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Congo

Under New Management

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Anke recently returned from rebel-held Eastern Zaire.

I felt the difference immediately. When I visited Goma in 1993 we didn't dare move around. There were roadblocks everywhere, with soldiers demanding payment. All that has stopped. The massive corruption has gone. There has also been a shift in public thinking about the day-to-day "little corruption." The result is a noticeable improvement in the standard of living for ordinary people.

People no longer live in fear. Mobutu is no longer invincible, because the people have mobilised themselves.

The local population in the Goma region was not active in the rebellion in the early days. The great success of Laurent Kabila's Alliance of Democratic Forces of the Congo was to unite the Banyamulengue resistance against ethnic cleansing, the Rwandan army determination to break the genocidal regime-in-exile's control over the refugee camps in Eastern Zaire, and Kabila's own coalition of parties and guerrilla groups.

The Zairian army didn't want to fight, and the regime was already rotting. Not surprisingly, the regime had a number of successes, and new people began to flock towards it.

Alliance branches are being created in many districts. They try to educate people about the "culture of corruption" which developed during the 30 year Mobutu regime.

We observed several training sessions for new members of the Alliance. They studied the unsuccessful 1964-65 rebellion, the heritage of Patrice Lumumba and his movement, and the Alliance's own programme. [1] The political ideas within the Alliance are varied, including elements of Maoist, Third-Worldist ideas from the 1960s. They identify seven social classes in Zaire, with two fundamental groups: exploiters and exploited.

When we asked how the Alliance would finance its programmes for health, education, and public services, we were confidently told that "Zaire is rich enough. Even paying the foreign debt will not be a problem." And the debt must be paid, since "we have to co-operate with all countries in the world."

Many of the Alliance representatives at a lower level are unaware of the political and economic problems which they will face when they take power. And there has been some influx of opportunists: former Mobutu supporters who converted "just in time." Only a handful of cadre from the 1964-65 rebellion are left. After 30 years of isolation, they are trying to transmit their principles of their long struggle against Mobutism to a new generation.

"Third-world" oriented people in Europe often think that Africa is a marginal part of the world, without great strategic significance. But when you see what the imperialists have been capable of in Rwanda and Zaire, collaborating in genocide, then you say to yourself, Africa matters a great deal to them.

[1] Rouge 19 December 1996, and 20 February 1997