

saad haddad is dead

by

Christine Choi

I was poking at a wilted salad from burger king,  
when I heard the news.  
He died in bed.  
They called it cancer, but  
I know better.  
You see the people's militia marched  
into his intestines.  
Handgrenaded his liver. And massed  
a frontal attack on the kidneys.

Weeds are now decorating his plot  
and the rumour is that grazing sheep  
are producing two-headed freaks.  
His virgins named mary have been  
seen lately at the wailing wall trying  
to conjure up some sleek pigs copulating  
in the missionary position. But to no avail.  
The pepsi can people he crushed and  
redeemed, a penny a piece are screaming down  
black clots on clean folks unused to soot.  
They also redecorated the holiday inn.

But this funky old chameleon seems  
to grow another tale as fast  
as we can pull them off.

PROBLEMS OF SOCIALIST TRANSFORMATION IN AFRICA:  
THE CONGOLESE EXPERIENCE

by

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The problems of socialist transformation in Africa have been blamed on two counts: the "ambiguities" of African nationalism and the development of a "labour aristocracy."<sup>1</sup> African nationalism per se is not necessarily seen as the fetter to socialist transformation, as the examples of Mozambique and Angola indicate. It is rather its refusal to adopt a materialist outlook to African societies -- recognising the existence of class struggle -- that has remained the target of criticism.

The labour aristocracy theory, on the other hand, takes a legalistic approach. Its basic argument posits the peasantry, rather than the working class, to constitute the revolutionary class. Employing the indices of classical economics, such as income levels, it analyses the characteristics of the "labour movement." The assumption is that all labour organisations are organisations of the working class. But this premise, which regards any labour union to be automatically labour-represented and labour-controlled, by virtue of its name, misses a fundamental element in the present class struggle in Africa. Many institutions that are autonomous from the state in the advanced capitalist countries are, in most cases, subsumed under the state in peripheral capitalist countries. This includes labour unions. Therefore, in many of these countries, the labour union is not an autonomous power base of the working class. Indeed, the union, being simply a wing of the state, class struggle takes place within its structures. "The real battle," as Bill Freund has noted, "was for the union and who would lead it."<sup>2</sup>

An analysis of the labour movement in the People's Republic of the Congo sheds new light on both of these burning questions. The experience of this country is important for two reasons. First, the Congolese working class, intellectuals and the state have eschewed bourgeois developmentalism and adopted a materialist outlook. They have moved beyond petty-bourgeois nationalism as the dominant ideology, which does not mean that there has been a transformation in the relations of production, or that an attempt has been made to incorporate working people in the state apparatus. In the Congo, the same patterns of exploitation that are found in most peripheral social formations still persist. Secondly, the Congolese example illustrates the nature of class struggle and its relationship to the labour unions. This is reflected in the struggle for control over the

trade unions between the bureaucratic elements of the Congolese petty-bourgeoisie and the proletariat. By placing the trade unions within the context of a state institution, this study attempts to elucidate one of the central problems of the labour aristocracy thesis. Our thesis is that, at the onset of African nationalism, the working class organisations were genuinely proletarian in character. But in time they were subsumed under state control. So that by the 1970's what appears to be workers' movements were actually struggles waged by the emergent bureaucratic bourgeoisie within the labour unions.

#### BACKGROUND TO THE CONGOLESE TRADE UNION MOVEMENT

The development of the Congolese urban proletariat characterises most of Central Africa. Brazzaville and Pointe Noire -- the major metropolitan centres -- were developed at the expense of the rural areas, causing a steady pattern of rural-urban migration. The process of separating town and country has been a common occurrence with the penetration of capital into Africa, but it has been far more pronounced in the Congo, owing to Brazzaville's position as capital of French Equatorial Africa.<sup>3</sup> Table 1 gives an indication of the demographic changes which have taken place as a result of this migrational pattern:<sup>4</sup>

Table 1

Population	1950	1956	1960	1972
Rural	85.7%	82%	74.4%	57.4%
Urban	14.3%	18%	25.6%	42.6%

Source: Bertrand, Le Congo: Formation Sociale et Mode de Développement Economique (see note 4).

In addition to the uneven penetration of capital concentrated in the urban areas, the French instituted a multi-tiered wage-scale system in which wages were calculated in accordance with different geographical zones.<sup>5</sup> With the urban centres having the highest minimum wage, the mass rural exodus was given further impetus.

Undoubtedly, the rural-urban migration pattern was the single most important factor in the development of the Congolese urban proletariat because it created a massive "reserve army of labour." Indeed, in 1962, Brazzaville had an unemployment rate of over 31%.<sup>6</sup> Taking into consideration that out of a population of approximately 850,000 people in 1962, about 212,000 lived in the urban centres, the urban unemployed consisted of a large segment of the population.<sup>7</sup>

Nevertheless, in spite of this massive reserve army of

labour and the constant influx of rural migrants, the difficult task of unionization did take place, though initially on a very small scale. The birth of official labour unions in Moyen-Congo\* was little more than an extension of the metropolitan labour organizations. Following the Brazzaville Conference of 1944, the Confédération Française des Travailleurs Chrétiens (CFTC), the Confédération Générale du Travail (CGT), and Force Ouvrière (FO) founded branches in French Equatorial Africa. In the wake of the loi cadre (Enabling Act) of 1956, the African branch of the CGT became the Confédération Générale Africaine du Travail. In the following year, the African section of the CFTC also Africanized its organization, taking the name Confédération Africaine des Travailleurs Croisés (CATC).<sup>8</sup> The FO, overwhelmingly made up of European civil servants at its inception, was initially very insignificant to the Congolese labour movement. But, by 1959 the FO was also Africanized and transformed into the Confédération Congolaise des Syndicats Libres (CCSL).<sup>9</sup>

Initially, the Congolese trade union movement was extremely weak, both numerically and politically. By 1950, out of over 190,000 wage earners, only about 8,000 were affiliated with a trade union.<sup>10</sup> The reasons for such a small turnout are three-fold. First, the constant influx of rural migrants tended to undermine labour organising since trade union gains were easily offset by the large reserve army of labour left for capital to draw on. Secondly, because trade union activity was initiated externally -- as a product of Cold War politics -- there was a certain amount of hostility towards union organisers, especially those from the CGT.<sup>11</sup> Finally, there were sharp class divisions between the nascent leadership of the trade unions and labour. As a result of the decree of August 1944 legalizing trade union activity in French Equatorial Africa, it became mandatory for all organisers of trade unions to hold a certificate of graduation from primary school and be able to read and write in French.<sup>12</sup> Thus, leadership at the outset was vested in the educated Congolese, usually drawn from the ranks of the petty-bourgeoisie. The leaders exacerbated the ideological divisions by asking for dues ranging between 100-200 CFA per month -- a substantial sum for most wage earners in Brazzaville at the time.<sup>13</sup>

Nonetheless, as the trade unions became more Africanized and took on a more political character (led by the CGAT), the Congolese working class movement grew to heights unprecedented in most of Africa. By 1960, approximately 88% of the Congolese wage workers were affiliated with one of the three trade unions.<sup>14</sup>

\*This was the name of the region when it was part of l'Afrique Equatoriale Française (AEF).

However, the rise of trade unionism and working class consciousness was not a manifestation of an "economic" struggle between capital and labour at the workplace. Instead, the labour movement was forged and consolidated in the national political arena.

#### NATIONALIST POLITICS AND INDEPENDENCE

Before 1946, French Equatorial Africa had no political institutions or parties. However, under the 1946 Constitution, Moyen-Congo's restricted electorate, voting through separate colleges of European and African French citizens, was able to choose four representatives to the French parliamentary bodies, five to the Grand Council of French Equatorial Africa and 30 to its own territorial assembly.<sup>15</sup> The major Congolese political parties in 1946 were the Section Française de l'Internationale Ouvrière (SFIO, later to become the MSA, Mouvement Socialiste Africain in 1957) led by Jaques Opangault; the Parti Progressiste Congolais (PPC) founded by Jean-Felix Tchicaya; and the European dominated Rassemblement du Peuple Français (RPF).<sup>16</sup>

The first ten years of political activity since the 1946 Constitution were devoted mainly to a struggle to build a constituency. Otherwise, owing to the lack of African political power, Africans made little impact on the colonial policy. In fact, out of 750,000 Africans, only 23,035 were allowed to vote, and of these only 9,617 participated in the first territorial elections in 1946.<sup>17</sup> With the implementation of *loi cadre*, the dual college system and federal government-general were eliminated and the electorate was enlarged to comprise all adult Congolese. In addition, the territorial assembly's economic and fiscal powers were expanded.<sup>18</sup>

Coinciding with the expansion of African political power was the rise of Fulbert Youlou, who in 1956 formed the Union Democratique pour la Defense des Interets Africains (UDDIA). Youlou, a Catholic priest, built his political base by exploiting a messianic movement that had emerged among the Lari around an early Congolese nationalist leader named Andre Matsoua.<sup>19</sup> Since the Lari made up approximately 50% of the population, he was able to galvanize substantial political support. Thus, not only was Youlou able to accumulate enough votes to be elected mayor of Brazzaville in 1956 and vice president of Moyen-Congo's Government Council in 1957, but his opportunistic manipulation of "Matsouaism" undermined any attempts to forge a national consciousness.<sup>20</sup>

Youlou's UDDIA held the strongest political position during the decisive year of 1958, when the referendum was held in which France's overseas dependencies were to choose between independence or federation with France. It was over this important question that the CGAT, under the leadership of Aimé Matsika,

Julien Boukambou and Abel Thaulay-Ganga, became involved directly in Congolese politics. From the outset, the CGAT favoured complete independence from France and proposed that a plebiscite be held to ascertain the wishes of the Congolese working people. The three leaders also formed the Union de la Jeunesse Congolaise (UJC) to assist in the mobilization of workers and students struggling for complete independence. Nonetheless, Youlou and the UDDIA, as well as the majority of the Congolese voters were in favour of federation.<sup>21</sup>

After an overwhelming victory for federation with France, the question of who was to hold state power between the MSA and the UDDIA became the central issue. The UDDIA, holding a slight majority over the MSA (58% to 42%),<sup>22</sup> clearly intended to take over the presidency of the Government Council. However, it only held a majority position by exploiting Matsouaism. This in turn fostered ethnic antagonisms between the Lari in the South and the Mbochi in the North. The majority of the Mbochi and other northerners, therefore, supported either the MSA or the PPC.<sup>23</sup> With these ethnic political divisions, the birth of the Congo Republic on November 28, 1958, was marked by a series of riots and confrontations culminating in bloodshed and the arrest of Jaques Opangault.<sup>24</sup>

Thus, forged in opportunism, the Youlou regime was able to consolidate state power in 1958 and maintain control beyond independence in 1960.

#### THE DICTATORSHIP OF FULBERT YOULOU

Woungly-Massanga of the Union des Populations du Camérout (UPC) probably best characterised Youlou's regime. As he puts it,

*Jamais une dictature bourgeoise ne se présente à visage découvert; jamais elle n'avoue ses objectifs antisociaux et antipopulaires ni ses méthodes ouvertement antidémocratiques et souvent même terroristes et sanglantes.*<sup>25</sup>

With such a tenuous power base, Youlou focused mainly on destroying all opposition to his regime and gaining international support by taking a strong anti-communist stance. Although many MSA leaders were coopted into his regime by offers of ministerial posts, the labour unions, specifically the CGAT, stood in strong opposition. Even before independence Youlou attempted to isolate and destabilize the CGAT. In May of 1960, Youlou announced the discovery of a "communist plot" and arrested Julien Boukambou, Aimé Matsika, Doudy Ganga, Thaulay-Ganga, Simon-Pierre Kikhounga-Ngot and Alice Bandingana -- all leading members of either the CGAT or the UJC.<sup>26</sup> He then called a

State of Emergency and passed legislation banning any verbal or written expression attacking the State. Anyone possessing "subversive" material or caught making anti-government statements would be imprisoned for five years and fined between 5,000 to 1,000,000 CFA.<sup>27</sup> Furthermore, a law was passed permitting the expulsion or imprisonment of "personnes dont les agissements sont dangereux pour l'ordre, la sécurité publique ou le crédit de l'Etat, ou qui tendent manifestement à compromettre l'édification de la République du Congo . . ."28

Control of the State apparatus was the key factor in consolidating power through its increased bureaucratization. An understanding of the rise of the so-called "bureaucratic bourgeoisie" is vital if we are to understand the forms of class struggle and the historical development of the Congolese labour unions. In order to crystalize Lari support, Youlou filled and expanded the main governmental posts with Lari civil servants. This created a severe financial drain on the State. By 1962, the civil servants, accounting for less than 0.9% of the population, absorbed over 40% of the national budget.<sup>29</sup> In addition, the staffs of the 11 ministries between June 1959 and April 1960 increased by 100%.<sup>30</sup> The increasing disparities between the civil servants and wage workers were also becoming apparent. Between 1960-1962, the average monthly salary of a state functionary rose from 29,000 CFA to over 37,000 while the Brazzaville worker (being in the highest wage zone) averaged about 5,000 CFA for a forty-hour week in 1962.<sup>31</sup>

As civil servants slowly raised their standard of living, there was no effort toward solving the unemployment problem. For the purposes of political expediency, some token gestures were made to improve the conditions of the working class. First, in 1959, a law was passed making it mandatory to give some sort of compensation for workers injured on the job.<sup>32</sup> Secondly, the minimum wage zones were reduced to two: an urban zone (zone 1) and a rural zone (zone 2) with 18% to 42% wage increases respectively.<sup>33</sup> But these gains were offset by massive inflation rates and rising unemployment levels. Even on the policy level, the State had never intended to deal with the question of unemployment. The two-year plan (1961-63) only allocated 69 million CFA, out of a budget of 10,500 million CFA, to the "secteur du travail."<sup>34</sup> Out of this infinitesimal sum, 67 million was to be allocated for the professional training of functionaries, not for the creation of jobs for the unskilled unemployed masses.<sup>35</sup> In 1959, the Civique National Obligatoire was created to absorb the unemployed youth, but this institution was more a reaction to the increasing politicization of Congolese youth and was in effect ineffectual.<sup>36</sup>

Youlou's regime also further exacerbated both the unemployment problem as well as the rural-urban exodus by implementing

a very short-sighted, opportunistic policy. He would often extract large sums of money from the Fonds Routier in order to appease the unemployed by offering temporary jobs for a couple of weeks.<sup>37</sup> Much of this money was earmarked for the development of infrastructure in the rural areas. Furthermore, at the very moment 500 homes were being destroyed in the rural areas by the flooding of the Congo River, Youlou's regime had announced its plans to finance 160 dwellings in Brazzaville, Pointe Noire and Dolisie.<sup>38</sup> After Congolese workers were expelled from Gabon in the Fall of 1962, conditions became unbearable.

With worsening economic conditions, Youlou's regime intensified its repression and moved toward the creation of a one-party state. On July 1, 1962, all associations deemed harmful to national unity were banned and by August 1, 1962, the three existing political parties were dissolved.<sup>39</sup> In spite of increased repression, the major labour unions, the CGAT, CCSL and CATC, formed a joint committee on July 5, 1963 and presented a list of demands to Youlou. These demands included drastic government reforms, elections of a new legislative body and the dismissal of corrupt ministers -- notably Dominique Nzalakanda, Minister of Justice. After several days of talks, on August 6, Youlou suddenly broke off negotiations and announced the creation of a single party state -- declaring a state of emergency on August 15, 1963.<sup>40</sup>

The joint committee of labour unions, unified and organized, called a general strike on August 13, 1963. The general strike was by no means meant to bring about Youlou's overthrow, but was in protest to the government's repressive measures.<sup>41</sup> In retaliation, Youlou had Julien Boukambou of the CGAT and Gilbert Pongault of the CATC arrested. But this was not enough to quell the mass movement. On August 13, 3,000 workers demonstrating in Brazzaville in defiance of the state of emergency and the gendarmes, stormed the prison and freed Boukambou and Pongault. Youlou called in French troops, in vain. By August 15, the crowd, having grown to some 7,000, converged on the presidential palace and forced Youlou to resign. Thus ended what has gone down in history as "Les Trois Glorieuses."

#### LABOUR UNION UNIFICATION AND THE RISE OF THE MNR

"Les Trois Glorieuses" was not an army-led coup d'état. Nor was it a seizure of power preceded by years of guerilla warfare. Instead, it was a popular, yet spontaneous, proletarian seizure of power, organized and led by the labour unions. As one writer has put it, the labour unions were the "grande et seule force d'unification urbaine."<sup>42</sup> Thus the labour unions were able to overcome Youlou's "ethnic politics" of divide and rule while also being able to, as Marx puts it, "organise a

regular cooperation between employed and unemployed."<sup>43</sup>

However, after taking State power, the labour unions had totally given it away. After urging workers to go back to work, they formed the Conseil National de la Révolution (CNR), appointing Alphonse Massamba-Débat as leader. The provisional government included Massamba-Débat as Prime Minister and Minister of the Armed Forces as well as hitherto politically unknown figures such as Pascal Lissouba, Bernard Galiba, Paul Kaya, Edouard Babackas, Charles Ganao and Jules N'Koukou.<sup>44</sup> Although the labour unions were key in the formation of the provisional government, not a single labour leader appeared on the unions' list of potential cabinet members!<sup>45</sup>

The labour unions' refusal to form a political party and take control of the state, especially under the leadership of the CGAT, seems puzzling on the surface. The CGAT, ever since it was a wing of the CGT, maintained a hard core Marxist-Leninist line and thus, the dictatorship of the proletariat was always considered in the long term. As far back as 1958 at the Territorial Congress of the CGAT in Brazzaville, union leader Matingou Firmin had said, "Si les travailleurs s'unissaient au sein de syndicats, il n'y aurait plus besoin de députés."<sup>46</sup>

This view, however, was not shared by all and therefore, serious ideological differences arose. The CATC, a Christian based, apolitical trade union, was by no means prepared to build socialism under the leadership of a workers state. In fact, the CATC's decision to unite with the CGAT and CCSL was seen only as a short term means to an end -- to confront Fulbert Youlou. A proposal to merge the three labour unions was in fact, suggested by the CGAT in 1958, but Fidèle Bemba, the CATC representative was strongly against it:

*La CGAT prend les syndicalistes qui ne sont pas de son bord pour des imbéciles; en ce qui nous concerne, la CATC se refuse à toute unification sur les bases proposées par la CGAT qui ne cherche qu'à communiser les autres centrales.*<sup>47</sup>

Regardless of the wishes of the CATC, the CGAT and the CCSL, with the support of the State, led by the newly created Mouvement National de la Révolution (MNR), opted for a merger between all Congolese trade unions. With the MNR's stated goals being to build socialism in the Congo, the logic of the merger was to strengthen labour's political role in the running of the State apparatus and assist in the transformation from peripheral capitalism to socialism. At the Annual Congress of the CATC in September of 1964, it voted against the merger and the politicization of its union -- the postal workers dissenting.<sup>48</sup> Thereafter, Fulgence Biayoula, the president of the

CATC was arrested--thus making the State's position quite clear.<sup>49</sup> In spite of strong CATC opposition, the CCSL, CGAT, the Confédération des Fonctionnaires, Fédération Postale and some autonomous unions, merged to become the Confédération des Syndicats Congolais (CSC) on November 24, 1964.<sup>50</sup>

The existence of the CATC separate from the CSC caused no legal problems initially since Article I of the loi du 17 décembre 1964, creating the CSC, specifically stated that the CSC would be maintained "sur la base du principe de l'adhésion volontaire." That notwithstanding, the State targeted the CATC. First, on October 28, 1964, Pascal Okiemba, an official of the CATC, was dismissed from his position as Minister of Justice with no justification. Secondly, three months later, four CATC members were expelled from the MNR politburo.<sup>51</sup> By Spring of 1965, Massamba-Débat's regime had finally decided to wage an all-out war against the CATC, dissolving all trade unions with the exception of the CSC.<sup>52</sup>

Unfortunately for the working class in general, the CSC supported the repressive measures levelled against the CATC. In fact, Idrissa Diallo, the main policy spokesman for the CSC, denounced the CATC and its leaders.<sup>53</sup> The end result was that it divided the rank and file and weakened the labour movement--the very thing the merger opposed. As the CSC's Preamble states:

*La classe ouvrière congolaise s'oppose résolument au pluralisme syndical et rejette l'apolitisme des syndicats qui ont pour but de maintenir les travailleurs dans un état de fait basé sur des prétextes d'idéologie, la désorganisation de la classe ouvrière, l'affaiblissement de la lutte, le tatonnement, l'anarchie, le tribalisme, etc...*<sup>54</sup>

The rejection of the CATC on the grounds of its apolitical attitude, especially in view of the fact that the Republic of the Congo was not yet a workers State and the CATC made up 41% of the workforce, was an extremely unfortunate error. Lenin even warned:

*Under no circumstances must trade union members be required to subscribe to any special political views; in this respect, as well as in respect of religion, the trade unions must be non-partisan.*<sup>55</sup>

The question of the CSC's autonomy from the State was taken quite seriously by the Union's leadership. Though it supported the MNR and the construction of socialism in the Congo, the CSC "soutient toute action politique conforme aux intérêts des masses populaires et lutte contre la domestication

des syndicats, est indépendante vis-à-vis du Gouvernement et des autres formations professionnelles."<sup>56</sup> Nevertheless, the weakening of the working class and the manner by which the merger took place prepared the ground for its subsumption under the hegemony of the State. The further weakening of the labour movement can be seen through an analysis of Massamba-Débat's labour policy.

"LA DOMESTICATION DES SYNDICATS": LABOUR POLICY AND THE MNR

Massamba-Débat's "socialist" regime initially had to take a pro-labour stance vis-à-vis the rapid mobilization of labour under the leadership of the joint committee of trade unions. One of the first tasks of the MNR government was to create an employment committee to look into the problems and roots of unemployment.<sup>57</sup> Thus the National Consultative Commission of Labour was set up to study the problems of labour and deal with various disputes between labour and capital. Included on the staff were Jean-Claude Ganga (CATC) and Paul Banthoud (CGAT). Probably the most significant move on the part of the MNR government was to re-write the 1952 Labour Code created under French colonialism.

The new Labour Code of 1964 made the National Consultative Commission of Labour essentially a continuing governmental body and thus increased the role of the State in labour affairs. It also expanded the State's responsibilities in terms of providing various forms of workers' compensation.<sup>58</sup> In 1965, the Labour Code had been altered to include the CSC as the sole representative of labour. In fact, the whole composition of collective bargaining was changed so that the CSC would serve as the only liaison between capital and labour.<sup>59</sup>

Following the "legitimization" of the CSC as the sole voice of Congolese workers, Massamba-Débat initiated a campaign to neutralize its leadership. CGAT leaders who had led the overthrow of Youlou, such as Julien Boukambou, Aimé Matsika and Abel Thaulay-Ganga, were demoted from responsible cabinet positions to obscure governmental posts within the first few years. Matsika for instance, was transferred to head civil aviation after eight months of serving as Minister of Trade and Industry.<sup>60</sup> Moreover, the more radical leaders of the CSC-- Idris Diallo, Paul Banthoud, Bernard Zoniaba and Claude Ndalla-- were forced out of the government one by one.<sup>61</sup> The dismissal of Paul Banthoud, then the General Secretary of the CSC, provides the most vivid example. At the Second Congress of the CSC held in April 1967, he warned the State that the CSC would not be "domesticated."<sup>62</sup> After calling for the nationalization of banks and industries, Banthoud was summarily dismissed.<sup>63</sup>

As the State's commitment to labour diminished, so did the conditions of the Congolese working class. The problem of unemployment went unabated during Massamba-Débat's tenure in office.<sup>64</sup> The unemployment problem was so pressing, that in October of 1966, the National Assembly opened with the question of employment stability.<sup>65</sup>

The overall economic picture magnified the problems of the Congolese wage workers and unemployed. By 1967, the nation's total exports only amounted to a little over 11,700 million CFA while imports reached over 20,000 million CFA.<sup>66</sup> To make matters worse, State expenditures--of which nearly 70% was wasted on civil servants salaries--grew fourfold since 1960, rising from 3.9 billion CFA to 14.5 billion in 1967.

While the conditions of the working class deteriorated, the so-called "revolutionary" government did nothing to quell the rising bureaucratic bourgeoisie--leaving the same exploitative patterns and structures established under Youlou intact. After one year of the MNR's rule, State expenditures on civil servants' salaries rose from 50% of the total budget in 1963 to 62% in 1964.<sup>68</sup> In fact, by the end of 1966, official policy was directed toward the professional training of functionaries as opposed to alleviating the rural-urban exodus and the problems of unemployment. In a "Résolution sur la Formation Professionnelle" passed in October of 1966, trained personnel, in both the private and public sector, were allowed certain tax breaks and various other benefits. Furthermore, it stated that the task of the CSC was to support and protect the interests of the Congo's bureaucrats.<sup>69</sup>

The latter's significance cannot be overstressed. Since the bureaucracy can only reproduce itself as a class by aligning with imperialism, which in turn exploits Congolese wage workers, then wage workers and the bureaucratic bourgeoisie's interests are diametrically opposed.<sup>70</sup> Nonetheless, both classes were supposedly represented by the State's single "labour union." The result of such an unholy alliance is bureaucratic control of what was once the political voice of the working class.

Though the bureaucratic bourgeoisie controlled the State, it did not constitute the only source of real political power in the Congo. Students, as well as the ultra-left Jeunesse du Mouvement National de la Révolution (JMNR) placed pressure on the State for more radical changes in the MNR's policies. The power of the JMNR was quite real in that since the overthrow of Youlou, it has had *de facto* control over the Armed Forces. As the MNR moved toward destabilizing the political power of labour, it set out to consolidate its own political power by dismantling the power of the JMNR. This was to be accomplish-

ed by the creation of a "People's Army."<sup>71</sup> Both the army and the civil defense corps were placed under the control of the MNR's politburo. This was followed by a total re-arrangement of army commanders. Massamba-Débat also dismissed Ambroise Noumazalaye--the leading spokesman of the left faction within the State--from his position as Prime Minister and took over the premiership himself.<sup>72</sup>

After implementing a whole series of repressive measures, including the arrest of popular military commander, Marien Nguabi, the very army created to protect the interests of the State overthrew Massamba-Débat on September 4, 1968.<sup>75</sup> The new "Conseil National de la Révolution" was led by Captain Marien Nguabi.

#### THE FINAL BLOW TO PROLETARIAN ORGANISATION

The character of Nguabi's seizure of power appears quite contradictory.<sup>74</sup> The Party which he and Pierre Nze had formed to rule the country--Parti Congolais du Travail (PCT)--claims to be the Marxist-Leninist vanguard party of the Congolese Revolution. Although the proletarian character of the "Revolution" is clearly stated, the proletariat did not take part in the overthrow of Massamba-Débat.<sup>75</sup> In fact, the CSC's weakness in the process of Nguabi's seizure of power and formation of a new government came under sharp criticism from the Union's rank and file members.<sup>76</sup>

It was obvious, however, that by the time Nguabi came to power, the CSC was an ineffective organisation for worker's representation. Under Article 21 of the act creating the CNR, the CSC, as well as the JMNK, were tentatively disbanded and placed under a Commission of Special Organisations.<sup>77</sup> Even after the CSC was allowed to function as an organisation, its whole Central Committee was dismissed and replaced.<sup>78</sup>

What the purposes and results of these moves were, it is difficult to say. Nevertheless, the Congo, under the leadership of the PCT, took on what appeared to be a far more revolutionary character. The Congo became Africa's first People's Republic; it adopted a new red flag with the hammer and sickle; the State was to be governed on the principles of democratic centralism; while workers and civil servants alike walked the streets of Brazzaville in Mao-styled uniforms.<sup>79</sup> The PCT, to some extent, also went beyond appearances. For the first time, with the construction of the Port at Ouessou, substantial sums of money went to the development of the hitherto neglected northern parts of the country.<sup>80</sup> In terms of reforms for the working class, in January of 1975, Nguabi's government finally eliminated the second wage zone and instituted a single national minimum wage of 13,500 CFA per month--a 70% increase from the

previous levels.<sup>81</sup> The latter was necessary as a means to slow the rapid increase of rural-urban migrants. The rate of unemployment for the male population in Pointe Noire alone had risen from 20% in 1962 to 36% by 1970.<sup>82</sup> By 1972, 42.6% of the Congolese people lived in the cities.<sup>83</sup>

For the PCT to regard itself as the party of labour, it certainly had little faith in the toiling masses. Nguabi argued that the Congolese working class was not really prepared to constitute the "vanguard" of the revolution, and thus needed preparation in order to rule themselves.<sup>84</sup> Hence the question:

*Qu'est-ce que la démocratisation pour les syndicats? C'est la prise de conscience de classe de chaque travailleur de tout événement d'ordre politique, social, économique ou culturel, national ou international pour une prise de position en assemblée générale des travailleurs, dans l'ordre et la discipline, et dans le respect des principes de la Révolution Socialiste.*<sup>85</sup>

There is no doubt that political education and the mobilization of all Congolese working people was a necessary task, but by the early 1970's, the character of the CSC had changed in such a way that the very leadership and the interests the union represented were actually diametrically opposed to the Congolese working class.

Under Nguabi, the increased bureaucratization of the State apparatus went unabated. By 1972, the number of civil servants had reached 26,000, absorbing approximately 75% of the national budget.<sup>86</sup> Nguabi was not only aware of the fact that the bureaucratization of the State was the major drain on the nation's resources, but he also recognised the existence of class struggle between the bureaucratic bourgeoisie and the proletariat.<sup>87</sup> Nguabi in fact, had stated that the only way to reduce the over 4 1/2 billion CFA deficit was to dismiss 3/4 of the civil servants.<sup>88</sup> As a class, however, they were too powerful to be reckoned with and subsequently gained power over all state institutions--including the CSC. The CSC, under Nguabi, had actually become a power base of the bureaucracy. Since the bureaucratic class did not have total control over the coercive apparatus of the State, the CSC was one of the avenues by which the bureaucratic bourgeoisie waged class struggle.

In September of 1969, the civil servants, led by the CSC, struck over delays in the payment of salaries. Rather than submit to the demands, Nguabi dissolved the Executive Bureau of the CSC and dismissed the Secretary of State for

Finance, who is said to have led the strike.<sup>89</sup> The ease at which the strike was destroyed lies in the fact that the effectiveness of a labour organisation as a source of political power is based on the full support of the working classes, utilising various methods including strikes, slowdowns and work stoppages. But the Congolese working class had done very little in support of the strikers. This is the fundamental contradiction. A similar occurrence took place on March 24, 1976. The CSC called a general strike in protest of the implementation of a single wage agreement for all State employees--a policy which counterposes the civil servants directly.<sup>90</sup> Again, the majority of workers did not come out in support of the strike. Thus the strike was easily destroyed, resulting in the arrests of CSC General Secretary Anatole Khondo as well as CSC leaders Charles Madzou and Ekamba Elombe.<sup>91</sup>

It was obvious to the working class that the CSC was no longer an organisation working in their interests. This was most evident in the "unauthorised" strikes of the Congo-Océan Railway employees in 1971. When negotiations were to begin to draw up a new contract, the railway workers not only refused the CSC delegation as their representatives, but demanded a new collective labour agreement and the right to choose their own union officials.<sup>92</sup> The five-day strike was marred by violence; several were wounded and one person was killed. Nevertheless, the railway workers held out and an agreement was made through direct negotiations. Though the question of union representation was never resolved, the workers were able to negotiate a 35% wage increase and various other benefits.<sup>93</sup>

Ngouabi was eventually assassinated in 1977, and the leadership has moved from Brigadier General Joachim Yhombi Opango to the present presidency of Colonel Denis Sassou Nguesso. The PCT's labour policy has nevertheless remained virtually unchanged. With Ngouabi murdered, the bureaucratic bourgeoisie has been able to gain more control over the State apparatus. Paradoxically, while the economic conditions worsen (with an annual inflation rate of over 90%)<sup>94</sup> the CSC has become more docile. By 1981, the PCT politburo could brag of "increasing unity" and "cohesion within the party and the consolidation of democracy."<sup>95</sup>

Thus the single Congolese labour union had moved far beyond "domestication" by the mid 1970's. Hughes Bertrand has clearly recognised the transformation in the very nature of the CSC:

*Les luttes qui peuvent apparaître entre la direction du parti et les représentants syndicaux reflètent moins les oppositions entre prolétariat*

*et bourgeoisie bureaucratique, qu'entre couche subalternes d'employés simplement entre les diverses tendances au sein de la haute bureaucratie politique et administrative.*<sup>96</sup>

#### CONCLUSION

The Congolese experience is a clear indication that an alliance of workers, youth, unemployed and certain elements of the intelligentsia have the capacity, with proper organisation, to seize State power. Though this was clearly a revolutionary accomplishment, we must also recognise its mistakes. First, though a large segment of the trade union leadership had a high level of revolutionary consciousness, they attempted to build a revolutionary movement within the structures of the trade unions rather than expand the movement into an effective political organisation with the express purpose of building socialism.<sup>97</sup> Because of the broad economic nature of trade union organisation, the unification of the unions under the ideological hegemony of the CGAT simply caused dissension and weakened the entire labour movement. Furthermore, the creation of the CSC, subsumed under the MNR, set up the machinery for its "bureaucratization." The latter point is vital: as soon as the CSC became nothing more than a wing of the State, it was no longer a weapon through which the proletariat could wage an effective struggle. Instead, it became an institution, with different classes vying for its control. Thus, by the early 1970's the CSC was no longer an organisation representing the working class--the bureaucratic bourgeoisie had seized full control.

On a more general level, we must also recognise that arming the people with the principles of Marxism-Leninism, though extremely important in its own right, is simply not enough. The opportunistic way in which Marxist ideology is used in the Congo is no different from the manner in which nationalism, as an ideology, is used in most other African countries. This is nothing more than "left Bonapartism." Bertrand has noted in reference to the PCT, that for an organisation "qui se dit 'avant-garde prolétarienne', il n'y a ni moyen d'expression, ni moyens d'organisation propres à la classe ouvrière; le prolétariat est muet."<sup>98</sup>

To close on a note of pessimism, however, would be to fly in the face of a rich history of working class resistance and revolutionary fervor among the Congolese working people. In real terms, the Congolese proletariat is one of Africa's most revolutionary. Not only does it have a history of both economic and political struggle, but the Congolese working class is armed with the ideology of liberation. At this juncture in history, the Congolese proletariat needs to re-organise itself outside



the structures of the CSC. It must not only organise and raise the level of consciousness among the urban wage workers, but it must begin to build strong political links with the peasantry. In the final analysis, the working class must once again rise up and lead the struggle against imperialism and for the creation of a socialist society.

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup>The labour aristocracy thesis was originally developed by Franz Fanon in The Wretched of the Earth (New York, 1968) and expanded by Giovanni Arrighi, "International Corporations, Labor Aristocracies and Economic Development in Tropical Africa" Imperialism and Underdevelopment ed. R.I. Rhodes (New York, 1970).

<sup>2</sup>Bill Freund, "Labor and Labor History in Africa: A Review of the Literature" Paper presented to African Studies Assoc. December 1983, p. 12.

<sup>3</sup>See Georges Balandier, Sociologie des Brazzaville Noires (Paris, 1955) for more in depth treatment of labour migration to the urban areas.

<sup>4</sup>Hughes Bertrand, Le Congo: Formation Sociale et Mode de Développement Économique (Paris, 1975) p. 121.

<sup>5</sup>Journal des Débats de l'Assemblée Législative du Congo. Session Extraordinaire June 27--July 1, 1959, p. 7.

<sup>6</sup>République du Congo, Direction du Service National de la Statistique, des Etudes Démographiques et économiques, Annuaire Statistique (1958-1963) n. d. p. 5.

<sup>7</sup>ibid. p. 5-6; René Gauze, The Politics of Congo-Brazzaville (Stanford, 1973) p. 1; By 1959 on the eve of independence, it was estimated that industrial wage workers in Brazzaville alone, numbered over 57,000, amounting to 12.5% of the adult population. See Bulletin de l'Afrique Noire, September 6, 1959, p. 1953.

<sup>8</sup>For more on the effects of the Reserve Army of Labour, see Karl Marx, Capital, Vol. I (London, William Glaiser, Ltd., 1920) pp. 642-665.

<sup>9</sup>Jean-Michel Wagret, Histoire et Sociologie Politique de la République du Congo (Brazzaville) (Paris, 1963) pp. 209-11; René Gauze, The Politics pp. 51-54.

<sup>10</sup>Jean-Michel Wagret, Histoire pp. 209-211; René Gauze, The Politics p. 58.

<sup>11</sup>Georges Balandier, Brazzaville Noires p. 96.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid. p. 97; See also (J)ournal (O)fficuel de l'(A)frique (E)quatorial (F)rançaise, September 1, 1944.

<sup>13</sup>Georges Balandier, Brazzaville Noires p. 97.

<sup>14</sup>Samir Amin and Catherine Coquery-Vidrovitch, Histoire Economique du Congo, 1880-1968 (Paris, 1967) p. 144; Below are estimates of the three major unions' percentages of working class support made by Samir Amin:

	CATC	CGAT	CCSL
1954	14%	6%	33%
1960	43%	29%	16%

<sup>15</sup>René Gauze, The Politics, pp. xx-xxii.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid. pp. 4-9; Woungly-Massaga, La Révolution au Congo (Paris, 1974) pp. 124-7.

<sup>17</sup>René Gauze, The Politics, p. 9.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid. p. xxiv.

<sup>19</sup>Matsoua (whose real name was André Grenard) founded the Association Amicale des Originaires de L'AEF. He was arrested in Paris in the 1930's because of his attempts to organise the Lari in the Congo and deported to Chad where he escaped in 1935. He was later re-arrested in France and sent back to the Congo, to die in Mayama Prison in 1942. The Lari however, did not believe he was dead. See Martial Sinda, André Matsoua, Fondateur du Mouvement de libération du Congo (Belgique, 1978).

<sup>20</sup>Woungly-Massaga, Révolution, pp. 131.

<sup>21</sup>René Gauze, The Politics, p. 57.

<sup>22</sup>Marcel Soret, Histoire du Congo, Paris 1978, p. 188.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid. pp. 66-68.

<sup>24</sup>Woungly-Massaga, Révolution, p. 136; Marcel Soret, Histoire du Congo, p. 189. The most intense riots were at the convening of the Territorial Assembly and in Poto-Poto, an African township outside of Brazzaville, in mid-February.

<sup>25</sup>Woungly-Massaga, Révolution, p. 136.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid. p. 144.

<sup>27</sup>Journal des Débats, 1ère Session Ordinaire, 1960, p.8.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid. p. 8.

<sup>29</sup>Jean-Michel Wagret, Histoire, p. 141. A Report of the Labour Inspector in 1959 noted that the chauffeur of a Brazzaville administrator earned an average of 21,000 CFA francs per month while a chauffeur in the private sector only earned an average of 7,000 per month.

<sup>30</sup>René Gauze, The Politics p. 142. This is easily verified by perusing the (J)ournal (O)fficuel de la (R)épublique du (C)ongo for the given years.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid. p. 138.

<sup>32</sup>République du Congo (Brazzaville), La République du Congo A Trois Ans Brazzaville, 28 Novembre 1961, p. 37.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid. p. 38.

<sup>34</sup>République du Congo, Ministère des Finances, du Plan et de l'équipement, Loi-Programme: Triennal du Développement de la République du Congo (n.d.) (1961-1963) p. 12.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid. p. 12.

<sup>36</sup>Journal de Débats, Session Extraordinaire, June 27-- July 1, 1959 p. 7; Ministère de L'Information, Congo Moderne: Discours Prononcé par Monsieur Stéphane Tchicelle Brazzaville October 1960, p. 7.

<sup>37</sup>René Gauze, The Politics p. 141.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid. p. 141.

<sup>39</sup>JO/RC July 1, 1962 and August 1, 1962; The National Assembly in fact supported the creation of a single party state and on April 15, 1963, it voted unanimously in favour. JO/RC April 15, 1963 p. 383.

<sup>40</sup>JO/RC August 15, 1963 p. 718.

<sup>41</sup>It is generally accepted that the Joint Committee did not intend to overthrow Youlou, Interview with Serge Mukendi 3/12/84.

<sup>42</sup>Samir Amin and Catherine Coquery-Vidrovitch, Histoire du Congo p. 144; This statement was written in a section prepared by Amin. This position is also supported by Pierre Bonnafre, "Une Classe d'Age politique: La JMNR de la République du Congo-Brazzaville" Cahier D'Etudes Africaines 31 (8) 1968, p. 332 and Vladimir Shundeyev, "New Way in Congo People's Republic" African Communist 59 (4) 1974, p. 89.

<sup>43</sup>Marx op. cit. p. 655.

<sup>44</sup>JO/RC September 1, 1963, p. 747.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid. p. 747.

<sup>46</sup>Quoted in Jean-Michel Wagret, p. 184.

<sup>47</sup>Quoted in Jean-Michel Wagret, p. 210.

<sup>48</sup>René Gauze, p. 160.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid. p. 160.

<sup>50</sup>JO/RC January 1, 1965 by loi du/17 décembre 1964, p.5.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid. p. 5

<sup>52</sup>René Gauze, The Politics, p. 160.

<sup>53</sup>JO/RC June 15, 1965 p. 359.

<sup>54</sup>Marchés Tropicaux et Méditerranéens November 26, 1964.

<sup>55</sup>JO/RC January 1, 1965, p. 5.

<sup>56</sup>V. I. Lenin, "The Role and Functions of the Trade Unions Under the New Economic Policy" Collected Works vol. 33 Moscow 1966, p. 188.

<sup>57</sup>JO/RC January 1, 1965, p. 6, Article 5 of CSC's Constitution.

<sup>58</sup>JO/RC March 1, 1964, p. 170; This committee was made up of six government officials, five representatives of capital, five labour union officials and one academician.

<sup>59</sup>See JO/RC July 9, 1964, pp. 560-566, for a copy of the "Code du Travail"

<sup>60</sup>JO/RC June 1, 1965, pp. 342-344.

<sup>61</sup>See René Gauze, p. 213 and 253.

<sup>62</sup>Ibid. p. 213.

<sup>63</sup>Afrique Nouvelle, April 26, 1967.

<sup>64</sup>He was also accused of misappropriating 12 million CFA. This may be true, but in view of the political climate at the time, these charges are more likely to have been trumped up. See "M. Massamba-Débat Clarifie une situation ambiguë." Marchés Tropicaux et Méditerranéens January 20, 1968.

<sup>65</sup>Although no statistics were available for this period, the annual report of the Conseil Economique et Social stated: "Le marché du travail ne semble pas avoir subi de modifications essentielles..." République du Congo, Conseil Economique et Social, Rapport Annuel 1965-1966 Brazzaville, (n.d.).

<sup>66</sup>Ibid. p. 175.

<sup>67</sup>République du Congo, Bulletin Mensuel des Statistiques No. 57, March 1968.

<sup>68</sup>Rene Gauze, The Politics, p. 164; République du Congo, Bulletin Mensuel des Statistiques No. 66, December 1968.

<sup>69</sup>"Le Redressment Progressif Mais Difficile de la République du Congo-Brazzaville" Marchés Tropicaux et Méditerranéens August 1, 1964, p. 1870.

<sup>70</sup>République du Congo, Conseil Economique 1965-66 p. 178.

<sup>71</sup>This is not the place to elaborate on the reproduction of this parasitic class and its relationship to the Congolese proletariat, but a penetrating analysis is found in Hughes Bertrand, Le Congo: Formation Sociale et Mode de Développement Economique (Paris, 1975).

<sup>72</sup>JO/RC July 15, 1966, p. 421.

<sup>73</sup>Rene Gauze, The Politics, p. 165.

<sup>74</sup>See "Remous-lents à s'apaiser au Congo-Brazzaville" Marchés Tropicaux et Méditerranéens October 26, 1968; "Le Congo-Brazzaville en Proie à la Révolution" Le Monde March 25, 1970.

<sup>75</sup>Some commentators have reduced the power struggles between Nguabi and Massamba-Débat to ethnic quarrels or "tribalism." On appearances only, this would seem to be the case since Nguabi and his cabinet were northerners in a hitherto Lari dominated political superstructure. Granted, riots between these two groups did occur after Nguabi came to power, nevertheless the struggle has a material base--the struggle over the control of the State. Some of these commentators include Arthur House, "Brazzaville: Revolution or Rhetoric" Africa Report April 1971; "Le Congo-Brazzaville: à l'avant-garde de la révolution" Marchés Tropicaux et Méditerranéens January 17, 1970.

<sup>76</sup>See P. Decraene, "Congo-Brazzaville: Deux Capitaines au Pouvoir?" Revue Française d'Etudes Politiques Africaines September 1968.

<sup>77</sup>Agence France Presse, Africa August 8, 1968.

<sup>78</sup>JO/RC August 15, 1968, p. 383; See also Simon Kimba, "Le Congo-Brazzaville est toujours en proie à des difficultés politiques" Afrique Nouvelle November 5, 1969.

<sup>79</sup>"Le Congo-Brazzaville: à l'avant-garde de la révolution" Marchés Tropicaux et Méditerranéens January 17, 1970 p. 119.

<sup>80</sup>"Le régime de la République Populaire du Congo se radicalise" Marchés Tropicaux et Méditerranéens April 24, 1971, p. 1147.

<sup>81</sup>Ibid. p. 1147.

<sup>82</sup>(A)frica (C)ontemporary (R)ecord 1975-76, p. B474-5.

<sup>83</sup>J. L. Lierdeman, Le Modèle de Croissance Démographique de Pointe Noire ORSTOM 1970.

<sup>84</sup>Hughes Bertrand, Le Congo, p. 121.

<sup>85</sup>This attitude is clear in Marien Nguabi, "Scientific Socialism in Africa" World Marxist Review 18 (5) May 1975; \_\_\_\_\_, "Address to the leaders of the CSC, March 18, 1973" Vers la Construction d'une Société Socialiste en Afrique Paris, 1975.

<sup>86</sup>Marien Nguabi, Vers la Construction, p. 100.

<sup>87</sup>Hughes Bertrand, Le Congo, p. 121; Marcel Soret, Histoire du Congo, p. 202.

<sup>88</sup>See Hughes Bertrand, p. 114; Marien Nguabi, Vers la Construction.

<sup>89</sup>ACR 1969-70, p. B-422.

<sup>90</sup>ACR 1976-77, p. B-492-3; Also, Hughes Bertrand has estimated that in 1972, 26,000 civil servants received 11 million CFA while 27,500 regular State employees earned about 8 million CFA, (p. 121).

<sup>91</sup> ACR 1976-77, p. B-492-3.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid. p. B-493.

<sup>93</sup> ACR 1971-72, p. B-495-6.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid. p. B-496.

<sup>95</sup> ACR 1978-79, p. B-543.

<sup>96</sup> Agence France Presse, Africa, May 5, 1981, p. 26.

<sup>97</sup> Hughes Bertrand, Le Congo, p. 121.

<sup>98</sup> Lenin had warned that the revolutionary movement must go beyond the confines of trade unionism. V. I. Lenin, "What is to be Done: Burning Questions of Our Movement" Selected Works, v. I, Moscow, 1960.

<sup>99</sup> Hughes Bertrand, Le Congo, P. 120.

SOCIAL STRUCTURE IN PRECOLONIAL NAMIBIA:  
A LINGUISTIC ANALYSIS\*

by

Anita Pfouts

The following points should be borne in mind in relation to the subject matter of this paper:

1. Namibia is presently under the illegal colonial regime of South Africa. This means that little work has been done to develop an historiography of Namibia independent from that of South Africa.
2. Prior to South African colonial rule, Namibia was part of the German colonial empire (German South West Africa); hence material written during and about the late 19th and early 20th centuries is in German. A few of these books have been translated, most notably, South-West Africa Under German Rule 1894-1914, by Helmut Bley and Let Us Die Fighting by Horst Dreschler.
3. For the precolonial era, one book (Vedder: South-west Africa in Early Times, 1938) has been cited more than any other. Even if all the author's observations are accurate, the book was written nearly fifty years ago by a member of the European clergy thus his interpretation and point of view are in need of revision. Travelers' accounts, a few anthropological and ethnographic studies, relating for the most part to the hunting and gathering populations, and a small body of linguistic work complete the literature. Obviously little effort has been made toward an historical approach which would utilize material from all available disciplines and which would be produced in English.
4. There has been material, in English, since the time of Michael Scott (A Time to Speak, 1958), which gives a view of Namibia under the Germans and the South Africans and of the crimes against the Namibian

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