 1920 at 16,000, which in relation to the total population of the territory was probably a very high level by comparison with other parts of colonial Africa. The force was divided into *troupes campées* for defence, and *troupes en service territorial* for internal security; the latter comprised about 6,000 men. In 1920 district commissioners were authorised to decide upon military or police occupations and operations. In any repressive operation the detachment had to be personally directed by a European (an administrator or authorised territorial agent) to prevent pillage, for the troops were paid even less than labourers.

The economy still relied heavily on personnel who were neither Belgian nor indigenous to the Congo. In line with their main sources of investment, UMHK and HCB drew much of their administrative staff from Britain, while Forminière looked to the USA. UMHK depended heavily on Americans for technical expertise and obtained much of its skilled white labour from South Africa. Much of its black labour came from Northern Rhodesia and Angola; many African clerks and shop assistants in Katanga were also immigrants. In Elisabethville (Lubumbashi), Belgians complained that one had to speak English to make oneself understood at the post office, and up to 1919 there were more pounds in circulation than francs: it was almost a Rhodesian town.

In 1911-13 the government had tried to establish a colony of Belgian farmers in Katanga, but without success. In Leopoldville, with 1,000 Europeans and 15,000 Africans in 1920, West Africans were the dominant group in several companies and on the railway, which unlike the CFL entrusted its trains to African drivers. ‘Creole’ African society considered itself equal to European society: such Africans had a comparable standard of living.

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6 See chapter 1, p. 49.
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organised themselves in associations (such as the ‘Franco-Belges’), attended private clubs and dance-halls, dressed like Europeans and read European newspapers. In urban areas the more senior literate Africans could earn as much as some whites and were often paid in pounds. As the purchasing power of the franc declined after 1919, this became a source of real anger among white government employees, and in 1920 some in Katanga went on strike. White workers from the sterling area felt especially aggrieved at being paid in francs, and in the same year South Africans in Katanga played a leading role in strikes on the mines and railways. The net result was to speed up the replacement of such unreliable foreigners with Belgians who were much further from any outside source of support.

The continuing weakness of the colonial state during the First World War enhanced the power of the Roman Catholic Church. By 1910 there were around 500 missionaries in the Belgian Congo, of whom some 200 were Protestant; there were between 50,000 and 100,000 African Christians. The eastern Congo was the preserve of the Catholic White Fathers, but Protestants were well established in the Lower Congo, along the Congo river and in Kasai; in all these areas there were numerous businesses in British or American hands. In the struggle for African souls the Protestants had the advantage, by 1911, of ten doctors, nine hospitals and twenty-five dispensaries. Moreover, the liberalism

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<td>1907</td>
<td>C 343</td>
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<td>1936</td>
<td>C 2,475</td>
<td>P 1,280</td>
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<td>C 1,173, P 260</td>
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N.B. The statistics for numbers of Christians are unreliable. Quite apart from their propaganda functions, they are flawed by large variations between denominations in the criteria for admission to baptism. Roman Catholic figures are swollen by child baptism, which Protestants hardly ever practised.
of the Belgian colonial regime seemed at odds with authoritarian Catholic strategies — the recruitment of converts from among redeemed slaves and the creation of large mission farms; besides, such concentration of Christians contributed to the spread of sleeping-sickness. However, there was political pressure in Belgium to increase the Belgian missionary presence in the Congo. In line with the Concordat of 1906, the Ministry of Colonies maintained the state’s special relationship with Catholic missions by way of land grants and subsidies. The network of Catholic primary schools expanded rapidly. Government schools for training African clerks and artisans were entrusted to Catholic teaching orders, as were several of the schools which the larger industrial firms had set up by 1920. At the United Missionary Conference of the Congo, at Luebo in 1918, there were Protestant complaints against the privileged treatment accorded by the state to Catholic missions.

1920–1930: BELGIAN ASSERTION AND ECONOMIC GROWTH

In the years after the war, the Belgian Congo became far more Belgian than ever before. In 1918 Renkin finally retired as colonial minister; his successor, Louis Franck, set about strengthening the partnership between government and Belgian capital. The exploitation of men and materials during the war had given rise to exaggerated ideas about the colony’s resources, and the commercial slump in 1920–1 did little to check the euphoria widespread in commercial circles. The realignment of the Congolese franc with the Belgian franc in 1919 encouraged private Belgian investment in the post-war period. Belgian capital took advantage of the transfer at par of a weak currency into an expanding economy, and realised profits in a strong currency. In 1920 the law of property was revised to facilitate capitalist growth. Franck told an American journalist, ‘The Congo is not only the economic hope of Belgium, it is teaching the Belgian capitalist to think in broad terms.’

8 Marcosson, African adventure, 175–6.
Of the total capital invested in the colony between 1887 and 1959, one-third was subscribed between 1921 and 1931. Much was channelled through the colossus of Belgian finance, the Société Générale, which sought to compensate for heavy losses in Russia following the Bolshevik revolution. It enabled UMHK to increase its share capital fivefold, while the percentage held by Robert Williams’s companies (notably Tanganyika Concessions) fell from 45 in 1920 to 16 in 1923. In 1928 the Société Générale took control of the Compagnie du Congo pour le Commerce et l’Industrie. Thereafter, despite protests in Belgium, the ‘Empire de la Générale’ was a fact. It controlled, more or less, most of the larger businesses in the Congo, amounting to almost half the economy of the colony; and it accounted for 65 per cent of capital investment between 1920 and 1932. Beside this giant, other financial groups were of minor importance. Given the extent to which the Société Générale penetrated the Belgian technocracy and bourgeoisie, its hold over the colony’s economy was only reinforced by the post-war growth of state enterprises, as in goldmining, plantations and river transport. Between 1920 and 1930 the share of government revenue derived from income tax and government investments rose from 13 to 37 per cent; of this, almost a quarter came from UMHK and a third from companies controlled by the Société Générale.

Meanwhile, Belgians came to the Congo: over the decade the white population rose from 7,000, of whom only half were Belgian, to 25,000 of whom 70 per cent were Belgian. Nearly all administrators were now Belgian, and the level of professional competence among them was raised by the four-year training provided by the Colonial University in Antwerp, founded in 1920, though in the government medical service half the doctors in the mid-1920s were Italian.

Belgian power in Africa had also been increased through the acquisition of Ruanda-Urundi. This territory, named after the two largest pre-colonial kingdoms within it, was a highland region of rich volcanic soils, and it had been the most densely-populated corner of German East Africa. Belgian forces had occupied it in 1916, but Belgium valued it simply as a pawn which might somehow be used to get Portugal to give up the south bank of the Congo estuary. This hope was disappointed, and in 1919 the League of Nations conferred on Belgium a mandate to administer
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Ruanda-Urundi. There was some argument over the frontier with the British mandate of Tanganyika; due to pressure from missionaries of the White Fathers, Gisaka was reattached to Ruanda, but areas claimed by Burundi were not restored and Belgium had to evacuate territory which its forces had occupied between Tabora and Lake Tanganyika. On the other hand, Belgium was granted special privileges in the ports of Dar es Salaam and Kigoma, and on the railway between them; this eased the problem of exporting copper from Katanga. In 1924 the Belgian parliament finally approved the mandate, and next year made the territory part of the Belgian Congo for administrative purposes. It became subject to the law of the Congo and was given the status of a vice-governor-generalship. Despite German protests at the League of Nations after 1925, Ruanda-Urundi became to all intents and purposes a fifth province of the Belgian Congo.

Earlier hopes of the agricultural wealth to be derived from Ruanda-Urundi were misplaced. While the population (perhaps three million) may well have been one-third that of the Belgian Congo, its commodity exports (mostly hides, skins and livestock) amounted to only one or two per cent of the Congo’s, and their real value scarcely increased between 1924 and 1930. A beginning was made with coffee and cotton, but the most immediately useful new crop was cassava, which was intended to protect people against famines such as ravaged the country in 1928. The main export was not produce but men, who left for work both in the Belgian Congo and in neighbouring British territories; it was chiefly these migrants who caused imports of cloth to Ruanda-Urundi to quadruple between 1923 and 1930. There was even talk, though it came to nothing, of the mass removal of people from Ruanda to Katanga, Kolwezi and the Kundelungu Plateau.

In the Belgian Congo the colonial government financed great improvements in transport and communications. The road network grew from 2,400 km in 1920 to 30,000 km in 1930, while annual petrol consumption rose from 500 to 24,000 tonnes. Two new rail links were constructed: Bukama–Port Francqui (Ilebo) (1928) and Tenke–Dilolo (1931); the Matadi–Leopoldville line was reconstructed; and from 1924 a narrow-gauge railway was built to serve cotton-growing areas in the Uele region. Sabena, jointly created in 1923 by the Belgian and colonial governments,
provided air services, both mail and passenger: Leopoldville was thus linked to Elisabethville in 1927, and in 1934 to Brussels (to which it had already been linked by telephone). Several new wireless stations were also built.

The mining companies reconsidered their strategies, for the richest deposits had been rapidly depleted during the war. In order to exploit lower-grade ores, UMHK decided in 1923 to develop a leaching plant and associated chemical industry and to build a hydroelectric power station (others were built near the Kilo-Moto goldmines and on the lower Congo). In the course of the 1920s UMHK became the world's largest copper-producing company, while from 1923 to 1931 the Belgian Congo was the world's third largest source of copper. Between 1920 and 1930 the production of copper increased sevenfold and that of diamonds tenfold. Gold remained important. Kilo-Moto (which the state owned in 1920–6 and in which thereafter it had a majority holding) became the second largest industrial employer in the colony, with an annual average of 20,000 workers. Exploration continued: in 1923 the CFL formed a subsidiary to mine gold and tin in its area, while UMHK began to mine cobalt and also uranium: from 1922 the Belgian Congo supplanted the USA as a source for medical radium. The relative contribution of minerals to export values gradually increased: they accounted for 60 per cent in the later 1920s. In 1929 total exports were worth £8.2m; in the course of the decade their value had probably increased between two- and threefold in real terms.9

Local processing industries also began to flourish. According to international agreements in 1890 and 1919, preferential duties on imports could not be imposed within a specified zone which included the Congo basin. In order to limit the market for non-Belgian products, the government therefore encouraged the local production of cement, soap, beer, fabrics and sugar. This policy was assisted by the growth of the white population and the increased circulation of money among Africans. The labour force in private employment rose between 1920 and 1926 from 125,000 to 422,000 while output from farm and forest increased considerably, even though the terms of trade were moving against African producers. The volume of imported consumer goods

9 According to one calculation, import prices tripled between 1922 and 1930. Wholesale prices in Belgium slightly more than doubled over the same period. See above, p. xviii.
tripled between 1920 and 1926, and remained at this level until 1929, while over the whole decade the gross domestic product nearly doubled in real terms. Belgium’s share of its colony’s imports, which had fallen from 74 to 43 per cent between 1908 and 1920, rose to 55 per cent in 1925; thereafter it declined, partly because of oil and motor-vehicle imports from the USA.

The growth of agriculture during the 1920s was not primarily directed to export. The limits of the government’s economic liberalism were shown in its policy towards cotton, the possibilities of which had been demonstrated during the war by E. Fisher. The government fixed the purchase price each year and assigned local monopolies over growing and marketing to Cotonco, formed in 1920, and a few other companies. These concessionaires were supposed to build roads to minimise porterage, but they seldom complied. Forced labour was used to build roads in Orientale province, and this was the only area in which cotton-cultivation was widespread by 1930. Some research was devoted to cotton, as to oil-palms, but the government was mainly interested in food-production, both to supply industrial centres and to combat local famines (a particular problem in Ruanda-Urundi). African farmers were goaded by an agricultural tax imposed in 1924, but they also received some technical help. The government joined the mining companies in financing large stock-rearing companies from 1927, in order to supply the compulsory meat component in workers’ rations. But little official help was given to the 400-odd European farms which by 1930 had been established in Kivu, Ituri and Katanga; in Katanga they continued to face competition from maize and cattle imported from the Rhodesias.

In the years after the war the government abandoned its pre-war support of small business. In this, it responded to pressure from Delcommune, spokesman of the Compagnie du Congo pour le Commerce et l’Industrie. Lippens himself had been president of this firm, and in 1921 he proposed restrictions (enforced in 1925) on the use of African trading agents, on which the smaller businesses depended heavily. The latter were further handicapped by attempts to prevent barter and loans to Africans, and to enforce wage-payment in cash. However, the big companies had their own

10 After his resignation from the colonial government in 1923, Lippens founded the Compagnie Sucrière Congolaise, which received a concession of 30,000 hectares in the lower Congo and throughout the period retained its sugar monopoly.
ways of controlling the African market. HCB used a subsidiary to sell goods to their African suppliers. Forminière and Kilo-Moto made the most of the restrictions on trade in diamond- and gold-mining areas. By the late 1920s, UMHK and CFK had begun to effect a horizontal integration of Katanga's economy.

As government and big business steadily eliminated competition in agricultural marketing, both during and after the war, prices paid to producers fell very steeply. This in turn depressed the price of wage-labour: it has been reckoned that on average real wages for unskilled workers in 1923 were no more than 40 per cent of their value in 1913. The cost of labour was further held down by new recruiting monopolies, in Kasai and Leopoldville, from 1921-2, and by a partial ban on cash-crop production in Lomami and Lulua in 1925. But although in this sense the problem of finding cheap labour had eased, there was a more fundamental sense in which labour supply was more of a problem than ever. The rapid growth of investment in the 1920s far outstripped the colony's own labour resources. In the early 1920s more than half the labour force of UMHK came from Northern Rhodesia, whence also came many other workers in Katanga. And over the Belgian Congo as a whole it was becoming clear that the scale of labour migration was threatening the capacity of rural populations to sustain and reproduce themselves. In 1924 the government set up a Native Labour Commission, representing government and business, which in 1925 recommended that not more than 10 per cent of a village's able-bodied men should be recruited for work at more than two days' distance. This principle was much modified in practice, though the government did ban recruitment in a few hard-hit areas. Franck's successor as colonial minister, Carton de Tournay, instructed officials not to give direct assistance to recruiters, but many continued to do so, and in any case the collaboration of chiefs was still solicited and rewarded. By 1927 it was reckoned that one quarter of the colony's adult male population was working either for government or for private firms; in the industrial area of Katanga, three out of four adult males were in employment.

The long-term future of the labour force was more effectively

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secured by attempts to improve its fitness. The larger companies, and private foundations, began to join government and missions in providing medical care, while sleeping-sickness and other endemic diseases were more systematically attacked. In 1921 provincial governors were given new powers to control workers' rations, housing, hygiene and transport to and from their home areas. Real wages, though very depressed, moved slowly upwards over the decade, in response to continuing labour scarcity. This stimulated the larger firms at least to make more discriminating use of their labour. UMHK was under special pressure to do so, since the cost of immigrant workers, whether unskilled from British Africa or skilled from the USA, rose as the Belgian franc lost value in relation to the pound sterling and the dollar, while by comparison the cost of capital goods declined. On the one hand, UMHK organised recruitment within the franc zone; by 1930 it was obtaining enough workers from Ruanda-Urundi and Lomami to be able to dispense with further recruitment in Northern Rhodesia. On the other hand, UMHK greatly increased the ratio between capital and labour, through changes in mining techniques and metallurgy. To make the most of the experience gained by unskilled workers, and also to cut down on recruitment costs, UMHK sought to retain them for longer periods. It began to place all black workers on three-year contracts and encouraged greater efficiency both through differential pay-scales and by making more provision for workers' wives and children. In addition, a growing minority of Africans were trained to operate machines, which could be much more widely used in Katanga's mostly opencast mines than in the underground mines being developed across the border in Northern Rhodesia.

While the involvement of Africans in capitalist relations of production rapidly increased in the 1920s, the decade also witnessed attempts to strengthen indigenous institutions which resembled contemporary British trends towards 'indirect rule'. In 1920 two officials, P. Salkin and G. van der Kerken, published books which stressed the political dangers of rapid industrialisation and proletarianisation; they wished to strengthen 'traditional' societies and the authority of 'legitimate' chiefs. Such views were entirely congenial to the colonial minister, Franck: he himself had recently been a leader of the Flemish speakers' movement in Belgium, and as such he was naturally sympathetic.
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both to the promotion of vernacular languages and to resisting the indefinite spread of French-language culture. Late in 1920 Franck outlined his African policy: official recognition should be withdrawn from the less important and effective chiefs, and those without local roots, while recognised chiefs should be grouped on the basis of tribal affiliation into area councils. This policy was patchily applied. Some officials made diligent enquiries into local history and tribal organisation, but systematic reforms were impeded by staff transfers and the attitudes of some provincial governors. Nonetheless, the official standing of chiefs was significantly raised by the constitution, in 1926, of African courts as integral parts of the colony’s legal hierarchy: they were given extensive powers in civil, and limited powers in criminal, jurisdiction.

The partnership between the colonial state and the Catholic Church continued to be strengthened. Franck himself was an anti-clerical, but he realised that Catholic discipline had helped to make good workers in Belgium and could be expected to do the same in Africa. He therefore initiated a scheme, finally introduced in 1927, whereby subsidies for primary education were confined to ‘national’ missions under Belgian management, which in effect meant Catholic missions. The latter were thus enabled to increase the numbers in their primary schools much faster than the Protestants. Catholic primary teachers not only sought to inculcate respect for the white man but also stressed the moral value of working for him. ‘The national missions...spread the love of the name of Belgium together with the light of the gospel...’ The teaching of French was allowed but not encouraged: three out of four Belgian missionaries in the Congo were Flemish-speakers and in any case French was thought to contribute undesirably to the ‘detribalisation of Africans’. Much use was therefore made of the African languages most familiar to missionaries, and as these were written down they tended to prevail over others. There were attempts to standardise the Kongo, Luba and Swahili languages, and Lingala (the trade language of the middle Congo). In Ruanda-Urundi, the end of German rule strengthened the position of the White Fathers, who were mostly French. They

12 See table on p. 472, note 7, above.
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strenuously defended the hegemony of the ruling Tutsi caste and through alliance with them were able to attract very large followings; by 1934 these included 283,000 baptised Catholics and as many catechumens.

The government’s educational policy reflected its reluctance to encourage more social change among Africans than was absolutely necessary. Apart from the government’s training schools (of which there were twelve by 1925), there was very little provision for post-primary education. As Belgians entered the colony after the war, there was growing concern to prevent Africans competing with them for jobs. Opportunities contracted for the tiny minority of Africans who were literate and enjoyed a European lifestyle. There was no class, however small, of blacks with full citizenship of the metropolitan country, as there was in French West Africa. In theory, it had been possible since 1892 for Africans to register themselves as subject to the Belgian civil code rather than customary law, but the qualifications remained unspecified and the privileges meagre: the procedure (called immatriculation) fell into desuetude. The growth of an indigenous petty bourgeoisie was stunted by the measures in 1925 against itinerant traders, while Africans who rented land in CFK territory were not allowed to renew their leases. In the larger towns (and by 1928 there were 32,000 people in Leopoldville), African workers were generally regarded as transient visitors, and little positive incentive was given for women to accompany men. UMHK’s change of policy in the later 1920s was exceptional.

Yet the continuing growth of towns and industry meant that more and more Africans spent long periods away from ‘home’, while some had no intention of going back there. Catholic missionaries tried to exert some influence over such ‘detribalised’ people by creating clubs for clerks, medical assistants or former schoolmates. In Katanga, the prefect apostolic was Mgr de Hemptinne, who came from a banking family and was a friend of King Albert. He secured the ascendancy of his own Benedictine order among mission schools in Elisabethville and the UMHK compounds, and this furthered his aim of turning tribesmen into reliable workers. The emergence of a core of settled African town-dwellers was also acknowledged by a senior administrator in Katanga, Gaston Heenen. When in charge of Lomami district in 1918–22 he had helped colonies of ex-soldiers to become

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improving farmers, outside the control of chiefs; as deputy to the vice-governor-general, he managed in 1926 to have the African township in Elisabethville declared a centre indigène extra-contumier, in which limited judicial powers would be exercised by townsmen rather than by representatives of chiefs.

Overt African opposition to the colonial regime seems to have subsided after 1920. Pockets of resistance remained, especially in the forest, but local detachments of the Force Publique sufficed to prevent revolts. Yet African societies were fraught with tension. There was friction between lineages, ‘recognised’ chieftainship and colonial authorities; the cash economy and colonial rule provided new avenues to wealth and power, at least for a few, and this bred suspicion and jealousy. Fears of witchcraft gave rise, as no doubt in earlier times, to local cults and secret societies. In 1921 Simon Kimbangu, a Baptist convert, attracted a huge following for his healing mission in the Lower Congo. He preached salvation, but nervous officials, supported by Catholic missionaries, thought that he threatened revolution and sentenced him to death, which the Belgian king commuted to life imprisonment. This proved a martyrdom: Kimbangu’s movement was driven underground, but it soon began to spread throughout the colony.14

1930–1940: DEPRESSION AND COMPULSION

The international economic depression of the 1930s accentuated economic and political trends in the Belgian Congo which were already apparent by 1928: systematic economic exploitation, close co-operation between government and big business, the elimination of several smaller-sized businesses, the development of agriculture. The colony was subjected to an essentially totalitarian regime in partnership with the Société Générale, and African participation in the economy was regulated by coercion rather than by any free market in goods and services.

The depression made a delayed impact on the Congo since in 1930 UMHK was still producing at full capacity (139,000 tonnes), while public expenditure was still sustained by the public works programme. When it came, however, the shock was violent. In 1932, copper exports slumped to one-seventh of their value in

14 See chapter 3.
1930; meanwhile, the total value of exports had fallen by 55 per cent and that of imports by 70 per cent. In real terms, the gross domestic product fell by 15 per cent between 1928 and 1933. External capital investment almost came to a halt; throughout the 1930s production depended on the reinvestment of profits, public capital, and cheaper labour. Government revenues fell by about a third between 1929 and 1932, yet expenditure was kept up by the need to meet debt charges: these accounted for only one-fifth of expenditure in 1928, but more than half in 1934–5, and of this one-third consisted of guaranteed interest payments on loans for the public works programme. (The abuse of these guarantees by some transport companies was much criticised by a commission of the Belgian Senate.) Budget deficits were made up by a public lottery in Belgium and by grants (700m francs between 1933 and 1937) from the Belgian government, which was concerned to protect its own large investments in mining and other ventures. A special bank was set up to save white farmers from ruin, while transport costs were reduced for the benefit of businessmen. The burden of the depression was largely shifted on to the shoulders of Africans, by compelling them to work where they were most needed (especially on road-building and maintenance) and to grow more crops to offset falling prices.

These measures brought about substantial changes in the pattern of the Belgian Congo’s exports. The cash value of agricultural exports fell less sharply in 1930–4 than that of mineral exports. Coffee exports, indeed, increased remarkably steadily throughout the decade; they were mostly produced by Europeans in the eastern Congo, and in 1937–8 they exceeded in bulk those of any other African territory (Madagascar excepted). The value of cotton exports began to rise in 1933 and by 1937 was twice what it had been in 1930; in 1936–9 output averaged nearly two-thirds that of Uganda or the Sudan. About 700,000 people were thought to be growing cotton in 1936. Nonetheless, minerals continued (except in 1933) to yield 60 per cent or more of exports. Gold output doubled in response to rising prices. From 1932 to 1936 gold ranked first among the colony’s exports, contributing nearly 24 per cent, and output equalled that from the Gold Coast; in 1939 gold exports were worth two-thirds those from Southern Rhodesia. The Belgian Congo also became Africa’s chief source of silver: in 1933–9 output averaged three times that
of South Africa, though its value was slight enough. Tin was now a very significant export: mines in central Katanga and north-east and north-west of Lake Kivu yielded 10,000 tonnes in 1938, about as much as from Nigeria. From 1914 to 1939 tin contributed more to exports than diamonds; output of diamonds increased, but its value showed no increase since the greater part was for industrial use rather than gemstones. By 1937 copper output had surpassed the peak reached in 1930, but it subsequently declined. The total value of exports in 1938 was little more, in real terms, than it had been in 1930, but they now rested on a much wider base.

Transport routes also changed during the 1930s. The completion of the railways linking Katanga to Port Francqui and Dilolo enabled farmers in Kasai and Lulua to meet the food requirements of the mines; maize imports from the Rhodesias ceased altogether in 1933. These railways also meant that copper traffic was largely redirected. In the mid-1920s all copper had been exported via ports on the Indian Ocean: about three-quarters went south through the Rhodesias to Beira while a quarter went east through Tanganyika to Dar es Salaam. From 1928, however, an increasing proportion reached the Atlantic via Port Francqui and Matadi; by 1935 this route handled half the copper traffic, due to specially favourable railway rates. Meanwhile, from 1931 about a fifth of Katanga’s copper was carried by the Benguela railway to the port of Lobito, in Angola. The Rhodesian railways were able to retain about 30 per cent of the traffic, since UMHK still depended on them for imports of coal, from Wankie. All the same, the Belgian Congo’s national transport network was at last a reality. It was strengthened in 1935 by the creation of a public corporation, Otraco, which replaced the various firms handling transport along the rivers and down to the sea at Matadi; Otraco also took over transport in the Kivu region. The government used it to channel through Matadi exports which might otherwise have been shipped out to the east; it was also a means of controlling transport costs in the interests of employers and monopoly trading firms. Meanwhile, the colony’s labour force was also very largely ‘national’: UMHK retained a tiny group of skilled workers from Nyasaland, but elsewhere in Katanga there were only a few thousand workers from British Africa. The colony’s southern border was now an economic as well as a political frontier.

One further structural change was in the relation of imports
and exports. In the 1920s, the former had considerably exceeded the latter, due to lavish investment ventures, but the onset of the depression abruptly reversed this position. As the economy recovered, the cut-back on imports continued, partly because in March 1935 the Belgian (and thus the Congolese) franc was devalued by 28 per cent in terms of gold. This meant that exports earned more in terms of francs, while imports became more expensive. The colonial government therefore imposed duties on mineral and vegetable exports, but reduced import duties; as a result, the contribution of customs duties to ordinary revenue rose remarkably. Meanwhile the value of imports remained well below that of exports: in 1938 it was only two-thirds that of exports. The Congo was in effect repaying the Belgian economy for the investments of the 1920s. One member of the Colonial Council in Belgium remarked in the mid-1930s:

The colony exhausts its resources in artificially maintaining enterprises which leave little real wealth in the country. Production goes on, but the small profits, when there are any, go to pay the interest (and that a low rate) on capital to investors outside the colony. The mass of people...cannot enrich themselves nor raise, to any considerable degree, their standard of living. 15

It was African farmers who suffered most from the depression. By 1935 prices paid to cash-crop producers were about half what they had been in 1929. Tax rates were reduced, but by no means commensurately: by the mid-1930s, tax absorbed more than half the cash earned in rural areas and it was sometimes commuted into labour service. There were reports of people wearing the skins of wild beasts for want of money to buy clothes. Textile prices fell by half between 1928 and 1933 in line with a general fall in import prices, but this was of much less benefit to farmers than to unskilled workers, whose earnings (in cash and kind) fell hardly at all: indeed, their real wages rose during the depression to 80 per cent of their value before 1914. 16 To some extent, wage-earners may be said to have benefited from the savings made by large employers as a result of the lower prices paid to food-producers. The disparity between rural and urban or industrial incomes persisted through the economic recovery of the 1930s, since African earnings from agriculture continued to be held down by

15 O. Louwers, quoted in Great Britain: Admiralty (Naval Intelligence Division), The Belgian Congo (London, 1944), 214.
coercion and monopoly. Thus as industry expanded once again it could meet its labour needs without serious difficulty and by 1939 the total workforce in private employment (which had sunk to 290,000 in 1933) had risen to 530,000; perhaps 10 per cent of the African population was then living outside the rural areas.

In Ruanda-Urundi the depression made little difference to the export economy since this had scarcely got under way. Exports of cattle rose sharply in 1931-2 but meanwhile the production of cotton, coffee and tin was being developed. The real value of exports rose fourfold between 1930 and 1936, and this growth continued: in 1939 they were worth 6 per cent of those from the Belgian Congo. In the same year, African consumption of imports was two or three times greater than in 1930, though this still owed much to labour migration: not only were many now working in Katanga but migration to Uganda had been stimulated by the devaluation of the franc in 1935. New pressures to work on cash-crops caused local food shortages, but roads built by locally conscripted labour meant that it was possible to prevent the recurrence of large-scale famine.

The systematic application of people to export-production involved renewed efforts both to assess their potential and to improve their physical condition: there were still fears that in some areas population might be in decline. In 1937-8 censuses indicated that the population of the Belgian Congo was 10.2 million and that of Ruanda-Urundi 3.8 million. The government also organised several local demographic surveys; these indicated a slight fall in the overall birth-rate in rural areas during the 1930s, but this was probably offset by falling death-rates; perhaps more significant were the wide local variations revealed. During the decade, the number of European doctors in the Congo doubled, and there was a still greater increase in the numbers of other medical personnel. The number of sick people treated in hospitals and dispensaries tripled between 1930 and 1940. On the other hand, this considerable effort must be set beside the advance of diseases induced by colonial conditions. While the incidence of sleeping-sickness was much reduced, the agglomeration of workers in industrial centres promoted the spread of tuberculosis and venereal disease. The larger companies improved their workers' rations, and rural famines became less common, but many people suffered from malnutrition. Under pressure to
produce for the market, many villagers had no time to grow maize or millet, or to supplement their diet by hunting and gathering; instead, they relied excessively on cassava.

The increasingly authoritarian character of Belgian rule pressed heavily upon Africans, but though it sustained white power and privilege it provoked dissension among Europeans. Government remained in practice the monopoly of an administrative élite, in association with leading business executives and churchmen, though in the 1920s the Colonial Council had instigated modest reforms in the law regarding concessions. Informed interest in the Congo was stimulated in Belgium by meetings of the Colonial Congress, in 1920, 1926 and 1930, and by the Royal Colonial Institute, created in 1928. But there was little opportunity for non-official opinion in the Congo to influence government: it still counted for little in the advisory councils and the only organ of municipal government was in Leopoldville, which from 1923 was run by an official with the advice of Belgian nationals nominated by the vice-governor-general.

The élites of government, business and the church attracted widespread resentment among whites, but officials and company employees hesitated to speak out for fear of losing their jobs, and by 1937 company employees accounted for 60 per cent of the adult male white population (excluding the missionaries); the total white population was 27,800. There was only one trade union, among civil servants, and that was ill-organised. Relatively few whites had a permanent stake in the Congo: most men planned to go back to Belgium. In 1937 women (other than missionaries) and children accounted for less than 40 per cent of the white population, as they had in 1931, when the proportion in Northern Rhodesia was 46 and in Kenya 55 per cent. Only 2,600 white men in the Belgian Congo were self-employed in 1937, and it was these who constituted the core of the settler population. They in turn were widely dispersed, though local newspapers had helped to crystallise a sense of common interest in three regions: Lower Congo, Equateur and western Kasai; Katanga, Lomami and Manyema; Kivu, Kibali-Ituri and Ruanda-Urundi.

The most important of these regional clusters was Katanga, which contained about a third of the colony’s white population. It was, moreover, in Katanga that settler politics intermeshed with conflicts within the hierarchy of government. Even after the
creation of a new transport route northwards, whites in Katanga were less closely linked to the rest of the Belgian Congo than to its southern neighbours: it was natural for them to emulate the strident politics of the Rhodesians. And at the highest levels of the colonial regime there was special tension between Katanga and the capital. Heenen, who became vice-governor-general in 1927, had the support of UMHK management, and also of Mgr de Hemptinne, in pressing for the rapid integration of Africans within capitalist society. This approach ran counter to the thinking of most senior officials in Leopoldville and Brussels, who continued to stress the importance of preserving African social organisation. Besides, there was the issue of provincial autonomy, a cause which de Hemptinne, backed by leading businessmen, had strongly argued in 1920. Relations between Katanga and central government had been calm enough during the governor-generalship of Martin Rutten (1923–7); he himself had spent most of his career in the province. But his successor, Auguste Tilkens, was much less sympathetic, and the onset of the economic depression added to the strain. In 1931 settlers in Katanga demanded the right to debate the provincial budget in the provincial council; in 1932 they called for a huge public works programme. But in Brussels and Leopoldville the response to falling revenue was to make drastic reductions in provincial expenditures, including that on rural administration. In 1933 the vice-governors-general were redesignated provincial commissioners and their powers were curtailed accordingly; besides, in the previous year Katanga had been deprived of Lomami district, the chief source of labour for the mines. All four vice-governors-general resigned in protest, and Heenen, before returning to Belgium, seriously discussed proposals for secession presented by de Hemptinne and a group of settlers; nothing came of them. Meanwhile the authority of the governor-general continued to benefit from the long tenure of incumbents. Ryckmans, who succeeded Tilkens in 1934, remained in office until 1946, whereas between 1924 and 1939 the office of colonial minister changed hands sixteen times: only three men held it for more than two years.

As central government strengthened its hold over provincial government, so the latter in turn tightened its control over African subordinates. Official eyes tended in the depression to see chiefdoms primarily as units of production, and chiefs as
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taskmasters. A decree in 1933 transformed chiefs into civil servants, who were paid salaries out of local treasuries and forbidden to seek an independent income. Together with local courts, and a staff of local police and messengers, chiefs had to enforce a growing weight of regulations in order to mobilise their people for the colonial economy. Their position came to depend on the oppressive regime of which they were minions, rather than on their claims to customary allegiance. Yet chiefs were more likely than white officials to know how much their subjects could stand. Some became expert at subterfuge: fields by the roadside were cleared but not sown; seed that was sown was previously boiled, so as to avoid all the work that would ensue upon germination. Chiefs might encourage denunciation, but it was also turned against them; depositions became more frequent and hereditary chiefs were often replaced by more literate men who might well have no local political standing. In Ruanda, Belgian claims had already conflicted with those of the king, Musinga, who in any case considered the church a threat to the cult of kingship; he was deposed in 1931 and thereafter Tutsi chiefs were more directly subordinated to white officials. By the late 1930s, officials in Lunda country were inclined to regard the former emperor, the mwata yamvo, as superfluous to the needs of local government.

On the surface, urban administration became somewhat less authoritarian, for in 1931 the colonial ministry extended Heenen’s innovation of the centre extra-coutumier to all major towns. In practice, however, this reform did not mean very much. In Leopoldville whites prevented the creation of a centre. In Katanga, Heenen’s concern to develop civic leadership among urban Africans was not shared by his successor. White officials were put in charge of the centre at Jadotville (Likasi) and at Elisabethville, where the power of the African council was effectively undermined by frequent changes of membership. Not until 1937 was an African chef de centre installed at Elisabethville, in belated response to orders from Governor-General Ryckmans, and even then this chef was under close Belgian supervision.

The educational system continued to be dominated by the Catholic Church. By 1937 it had received 118,000 hectares in land concessions; Protestant missions, less than 5,000. Catholic missions were agricultural businesses: in 1935 they employed 30,000 wage-earners. Their impact, however, varied greatly: in
1939, the percentage of total population baptised into the Catholic Church was 43 in the apostolic vicariate of Boma, 35 in Matadi, and 26 in south Katanga, but less than 10 in much of the east and north-east. In 1938 there were 222,500 pupils in subsidised schools and another 500,000 in unsubsidised Catholic schools; there were 300,000 in Protestant schools and about 6,000 in ‘official’ schools run by the government. By any reckoning this outreach compared very favourably with that of school systems elsewhere in colonial Africa, but it held the great majority of pupils just as briefly: in 1939 no more than 8,000 were receiving any sort of post-primary education. Technical training for Africans was relatively widespread, and the depression accelerated the trend among the larger firms to economise by using Africans rather than Europeans for handling machinery, including the driving of railway locomotives. From 1933 Africans could be trained to become agricultural assistants, and from 1936 as medical assistants. Protestant vocational schools concentrated on producing schoolteachers; it was hard for African Protestants to get jobs in government or even the large firms. In any case, the demand for literate Africans in the lower reaches of government was still restricted by the use of whites (as in French black Africa) to do work which in some British territories was done by Africans. Catholic seminaries provided the only general secondary education in the territory, and the only Africans to complete higher education during our period were those — less than thirty — who had become Catholic priests. In 1931 the Commission for the Protection of Natives initiated desultory discussion with the colonial ministry regarding the definition of a category of Africans suitable for immatriculation, but no progress had been made by the end of the decade.

These educational strategies precluded the emergence of an African élite literate in French and capable of challenging the colonial order. The only African during our period who is known to have made a detailed anti-colonial critique was an exception who proved the rule: Panda Farnana had been educated in Belgium, worked in the Congo as an agricultural officer from 1909 to 1914, and eventually settled in Brussels. In 1920 Farnana represented an association of expatriate blacks at the first Colonial Congress and upset an apostolic vicar by urging the government to do much more for African education. Farnana also spoke in

17 See above, p. 231.
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Brussels at the second Pan-African Congress in 1921, but the one event in the Congo which can be traced to his initiative was the erection in 1927 of a war memorial in Leopoldville for African soldiers. Strict censorship prevented the circulation of reading-matter not approved by the missions. The one public platform given to more educated Africans was a newspaper, *Ngonga*, in Elisabethville. This was founded in 1934 by the former district commissioner, A. Verbeken; it had an African assistant editor and printed letters of complaint by Africans. Government, business and the Catholic Church were all alarmed, and within a year the paper closed for lack of funds. From 1929 the government developed a counter-espionage network to nip subversion in the bud. Large employers controlled every aspect of life among the workers in their compounds. In these circumstances, organised protest was almost impossible. The only disturbances at UMHK were demonstrations in 1931 by a few hundred workers afraid of being sent home as the company began to curtail its operations.

However, the return of more than 100,000 workers to their home areas during the depression did spread messages of hope and resistance. Kimbangu was still in gaol (largely at the insistence of Mgr de Hemptinne) but his followers founded churches in parts of the north-west and north-east. Immigrants from Northern Rhodesia, mostly traders and domestic servants, who feared expulsion from Elisabethville, responded to the millenarian gospel of Kitawala, an offshoot of ‘Watch Tower’ movements in British territory. Several were arrested and expelled in 1931, but Kitawala teaching spread north and west along the railway line and provoked further arrests and deportations in 1934. Among the Pende, in Kwilu, there was a widespread response in 1931 to a prophet who called on people to discard European goods and promised the imminent return of the ancestors. The departure of several thousand whites in the depression gave rise to rumours that the Belgians were all about to go home. There were also rumours that Americans would come to free Africans from colonial rule. Myths about Europeans stealing wealth and knowledge from the ancestors of Africans gave expression to anxieties aggravated by the increasing interference of whites in local custom. Africans in the 1930s were likely to regard the white man not as a ‘civilising’ influence but as an immoral and malevolent being to be feared.

Paradoxically perhaps, the depression had the effect of strengh-
thening the settled character of African urban populations. Those thrown out of work were mostly inexperienced single men; among those who stayed, married men often fetched their wives from their home areas. In Leopoldville, where the population sank in 1933 to 22,000 and then rose to 47,000 in 1940, the ratio of men to women fell from over 3 : 1 in the later 1920s to 1.8 : 1 in the late 1930s. There was a similar shift in Elisabethville and the UMHK compounds. Among the self-employed urban population, women worked as petty traders, market gardeners, prostitutes and brewers (Africans had been prohibited since 1912 from buying European alcoholic drinks). Tribal associations helped Africans in towns to survive the worst of the depression. In 1933 there were eighteen in Elisabethville, but thereafter their importance diminished; they were given no political role in the centre extra-soutnemier and even their own meetings were brought under European supervision. With so little scope for African initiative, it was no wonder that the best-educated, the clerks and teachers, were demoralised and gave vent to their frustration in gambling, drinking and fighting.

CONCLUSION

More than any other colony in Africa, the Belgian Congo was run as a business undertaking, and it is appropriate to attempt some sort of financial reckoning for the period here surveyed. Between 1909 and 1938 the Belgian Treasury spent on the Congo about 180m gold francs (i.e. francs at their value before 1914); of this, 45m paid for the colonial ministry in Belgium and 86m were grants to balance the Congo’s budget in 1933–7. This expenditure was offset by Belgian taxes on the debentures and profits of colonial companies based in Belgium. These were substantial. By 1936 the Belgian Congo had attracted 12 per cent of all capital invested south of the Sahara; this was considerably more than in either British East or British West Africa and was exceeded only by South Africa (43 per cent). Three-quarters of the investment in the Belgian Congo (much more than anywhere else) was private capital. There were wide variations and fluctuations in annual rates of return, but over the whole period mines and banks yielded an average of 17 per cent. Investment within a zone that was Belgian in terms of currency and political control was especially valued since Belgium had lost at least 3,000m in
gold francs in Russia after 1917, while its scope for investment in China and Latin America was subsequently restricted.

The trade generated by investment in the Congo also benefited Belgium. By the late 1930s Belgium received 75 per cent of exports from the Congo, and 85 per cent of those from Ruanda. Belgium’s share of its colony’s imports, which had fallen to 35 per cent by 1935, rose steadily to 44 per cent by 1938. The Congo contributed a growing share of Belgium’s total external trade. The percentage of Belgium’s imports (excluding gold) derived from the Congo rose from less than 2 before 1930 to 4.5 in 1934 and 7 in 1937–8. The percentage of Belgian exports sent to the Congo declined from 3.4 in 1926 to 1.1 in 1934 but rose to 2.3 in 1938. By that time, activities connected with the colonial economy provided some 400,000 jobs in Belgium. Admittedly, the trade of the Belgian Congo was not, in our period, especially impressive if measured against size of territory, population or capital investment, but this reflected the long-term nature of speculation in railways and mining; the real returns were yet to come. Meanwhile, Belgium’s colony had come to make a notable contribution to the world’s supply of raw materials: by the late 1930s its copper represented 7 per cent of world output, its tin 5, its cobalt 27, its palm-oil 15 and its palm-nuts 13. It was the world’s largest producer of industrial diamonds and uranium; its monopoly of the latter was challenged from 1933 by Canada, but an agreement in 1938 secured the Belgian Congo 60 per cent of the market.

These results did much to sustain Belgium’s position as a significant, if minor, economic power, but they were achieved at a high cost to Africans, both in material terms and in terms of scope for personal fulfilment. The colony had become a huge industrial enterprise; in some respects it was enlightened and even benevolent, but the whole system was predicated on the continuing concentration of power in white hands, and the regimentation of African life. When Belgium was occupied by Germany in 1940, the Congo once again helped it survive as a force in world politics, but the war and its aftermath imposed new tests on Belgium’s capacity to retain the total control which characterised the prevailing Belgian conception of colonial rule.

Of the totals for sub-Saharan Africa, the Belgian Congo accounted for around 11 per cent of land, population and capital investment by the mid-1930s, but no more than 3 per cent of trade.