

PROSPEROUS CONGO EASING RACE CURBS

By C. L. SULZBERGER Special to THE NEW YORK TIMES.

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Natives' Social Status Is Being
Improved to Conform With
Material Well-Being

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LEOPOLDVILLE, Belgian Congo, Jan. 30—Belgium, one of the last of the European powers to enter the field of African colonialism, has begun to adjust her Congo legislation to the requirements of twentieth-century concepts of racial equality.

For years Brussels representatives here had emphasized the material requirements of the natives above the latter's craving for social and psychological equality (political rights are not an issue since no one votes here; the colony is administered from the homeland and has no autonomy).

There is no doubt that the Africans' well-being is much advanced over that in neighboring Portuguese Angola and French Equatorial Africa. Not that the minimum wage level is high—only 11 Belgian francs (about 22 cents) daily, plus more than twice as much in food, lodging and other employer obligations.

However, the demand for workers has been so steady that, it is estimated, 80 per cent of Leopoldville's labor is paid considerably

more than the minimum. Many workers come here from other African states. There are some quite wealthy Africans and in this city alone 52,000 own bicycles—a sign of prosperity in this part of the world.

Second-Class Citizens

Nevertheless, the native has been a second-class citizen. He cannot, as he can in the French territory across the Congo River, buy alcohol. While in theory there is no open color bar, it does exist. River ferry tickets are sold on the basis of race, for example.

The African is subject to a curfew at night unless he has a special permit. His movies are censored, and he is not allowed in white cinemas. He is not permitted to live in white residential areas. The law permits the flogging of native criminals but not of whites.

This system of discrimination is undergoing a change as a result of a decree enacted last year eliminating legal distinctions between the two races. It encourages evolution to an "assimilated" status for educationally qualified Africans, who become entitled to the same salaries and privileges as Europeans and can send their children to whites' schools or marry Europeans.

The process will take a long time to implement and so far the number of natives affected is very small. However, the first interracial school is being established in the trust territory of Ruanda-Urundi. In that area a native, Msgr. Bigirumwami of Nyundo, from the Watusi tribe—known for its seven-foot-tall members—has been named a Bishop.

When the Governor General holds receptions, some native

leaders are invited to attend. Passports have been issued to Africans and some are studying in Belgium. More natives are being seated on the colony's Council. Gradually, it is hoped, these measures will ease the symptoms of restiveness expressed in the formation of such anti-white groups as the Kitawala, or Kibangu sect.

Immensely Rich Area

The Congo, an immensely rich area, is economically controlled by five big Belgian combines: Baron Empain banking; Société Commerciale et Minière, du Congo, which is dominated by the Nagelmackers Bank; Huillevier, a subsidiary of Unilever; Société de Bruxelles pour la Finance et L'Industrie, and Société Générale de Belgique.

Between them these cartels control virtually all the important mining and agricultural enterprises in the Congo. As big business has tended to oppose liberalizing measures, it took considerable pushing for the Government to start its new native program.

Meanwhile, there has been no let-up in the Congo's industrial boom. Under a ten-year plan that terminates in 1960, some \$1,600,000,000 is being invested in new transport, hydroelectric, irrigation and other development projects. The Belgian Government itself is expected to put up about \$1,000,000,000, of which only \$20,000,000 is coming from Mutual Security Agency funds.

It is certain that this will greatly benefit the colony's material well-being. The Government is trying to accelerate the program to bring the natives' social and educational status up to their advancing economic level.