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 missed
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 he crushed and
redeemed, a penny a piece are screaming down
black cots 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 Robin D. G. Kelley

The problems of socialist transformation in Africa have
been blamed on two counts: the "ambiguities" of African na-
tionalism and the development of a "labour aristocracy." AFR-
ican 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 material-
ist 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 peasan-
try, rather than the working class, to constitute the revolu-
tionary 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 organi-
sations are organisations of the working class. But this pre-
mise, 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 un-
der the state in peripheral capitalist countries. This includes
labour unions. Therefore, in many of these countries, the la-
bour 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, "is for the union and who would
lead it."

An analysis of the labour movement in the People's Repub-
lic of the Congo sheds new light on both of these burning ques-
tions. 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. 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. Table 1 gives an indication of the demographic changes which have taken place as a result of this migratory pattern.

Table 1

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>85.7%</td>
<td>82%</td>
<td>74.4%</td>
<td>57.4%</td>
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<td>Urban</td>
<td>14.3%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>25.6%</td>
<td>42.6%</td>
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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. 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 15%. 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.

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 Francaise des Travailleurs Chrétien (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 Croyants (CACT). 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).

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. The reasons for such a small turnout are threefold. First, the constant influx of rural migrants tended to undermine labour organizing 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 organizers, especially those from the CGT. 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 organizers of trade unions to hold a certificate of graduation from primary school and be able to read and write in French. 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.

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. This was the name of the region when it was part of I'Afrique Equatoriale Francaise (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 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. The major Congolese political parties in 1946 were the Section Française de l'Internationale Ouvrière (SFTI), later to become the MSA, Mouvement Socialiste Africain (MSA) led by Jacques Ospangault, the Parti Progressiste Congolais (PPC) founded by Jean-Félix Tchicaya; and the European-dominated Rassemblement du Peuple Français (RPF).

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. 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.

Coinciding with the expansion of African political power was the rise of Fulbert Youlou, who in 1956 formed the Union Démocratique pour la Défense des Intérêts Africains (UDIA). 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 André Mutsa. 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 "Matsoatism" undermined any attempts to forge a national consciousness.

Youlou's UDIA 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 Mutsa, 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 UDIA, as well as the majority of the Congolese voters were in favour of federation.

After an overwhelming victory for federation with France, the question of who was to hold state power between the MSA and the UDIA became the central issue. The UDIA, holding a slight majority over the MSA (55% to 42%), clearly intended to take over the presidency of the Government Council. However, it only held a majority position by exploiting Matsoatism. 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. With these ethnic political divisions, the birth of the Congo Republic on November 29, 1960, was marked by a series of riots and confrontations culminating in bloodshed and the arrest of Jacques Ospangault.

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**

Woongly-Nassa of the Union des Populations du Cameroun (UPC) probably best characterised Youlou's regime. As he put it,

"Je n'ai jamais été dictateur bourguignon, je ne suis pas voleur, je ne me suis pas totalement aliéné.

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 Mutsa, Doudy Ganga, Thaulay-Ganga, Simon-Pierre Kikhounga-Ngut and Alice Bandingana -- all leading members of either the CGAT or the UJC. 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. 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'État, ou qui tendent manifestement à compromettre l'édification de la République du Congo...”

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 bourgeoise” 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. In addition, the staffs of the 11 Ministries between June 1959 and April 1960 increased by 100%. 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.

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. 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. 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, or 10.5% of the budget, to the “secteur du travail.” 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. In 1959, the Civilité 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.

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. We would often extract large sums of money from the Fonds Roulout in order to appease the unemployed by offering temporary jobs for a couple of weeks. 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 fumigate 160 dwellings in Brazzaville, Pointe-Noire and Dolisie. 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. In spite of lessened repression, the major labour unions, the CSEG, 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 Nzala and Minister of Justice. After several days of talks, on August 6, Youlou suddenly broke off negotiations and announced the creation of a single parti state -- declaring a state of emergency on August 15, 1963.

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 of the government’s repressive measures. In retaliation, Youlou had Julien Boukambou of the CSEG 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 guerrilla warfare. Instead, it was a popular, yet spontaneous, proletarian seizure of power, organised and led by the labour unions. As one writer has put it, the labour unions were the "grandes forces de l'histoire, du changement social..." Thus the labour unions were able to overcome Youlou’s "ethic politics" of divide and rule while also being able to, as Marx puts it, "organise a
regular cooperation between employed and unemployed.43

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 Revolution (CNR), appointing Alphonse Massamba-Debat as leader. The provisional government included Massamba-Debat as Prime Minister and Minister of the Armed Forces as well as hitherto politically unknown figures such as Pascal Lissouba, Bernard Balba, Paul Kaya, Emile Abakas, Charles Nanao and Jules N'Ngo. 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.44

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 CCG, 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 Matongou Firmin had said, "Si les travailleurs s'usinaient au sein de syndicats, il n'y aurait plus besoin de députés."45

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 CSCL 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 Fidel Bembé, the CATC representative was strongly against it:

"La CGAT prend les syndicatistes qui ne sont pas de son bord pour des indésirables; en ce qui nous concerne, la CGAT se refuse à toute unification sur les bases proposées par la CGAT qui ne cherche qu'à commencer les autres centralites."46

Regardless of the wishes of the CATC, the CGAT and the CSCL, with the support of the State, led by the newly created Mouvement National de la Revolution (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.48 Thereafter, Fulgence Bayoula, the president of the CATC was arrested--thus making the State's position quite clear.49

In spite of strong CATC opposition, the CSCL, CGAT, the Confédération des Fonctionnaires, Fédération Postale and some autonomous unions, merged to become the Confédération des Syndicats Congolais (CSC) on November 24, 1964.50

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 Okemba, an official of the CATC, was dismissed from his post as Minister of Justice with no justification. Secondly, three months later, four CATC members were expelled from the MNR politburo.51

By Spring of 1965, Massamba-Debat's regime had finally decided to wage an all-out war against the CATC, dissolving all trade unions with the exception of the CSC.52

Unfortunately for the working class in general, the CSC supported the repressive measures levied against the CATC. In fact, Idrissa Dallol, the main policy spokesmen for the CSC, denounced the CATC and its leaders.53 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'agitation des syndicats qui ont pour but de maintenir les travailleurs dans un état de fait bas aux désordre de l'idéologie, la désorganisation de la classe ouvrière, l'affaiblissement de la lutte, le totalisme, l'anarchie, le tribalisme, etc...

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 political views; in this respect, as well as in respect of religion, the trade unions must be non-partisan."54

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 doméstication..."
des syndicats, est indépendante vis-à-vis du Gouvernement et des autres formations professionnelles. Nevertheless, the weakening of the working class and the manner by which the merger took place prepared the ground for its subsupption 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. 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 Gange (CATC) and Paul Banthoud (CGAT). Probably the most significant move on the part of the MNR government was to re-write the 1962 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. 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 litigant between capital and labour.

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 Boumbaou, Aimé Matsika and Abéel Thaulay-Banga, 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. Moreover, the more radical leaders of the CSC - Toris Diallo, Paul Banthoud, Bernard Zonta and Claude Nallé - were forced out of the government one by one. 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." After calling for the nationalization of banks and industries, Banthoud was summarily dismissed.

As the State's commitment to labour diminished, so did the conditions of the Congoese working class. The problem of unemployment went unabated during Massamba-Débat's tenure in office. The unemployment problem was not pressing, that is, in October of 1966, the National Assembly opened with the question of employment stability.

The overall economic picture magnified the problems of the Congoese wage workers and unemployed. By 1967, the nation's total exports only amounted to a total of 11,700 million CFA while imports reached over 20,000 million CFA.

To make matters worse, State expenditures - which nearly 70% was 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. 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 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.

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. Nonetheless, both classes were supposedly represented by the State's single "labour union." The result of such an unwholesome 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 (JNMR), placed pressure on the State for more radical changes in the MNR's policies. The power of the JNMR 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 democratizing the political power of labour, it set out to consolidate its own political power by dismantling the power of the JNMR. This was to be accomplish-
ed by the creation of a "People's Army." Both the army and the civil defense corps were placed under the control of the MNRH by a military tribunal. 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.72

After implementing a whole series of repressive measures, including the arrest of popular military commander, Marien Ngouabi, the very army created to protect the interests of the State overthrew Massamba-Débat on September 4, 1968.73 The new "Conseil National de la Revolution" was led by Captain Marien Ngouabi.

THE FINAL BLOW TO PROLETARIAN ORGANISATION

The character of Ngouabi's seizure of power appears quite contradictory.74 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.75 In fact, the CSC's weakness in the process of Ngouabi's seizure of power and formation of a new government came under sharp criticism from the Union's rank and file members.76

It was obvious, however, that by the time Ngouabi 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 UMRH, were tentatively disregarded and placed under a Commission of Special Organisations.77 Even after the CSC was allowed to function as an organisation, its whole Central Committee was dismissed and replaced.78

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.79 The PCT, to some extent, also went beyond appearances. For the first time, with the construction of the Port at Douala, substantial sums of money went to the development of the hitherto neglected northern parts of the country.80 In terms of reforms for the working class, in January of 1975, Ngouabi'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.81 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 1965 to 36% by 1970.82 By 1972, 42.6% of the Congolese people lived in the cities.83

For the PCT to regard itself as the party of labour, it certainly had little faith in the toiling masses. Ngouabi 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.84 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 état 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 Sociale.85

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 Ngouabi, 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.86 Ngouabi 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 recognized the existence of class struggle between the bureaucratic bourgeoisie and the proletariat.87 Ngouabi 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.88 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 Ngouabi, had actually become a power base of the bureaucracy. Since the bureaucratic class did not have total control over the executive 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, Ngouabi dissolved the Executive Bureau of the CSC and dismissed the Secretary of State for
Finance, who is said to have led the strike. 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. Again, the majority of workers did not come out in support of the strike. Thus the strike was instantly destroyed, resulting in the arrests of CSC General Secretary Anatole Khondo as well as CSC leaders Charles Madzou and Ekamba Etombe.

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. 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.

Nguabi was eventually assassinated in 1977, and the leadership has moved from Brigadier General Joachim Tshisabwa to the present presidency of Colonel Denis Sassou Nguesso. The PCT's labour policy has nevertheless remained virtually unchanged. With Nguabi 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%), 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."

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 peinent apparente entre la direction du parti et les représentants syndicaux reflètent moins les oppositions entre prolétariat et bourgeoisie bureaucratique, qu'entre couches subalternes d'employé simplement entre les diverses tendances au sein de la haute bureaucratie politique et administrative."

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. Because of the broad economic nature of trade union organisation, the unification of the unions under the ideological hegemony of the CGT simply caused dissenion and weakened the entire labour movement. Furthermore, the creation of the CSC, subsumed under the MIB, 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 voting 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 prolétaire, il n'y a ni moyen d'expression, ni moyen d'organisation propre à la classe ouvrière: le prolétariat est muet."

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

1 The labour aristocracy thesis was originally developed by Franz Fanon in *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York, 1963) 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).


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


7 *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. 193.


11Georges Balandier, Brazzaville Noires p. 96.

12Ibid. p. 97; See also (1) Official de l'(A)fricaine (E)quatorial (F)rançaise, September 1, 1944.

13Georges Balandier, Brazzaville Noires p. 97.

14Samir Amin and Catherine Coquery-Vidrovitch, Histoire Economique du Congo, 1880-1960 (Paris, 1967) p. 144; Below are estimates of the three major unions' percentages of working class support made by Samir Amin:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>CATC</th>
<th>CGAT</th>
<th>CSSL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1954</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>16%</td>
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18Ibid. p. xxiv.

19Matsoua (whose real name was André Driemar) founded the Association Amicale des Originaires de L'AfF. 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 1933. 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 Sindu, André Matsoua, Fondateur du Mouvement de Libération du Congo (Belgique, 1978).

20Wounghly-Massaga, Révolution, pp. 131.


23Ibid. pp. 66-68.

24Wounghly-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.


26Ibid. p. 144.


28Ibid. p. 8.

29Jean-Michel Wagret, Histoire, p. 141. A Report of the Labour Inspector in 1959 noted that the chauffeur of a Brazza- ville 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.

30René Gauze, The Politics p. 142. This is easily verified by perusing the (C)urnal (O)fficiel de la (R)épublique du (C)ongo for the given years.

31Ibid. p. 138.


33Ibid. p. 38.


36Journal de Débats, Session Extraordinaire, June 27--July 1, 1959 p. 7; Ministère de l'Information, Congo Moderne: Discours Prononcé par Monseigneur Stéphane Ichichelle Brazzaville October 1960, p. 7.

38 Ibid. p. 141.
39 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.
41 It is generally accepted that the Joint Committee did not intend to overthrow Youlou, Interview with Serge Mukendi 3/12/84.
42 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 Bonnaire, "Une Classe d'Age politique: La JINMR 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.
43 Marx op. cit. p. 655.
46 Quoted in Jean-Michel Wagret, p. 184.
48 René Gauze, p. 160.
49 Ibid. p. 160.
50 JO/RC January 1, 1965 by loi du 17 décembre 1964, p.5.
51 Ibid. p. 5.
54 Marchés Tropicaux et Méditerranéens November 26, 1964.
57 JO/RC January 1, 1965, p. 6, Article 5 of CSC's Constitution.
58 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.
59 See JO/RC July 9, 1964, pp. 560-566, for a copy of the "Code du Travail".
60 JO/RC June 1, 1965, pp. 342-344.
61 See René Gauze, p. 213 and 253.
62 Ibid. p. 213.
63 Afrique Nouvelle, April 26, 1967.
64 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 "H. Massamba-Debat Clarifie une situation ambiguë." Marchés Tropicaux et Méditerranéens January 20, 1968.
65 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 Économique et Social, Rapport Annuel 1965-1966 Brazzaville, (n.d.).


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 Development Economique (Paris, 1975).


Some commentators have reduced the power struggles between Ngouabi and Massamba-Dewa to ethnic quarrels or "tribalism." On appearances only, this would seem to be the case since Ngouabi and his cabinet were northerners in a hitherto Lari dominated political superstructure. Granted, riots between these two groups did occur after Ngouabi 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: a l'avant-garde de la revolution" Marches Tropicaux et Mediterraneens January 17, 1970.


Agence France Presse, Africa August 8, 1968.


"Le regime de la Republique Populaire du Congo se radicalise" Marches Tropicaux et Mediterraneens April 24, 1971, p. 1147.

Ibid. p. 1147.

Africa (C)ontemporary (R)ecord 1975-76, p. 8474-5.


Hughes Bertrand, Le Congo, p. 121.


Marien Ngouabi, Vers la Construction, p. 100.


See Hughes Bertrand, p. 114; Marien Ngouabi, Vers la Construction.

ACR 1969-70, p. 4-422.

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).
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 rule of South Africa. This means that little work has been done to develop an infrastructure of human rights 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, much material written about Namibia in the past has been biased and must be reinterpreted. A historical approach which would utilise material from all available sources, both official and unofficial, is needed.

3. For the present paper, one book (Bridge, 1983) has been cited more than any other. Even then, the author's observations were inaccurate, the book was written in error, and a substantial part of the literature is based on spurious information. A more thorough study of the literature is necessary.

4. There have been several attempts to review and summarise all the colonial and post-colonial literature. A few anthropological and colonial source materials have been compiled and transcribed, mostly from the literature. A thorough study of all available sources is necessary.

5. Hughes Bertrand, Le Cong, p. 121.


42. Acra 1978–79, p. 443.


44. Acra 1977–78, p. 443.


