CHAPTER THREE

FRIENDS IN FOREIGN LANDS

ABOUT NINE hours after Namwisi Ma Koyi finishes speaking at the St. Regis, day begins in the village of Yalifoka. It is 6 A.M. there. Three children emerge from their respective mud houses, walk swiftly in bare feet to the drum—a long, skin-covered, hollowed-out log in the center of the village—and beat their reveille. As it pulsates, hundreds of people rise from straw mats, a few from wood-frame beds. They don tattered shorts and shirts, mostly secondhand clothing, Salvation Army stuff from the West. They straggle out of their scattered houses and head into the bush for their fields before a visitor has finished brushing his teeth.

Yalifoka is about 90 miles southwest of Kisangani, Zaire's fourth-largest city and the metropolis of the northern half of the country. Back in the 1960s, when Kisangani was called Stanleyville, it was the scene of much fighting and at least one U.S.-European rescue mission. Zaire's national hero, Patrice Lumumba, had his main base of support around Stanleyville, before the United States paid to have him murdered in 1960. Food experts say this broad belt of jungle could be the breadbasket of Africa.

Among the Yalifokan villagers trekking to the fields are Afana Ongia and his three wives. Earlier this summer, the Afana family spent thirty days clearing and planting one hectare, about 2½ acres. It was backbreaking work. They whacked through dense jungle with machetes, then set the stumps and felled branches ablaze. Generations of Zairian farmers have cleared their fields with fire. Potential soil nutrients go up in smoke, but, without machines, burning seems the only way to plant. Since less than 2 percent of Zaire's potential farmland has been cultivated, nobody seems to mind the waste.

The field that remains is dotted with charred branches and stumps. But Afana and his wives plant around them. They needn't worry about sowing orderly rows. They have no machines to impose order, not even a mule to pull a plow. Beasts of burden haven't survived the climate and diseases of tropical Africa, and the Afana family probably couldn't afford an animal anyway.

Here and there among the charred stumps, they have planted equal quantities of rice to sell, manioc to eat, and plantain, a little for both. Manioc, called cassava in some countries, is a starchy root. It has the brown skin and white flesh of a potato, but grows more in the shape of a giant carrot, a foot or two long. Women husk it, dry it, grind it to powder, and boil it with water to make a gray, pasty gruel. Plantain is a big starchy banana, usually eaten mashed and cooked. Manioc and plantain are the dietary staples of Zaire.

Most of the actual clearing and planting is done by Afana's wives. He supervises. The women show the strain. His first two wives are only in their twenties, but already look old, with wrinkled faces and sagging breasts. In years of clearing jungle, they have also produced eight living children, all still too young to work the fields. Afana himself, in his early thirties, looks relatively fresh and youthful. So does the third wife he recently took.

Like most farm families in the area, the Afanas bring in a paltry $200 to $400 a year for their labor, plus the food they keep to eat. You don't see radios or bicyles in these villages, as you do across most of black Africa. Chairs, tables, and other furniture are homemade. Children play with sometimes elaborate homemade toys. Handcrafted guitars, and push-cars made of sticks and wire, are popular.

Electricity is unknown. Some homes have lamps, but kerosene is 66 cents for a beer-bottle-full, when it's available at all. So there is little light at night except for wood fires. Water is carried on women's heads from streams often more than a mile away. Most farmers in Africa—in Nigeria, Kenya, Ivory Coast, or even in poorer countries like Niger and Tanzania—have not lived in such primitive conditions for decades.

Afana's neighbor, Tikelake (his only name) is trying to raise his income by switching his crop to coffee under the tutelage of a government extension agent. Coffee is an export crop, unknown in Zaire as a beverage except to a few elite city-dwellers. (A Western visitor to these farms is left much in the conditon of Coleridge's Ancient Mariner, with coffee, coffee everywhere, nor any drop to drink.)

To encourage production, the government of Zaire has fixed a minimum price of $40 for an 80-kilo (176-pound) bag of coffee beans. But Tikelake can't bring the beans to market himself. He must sell to a *commerçant*, or trader. *Commerçants* dealing in coffee get to Yalifoka only about twice a year. When they show up with their trucks, Tikelake has little real choice but to accept their illegally low offers of $27 to $33 a bag. He and his wife grow between five and ten bags a year. The extension agent says they could easily double their production if they had a reliable market. Two of their six surviving children are old enough to farm now, but don't, because the marketing system offers little incentive for their added labor.

Unlike their father and his neighbor Afana, who grew up in colonial days and never went to school, Tikelake's children now attend class for up to six years. But the education doesn't seem much to brag about, even judged by standards elsewhere in black Africa. Children from several villages are crammed into one or two rooms. Among their subjects, they are supposed to be studying French, the national language. French was intended to open up communication among Zaire's hundreds of tribes, whose languages are often mutually unintelligible. But only a few of the children show even minimal knowledge of French after several years' study. Their teacher isn't much better. Despite the poor quality of the schools, school fees gobble up the largest part of the budget for many Zairian farm families. Each child attending requires yearly payment of about $31—$11 for tuition and $20 in bribes for admission.

In midafternoon, when the sun gets unbearable, the Afanas, the Tikelakes, and their neighbors return home from the fields. Naps are taken. Soon the women begin preparing the day's main, perhaps only, meal. It consists mostly of manioc gruel—pure, bulky starch that settles heavily into the stomach. Manioc root has miniscule nutritional value. Recent U.S. AID and United Nations studies show that it also contains more than a trace of cyanide, which may damage the brain, central nervous system, and other tissues over the years. According to AID, 50 percent of Zaire's cultivated land produces manioc, which provides 60 percent of the caloric intake for 70 percent of the people.* Sometimes boiled plantain is mashed into the manioc, a small nutritional spike. The mash is consumed with a bit of watery soup flavored with the leaves of the manioc plant, perhaps the most nutritious ingredient of all, plus, if available, a couple of hot peppers and a tomato or onion or two.

Scrawny chickens squawk about and one may occasionally be tossed into a soup to be shared among families. Such a chicken would bring $3.50 if sold, but buyers aren't always available because most people don't have $3.50. Sometimes there is fish for the soup. But even with animal flesh and some peppers, the mixture is pretty insipid—a far cry from the hearty, fiery broths of West Africa. Wild oranges provide dietary supplement. The main supplement, however, is sugar cane, which grows wild. Men, women, and

*Such figures cannot possibly be compiled so precisely, but from observation they seem accurate as a rough guide.

children chew cane all day, spitting out the pulp the way old-time cowboys or ballplayers spit their tobacco juice. Few would say the habit is healthful, but it beats hunger.

Stream water is the main beverage. To protect the water, great energy is expended digging sanitary pits at a safe distance from the stream, and building outhouses over the pits. There is an almost compulsive tidiness in villages throughout Zaire. Without it, the health situation would be even worse than it is. Dirt courtyards around the mud houses almost always bear fresh broom marks. Grassy spots or small gardens are neatly trimmed. Men are about here and there in the afternoons patching roofs with leaves.

In each village, rules are enforced that drinking water be drawn at the highest point in the stream, baths taken at midpoint, and clothes washed below. But a stream passes near many villages. So despite all these efforts, drinking water almost inevitable becomes contaminated—if not from the bodies or the clothes, then from the droppings of the animals that run about, or from the children who, prior to toilet training, empty themselves almost anywhere. Children, like most other people, are suffering from various diseases passed on through the dietary tract. A third of them don't make it to the age of five.

People complain, not so much about ill-health, to which there is no known alternative, but about continuing low incomes in the face of rising prices. New monetary controls demanded by the Western banks and the IMF have sent prices soaring up to 50 percent a year for clothes and other market goods. The cheapest cotton and polyester shirts cost \$12 to \$18, and pants about \$17. But the economic complaints have a limit. There is a palpable fear of political discussion in the villages. With few exceptions, if you ask villagers about Mobutu Sese Seko, they will mutter uneasily that they don't want to talk about the president.

CONDITIONS are similar in farm villages throughout most of Zaire. Bipemba, for example, is a village in the south-central province of Western Kasai. Back at independence, in 1960, when the United States was helping murder the elected prime minister of Zaire and install a military government led by Mobutu, Kasai was much in the news. *Time* magazine referred to the rebellious province as the "dark interior" of the country where independence promised to bring "a running civil war of spears and poison arrows."

Katumba Mpoye was thirty-eight years old in 1960. He was farming in Kasai then, as he is now, and doesn't think the life has changed much. He doesn't recall dodging any spears or arrows—a few bullets back then, just flies and gnats now. "Agriculture is very difficult," he says, sweating heavily in the noon sun amid the corn and peanut patches. Kasai isn't dark. Most of it isn't even shady. "With the hoe, each day, each day, each day. The children won't accept the farm," Katumba says. Katumba and his wife have produced fourteen children. Of the eight who survived childhood without succumbing to disease or malnutrition, none farms. Only one still considers it. He is nineteen and in his third year of secondary school.

Most students don't get to secondary school. Most of those who do, like Katumba's son, have their studies interrupted several times when their families can't pay the high fees and bribes that are required. When money is scraped together they return to class, testament to the value placed on education. Two of Katumba's younger children are students. Three older ones call themselves students, but are out of school because of money, health, or scholastic performance. In other words, they are unemployed. One grown son is semiemployed as a small trader, and another, a high school graduate, is director of a primary school.

Katumba's farm is only about 4 miles from a market, so his wife can carry produce there on her head. Each time she carries a load, she has to pay a precious dollar to soldiers who have set up a roadblock on the only road. They call it "beer money." Commerical vehicles have to pay 100 Zaires (about $33) to pass the roadblock. Asked if there is justice in Zaire, Katumba replies, "If you have money, that is one justice. If you don't have money, that is another justice."

Because Kasai has most of Zaire's diamonds, Kasai's young people imagine that the gem trade is a means to wealth, And, in fact, diamond smuggling has made a few local Kasai men rich. Big Mercedeses sometimes roar past the bare mud houses of farmers like Katumba, their springs being tested on the dirt roads. Such flashes of opulence are an inspiration to many. Almost every day you can find men, women, even children, hoping to get in on the action, shoveling sand along the banks of the Sankuru River, looking for something bright and hard.

Kasai peasants often do find diamonds. But like Tikelake with his coffee, they seldom get fair value. One woman unwrapped a hanky for some inquiring visitors and revealed a handful of diamonds, some orange (industrial quality) and some clear. She boasted they were worth $65. An American who knew the diamond business, though, said they would bring thousands of dollars in New York. Zairians don't get Mercedeses by finding diamonds; they get Mercedeses by buying diamonds from peasants who *do* find them, and by paying less than the diamonds are worth. Only government influence decides who can get away with this.

Big international companies are supposed to have exclusive rights to the diamonds. A Zairian-Belgian combine known as MIBA mines them. Maurice Tempelsman's companies have rights to explore for and buy them. And the DeBeers syndicate marketed them, until several other European concerns were brought in to share the wealth in 1981.

Because the government has granted exclusive concessions to the big companies, freelance diamond digging is illegal. In July 1979, soldiers went to the bank of the Sankuru River, found an unusually large number of diggers, and opened fire. What happened next is argued about a lot. Local people say several hundred scavengers died, some from gunfire, most from drowning after they panicked and ran into the swift-running river (most Africans never learn to swim). Prominent citizens in town say they saw several dozen bodies. A government investigation organized by Mobutu reported only three deaths. Mobutu invited Amnesty International, the London-based human rights lobby, to investigate, but it declined. Amnesty said that the restrictions Mobutu imposed would prevent it from doing a thorough job.

Those few who are allowed to take diamonds out are assumed by nearly everyone to spread their profits, via bribery, among Mobutu's appointed local administrators and army officers. With the money they keep, the smugglers often buy trucks and become big-scale *commerçants*, hauling consumer goods in from the coast or the nearest airport or barge port and selling them to the transportationless masses.

The *commerçants* are not liked by the people who have to pay the high prices they charge. But because they have money, the *commerçants* often have friends in the white expatriate community. In Kisangani, you can see them sitting around the two big hotel dining rooms in the European section of town, topping off $20 meals with $5 snifters of imported brandy. In Mbuji-Mayi, a *commerçant* kept public company with the attractive young regional administrator for the United States Peace Corps.

MANY thousands of Zairians* work on plantations owned by big multinational companies, like Unilever, raising coffee, palm oil, sugar, or rubber. For this they are paid $10 to $13 a month. That is $120 to $156 a year. Their wives and children who don't work on the plantation can garden to fill the family table. But generally, workers must promise the plantation owner that they won't sap their energies by raising cash crops. This promise, of course, is almost universally broken. Anyone receiving so little money is going to try to improve his income by farming his own land. Energies *are* sapped, and that's one reason expatriates continue to accuse Zairians of laziness.

Some menials at the huge Unilever† palm oil plantation at Lokutu, about 120 miles into the bush west of Kisangani, get only $7 a month. Of the 50,000 Zairians Unilever says it employs, about 5,000 work at Lokutu. From their salaries, the company deducts several dollars a month for living quarters.

*I will try in this book to avoid offering precise statistics that have no reliable base. Plenty of agencies at the U.N. and elsewhere try to satisfy the curiosity of those who want to know how many thousands in such and such a country are starving or working or whatever, but such figures become ludicrous when you get to the scene and find no accurate means of measuring.

†Though Unilever stock is traded on the New York Stock Exchange, it is best known in the U.S. by its U.S. subsidiary, Lever Brothers.

This means that in cash, menials may get as little as $4 a month, and farmers $7 to $10 a month. The quarters consist of a 6-by-7-foot room for a single man, a bit more if the employee has a wife and children and can prove they're his. A Unilever executive from England on temporary assignment in Zaire describes all this, and his own life as well:

"I have a cook, a houseboy, a chauffeur, and a gardener and I get change from 200 Zaires [about $65 a month," the executive says. He laughs. It is not a laugh of disdain, but rather an expression of helplessness over a situation so obviously unfair that his own advantage is an embarrassment to him. He has a nice house in Lokutu, and on trips to Kisangani he enjoys a $30-a-night air-conditioned hotel room and spends $11 for a meal of pork chops, french fries, cole slaw, and beer. A single evening's expenses consume more than four times the monthly pay of the farm workers his company employs. The executive is ferried about by private plane. (Unilever ships its goods out by river, so it has not built a decent road to Kisangani.) He makes the usual expatriate complaints that Zairian workers are lazy. But then he laughs again, and adds, "If that was what they paid me, I wouldn't work either."

The daughter of another Unilever executive, also a Britisher, grew up in the Kisangani area. She has married a Portuguese, the branch manager of a European-owned chain of import-export stores. Over coffee in their Kisangani home, she agrees to talk about the import-export operation on condition that the business not be identified.

The operation sells mostly to Zairian *commerçants*, who in turn sell to market women, who then sell to customers. "The owners never put anything into the country," the woman says. "They never build anything. They are here to make as much money as they can while things are good, and then they get out."

You can hear such cynicism from a lot of expatriates, but this woman discloses more. She reveals that her husband's firm makes its money on the black market. It smuggles goods and currency into and out of the country in evasion of the controls established by the Zairian government at the direction of the IMF. Like other privileged concerns here, the company operates boats on the Congo River. The boats stop on the north bank in the neighboring Republic of Congo and off-load smuggled diamonds or coffee.

The company exchanges this Zairian wealth for hard foreign currency, which is forwarded directly to the company's European accounts. The boats also pick up Western goods and bring them back to Zaire illegally. And the firm has cargo aircraft that come and go pretty much unaccounted for. The money sucked out of the Zairian economy by the sale of illegally imported goods is not reflected on Zaire's international balances. The IMF, reporting on Zairian insolvency, never includes this sort of sneaking out of resources by Westerners, which is both immense and profitable.

The woman's husband enters, and flatly denies that his firm does illegal business. He says that all the coffee and other goods it exports are sold through government sales agencies, which adhere to currency controls. He praises Mobutu's government and says Zaire is in trouble only because Zairians are lazy. The British woman is embarrassed.

As her husband talks, an American working for UNESCO (the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization) enters and pulls from his pockets several hundred U.S. dollars. He lays them on the table. The husband sweeps them into a box, and changes them at a rate of 5 Zaires to the dollar. The legally controlled rate is just under 3 Zaires to the dollar. There is no way the husband can pay this rate unless he is exporting the dollars on the sly, in flagrant violation of exchange controls. With no indication that he senses he is proving the charges against him, he offers to do the same for a reporter.

Like the diamonds, and coffee, and cobalt, and other goods, even this little bit of hard cash—UNESCO wages—is hustled out of the country. The Zairian people get no income from it. They get no roads, no schools, no hospitals. The hard Western currency that pays for all the smuggled goods stays outside the country. It goes into the pockets of Western businessmen and buys off influential Zairians. The elite may bring a few million dollars of the stolen wealth back into Zaire in the form of Mercedeses, and other goods for their private use. But the development capital their countrymen need to pull themselves into the twentieth century never makes it home.

THE tragedy of Zaire is not just that wealth is siphoned out by bankers big and small, operating with the open sanction of a crooked government installed and protected by the United States. The tragedy is that almost nothing has been left behind. The spirit as well as the wealth of the country has been raped. Life moves pathetically.

Mama Singa, a small *commerçant*, embodies the problem. She must do for Zaire what Continental Grain, the A & P, and several large railroads do in the U.S.: get food to the people. As a one-woman enterprise, she is anything but lazy. She is, in fact, impressively industrious. But as a national food distribution system, she is a mess.

It is a sizzlingly hot Friday afternoon, and in almost the geographical center of the continent the dusty town plaza broils in the sun's headachey glare. Mama, who isn't tall but easily weighs 180 pounds, has leased a bright red diesel truck from a big *commerçant* in Kisangani who owns five such trucks. For one money-making trip into the bush, the truck cost her 2,000 Zaires, or about $675. Within its slatted wooden sides wait 700 cubic feet of cargo space, about one-fifth the capacity of an American semi. Mama plans to go about 100 miles, to some of the prime crop land on the continent. If she's lucky, she'll get there and back in four or five days.

Mama picks up the truck, with driver, mechanic, and helper-apprentice, on the "right bank" of the Congo River. The right, or northern, bank, is the modern, pretty section of Kisangani. Its streets are paved, lined with trees, and well lit at night. Its buildings are stucco and masonry, neatly painted. It is inhabited by expatriates, *commerçants*, government officials, army officers, and others of the privileged.

After a forty-five-minute wait, a ferry crosses the river a few miles below Stanley Falls, and deposists Mama and the truck on the "left bank." The bulk of Kisangani's population lives there. The houses are of unpainted mud, and are ranged along dirt footpaths instead of boulevards. Women haul water on their heads from public spigots as much as a half-mile away. There's no electricity. Nights are dark except for wood fires. Some lucky residents pay 33 cents round-trip on the ferry every day to go to right-bank jobs that earn them $50 to $75 a month. Others walk to meager farms outside town.

Mama's truck faces two roads on the left bank. Neither road is paved. Both are gooey with mud. Mama takes the right road, leading southwest, toward a string of farming villages. Before she gets 200 yards, the clutch gives out. The truck stops four hours while the driver and a mechanic fix it. The truck goes on.

Mama isn't starting out empty. The back of the truck is loaded with about fifty market women carrying baskets. They have paid about $3.50 each for a one-way ride to Yatolema, a market town 58 miles into the bush. Yatolema's weekly market day is Sunday. The women plan to buy whatever their heads can carry, then return to Kisangani to sell it. If they return with Mama Singa, and they may have little choice, they will pay extra for their cargo when the baskets are filled.

Meanwhile, Mama plans to pick up some cargo of her own in the villages—probably manioc, corn, or plantain, whatever looks profitable. A bunch of plantain worth $1 in the bush sells for about $3.50 in town. An 88-pound bag of manioc brings about $1.75 to the farmer who grew it and will be marked up to $7 to $10 in town. The market women in Kisangani who buy the bags from Mama at these markups will, of course, raise the prices still higher when they sell to their own customers by the cupful.

American farmers also complain of high retail markups. But U.S. markups include costly processing and long-distance hauling that allows New Yorkers and Bostonians to eat in January approximately as they do in August. The produce Mama Singa collects won't be processed or refrigerated. It will never reach the malnourished masses of Kinshasa, Lubumbashi, or Kananga—the three largest cities—or the hungry laborers in the big mining centers. There is no way to carry the food to these places. The price soars merely going back to Kisangani, because no one has invested in a transportational infrastructure for Zaire. The market belongs to the *commerçant*. When a *commerçant* comes along, the farmer doesn't know when he'll have another chance to sell his crop, or the consumer another chance to buy his food.

Mama's truck rolls treacherously over a narrow, mud-slickened wooden bridge over a raging brown stream maybe 40 feet across, then roars up a muddy hill out of Kisangani. The trip proceeds at about 10 miles an hour. Every 50 yards or so, if the road is dry, the truck slows even more, to navigate around craggy chasms a foot or two deep in the road, or to bounce slowly over them. Where there's water, the driver doesn't know if it's a shallow puddle or a deep pothole; trucks sometimes overturn when drivers guess wrong. In mud, the driver drops to first gear (he is rarely higher than second) and roars through, with everyone aboard praying silently that the truck won't stall. When it does, the driver, crew, and any recruitable roadside help, labor for an hour, shin-deep in slime, to shovel it out.

Every few miles is a village, where Mama stops to pick up more market women. Every few miles is a stream, where the driver stops to refill the badly leaking radiator. The clutch goes out again, and everything stops for an hour while it is fixed.

A roadblock. Four soldiers search the truck. Among the passengers they find a young soldier without papers permitting him to travel. He is forced down, shoved around, his luggage searched. The searchers see a few items they like, and keep them. The traveling soldier is allowed back on. The four searchers approach the cab and demand the driver's papers. Mama unwraps the pile of bills she has been collecting from the market women and hands a presorted fistful to the soldiers at the roadblock. "For beer," the driver mutters. He roars on.

Mama is also the mail. She occasionally stops in villages to drop off envelopes she has brought from town, or to pick up scrawled messages for passing on to the next village. Mama speaks only Lingala and Swahili, and not much of those, except to bawl people out and argue about the price of some dried fish she has brought to peddle along the way. She rarely smiles. For a transport operator, there isn't much to smile about. At rivers and streams, the truck must wait for ancient ferries. A ferry is eight or ten battered metal boats lashed together with planks on top. Work crews are rounded up from the bush and struggle to guide the truck onto the ferry, which almost tips over from the weight. A crossing takes an hour.

It is midnight when Mama reaches Yatolema and drops off the market women—58 miles in slightly over eleven hours, not counting the initial four-hour delay for the clutch breakdown. At 3 A.M. she reaches another village, where she and the crew sleep.

In three days of traveling, Mama encounters three other vehicles—a pickup jammed with people, a Land Rover driven by missionaries, and another big truck whose cargo is hidden. According to the authoritative Michelin map of Central Africa, this is the main national highway. It is the road you would take if you wanted to drive the 720 miles from Kisangani, Zaire's major northern and eastern city, to Kinshasa, the capital. But to do that, you would need a couple of months and much luck. After Opala, a town about half a day beyond where Mama turns back, the road is said to get much worse. Anything worse is hard to imagine.

Headed home, Mama's truck groans under a load of plantain. But villagers want to sell, and she keeps buying. Her offers are mostly nonnegotiable. One woman has lugged three huge bunches of plantain a mile or more from home. Mama pays her 3 Zaires, about $1, for one bunch, and 2 Zaires for another. The woman contends that the third bunch is also worth 3 Zaires, but Mama offers only $2.50. After much argument and wailing, the seller gives up, loads the third bunch back on her head and trudges home again. She still has her pride, but she also still has her plantain, which her family will have to eat.

Near Kisangani, the truck sinks into mud so deep that Mama herself has to get out and shovel. But on the fifth day she makes it home to market.

HASSAN NABHAN is an Egyptian working in Zaire with the U.N. Food and Agricultural Organization. He has spent most of his three years here successfully persuading about 9,000 of the 300,000 farmers in Eastern Kasai province that an expenditure of $100 a year for fertilizer more than pays for itself. He has raised demonstration fields of corn side by side, one fertilized, one not. The difference in productivity was certainly a shock.

To help the farmers finance the fertilizer payments, Nabhan gradually combined U.N. money and local farmers' contributions into a $1 million revolving fund. Farmers got fertilizer on credit from the fund, then paid off in installments as they sold their harvest.

In the week before New Year's Day, 1980, however, the plan was obliterated. At the insistence of the Western banking establishment, acting through the IMF, Mobutu imposed new restrictions on the national money supply. The Western press reported these restrictions in the most favorable language, and said that Zaire was "putting its financial house in order." Namwisi Ma Koyi boasted of the new restrictions in his speech at the St. Regis.

To insure that all the earnings from mineral sales were kept in the central bank, where they could be siezed by the big foreign creditors (or by the crooks who run the Zairian government), Zairians were prohibited from converting their money into solid foreign currency. When savers can't convert their money into dollars or francs, they can't buy things from abroad. Among these savers were Nabhan's farmers. When the decree was announced, they could no longer convert their farm income, or even their already-banked U.N. grants, into foreign currency. So they couldn't buy any more fertilizer. This was how the IMF, with the encouragement of the U.S. government, put Zaire's house in order.

Nabhan's farmers were mostly wiped out anyway, as were most other Zairian savers, by a second decree. The Western bankers wanted to coerce people into holding all their money in the government banking system. That way, the bank could control all substantial expenditures, and the Westerners could hoard the money themselves, which in their judgment would help strengthen Zairian currency as an international trading commodity. So the Western bankers had Mobutu invalidate all existing currency and make it exchangeable for a new, devalued currency. The plan gave people three days to visit a bank and exchange up to $1,000 of the old money for new. Anything over $1,000 was worthless, which punished people who kept their money outside the banking system.

This plan was hardly in keeping with the free economic market that the United States says it encourages throughout the world as the U.S. alternative to communism. In fact, if Cuba were to attempt such a program, the U.S. president might well denounce it on his next television appearance as an example of communist tyranny. Newspaper editorial writers would hang Fidel Castro from every masthead. (In truth, Cuba's economic restraints are considerably more humane than Zaire's, though ultimately no more respectful of individual freedom.)

The $1,000 currency exchange restriction in itself didn't bother most Zairians, because most Zairians didn't have $1,000. But communications and transportation are such that most people never got to a bank at all in the three days. Those who did found crushing lines, demands for bribes from banking officials, and sometimes an exhausted supply of new banknotes.

For example, the 4 million residents of Eastern Kasai province were served by exactly two banks, both in the provincial capital of Mbjui-Mayi, which is more than a three-days' journey for many residents by any practical means of conveyance. If the supposed legitimate purpose of the currency switch was to increase respect for the banking system as a repository of money, the effect was just the opposite.

Wealthy *commerçants*, both Zairian and Western, should have been wiped out by the plan. But they weren't. It is universally accepted that they cut the bankers and government officials in on the new money they got, and so were able to exchange all they wanted. As a teacher in Kinshasa described it, "There was a limit. But for the bosses there was no limit. For the poor people there was a limit."

There was a swift, dampening effect on daily life. A Peace Corps volunteer from the northern interior observed, "Some [people] lost 40 Zaires [about $13], some lost 400, some lost 4,000. But I can tell you there aren't going to be any weddings in this country for two years." An American missionary says his group, the Communité Presbytérienne du Zaire, lost more than $330,000 it had raised to run schools, hospitals, and rural dispensaries.

And so Hassan Nabhan, the agricultural advisor from Egypt, his fertilizer program in shambles, is discouraged. "If we had 1,500 millimeters of rainfall a year in Egypt, the whole land would be cultivated," Nabhan says. Fifteen hundred millimeters is about 60 inches—Zaire's annual soaking. Rain in Zaire is also more evenly spread through the year than in many African countries where half the months are dry, half rainy. This even rainfall allows Zaire a second harvest.

"Here they have the rain," Nabhan says. "If you just invested a little in imported fertilizer, worked on the attitude of the people to farm, you could easily double the production. If you put in a big investment in roads, transportation, and storage facilities, Zaire could support the Sahel countries [the famine-stricken lands on the fringe of the Sahara]."

He goes on: "In most countries you can only increase production horizontally, by increasing the amount of land. But in Zaire you can increase both vertically and horizontally, because you haven't reached maximum productivity. We proved in this local [demonstration] project you can get 4.5 tons of maize [corn] per hectare. Now they're getting 0.6 tons. It's just fertilizer, seeds, and a better method of cultivation."

Fertilizer could be produced domestically without any imported ingredients. Modern technology can suck enough nitrogen right out of the air to revitalize the soil. While many countries can't use this process because it requires a lot of electricity, Zaire, with its huge hydroelectric potential, could. Moreover, Nabhan and many other experts argue that if running water, electricity, schools, hospitals, and recreational activities were brought to farming villages, more people would farm. But little is left over in the way of development money after the Western corporations have their fill. Planners who do occasionally get some money to spend are themselves city dwellers. They are rewarded by politics, not economic productivity. Their investments tend to be urban.

The offspring of farmers flow out of the villages. Enormous shantytowns rise on the fringes of the cities. This happens in many countries throughout the Third World, as people are naturally attracted by the amenities and pleasures of modern life, which are concentrated in the cities. It happened in the United States, too, but usually as industry arose to occupy the new city dwellers, and machines arrived to replace farm workers and maintain food production. The marketplace was free to do its work. This is not the case in countries like Zaire.

MINGI is a twenty-one-year-old engineering student at the national university in Kinshasa. He shares a four-room mud house in Kinshasa with a sister, her baby, the baby's paternal grandmother, and five other people. They eat one meal a day, mostly manioc. Much of the time they go around feeling hungry.

There is no electricity or running water. The road outside is a scarcely navigable morass. In a field nearby, hundreds of buses sit idle, rusting, for lack of spare parts. Mingi takes an overcrowded bus to school. The round-trip fare is 33 cents. A paperback textbook is $10.

Mingi lives on a government allowance of $25 a month He can't supplement his allowance the way female students do, by selectively prostituting themselves from the age of fifteen. Mingi's intended bride is such a student.

He is bitter that he has to share her with two older, richer men. But they pay her $4 to $7 a night when she stays with them. In the summer of 1980, she becomes pregnant—with his baby, he says matter-of-factly, as if no other possibility exists.

That summer, Mingi and several thousand fellow students are on strike against the university, or say they are. Their chief demand is a higher living allowance, but the whole notion of free speech and democracy is at issue. Mobutu closed the campus as soon as the students took to the streets in April. Many students were beaten or imprisoned. So Mingi and his friends will talk only in private. They claim to be well organized, and they appear to be so at several meetings. But when the university reopens in October and they try to renew the strike, the police come out again. Mobutu threatens to put them all on planes and send them back to the farms. The student strike fails.

Not far from Mingi lives Remy, twenty-one, the son of a cabinet minister from the administration of Joseph Kasavubu, president of the republic in its early days. Now he is out of school and out of work. He sits on a battered metal folding chair on the dirt floor of an open gazebo made of cane and thatch, on the neatly swept compound of a mud house in Kinshasa. Half a dozen loaves of bread wait for sale on a stand outside.

One of Remy's earliest memories is of a night in 1964. He woke to find men at the door. They said Remy's father was needed. His father was taken away and never seen again.

Today, his mother runs a small store. It brings in about $6.50 a day, to support a family of five. They eat every afternoon: manioc flour, manioc leaves, and beans. Beans—the precious protein that keeps them alive—run between 33 and 45 cents a cupful, dry.

Remy says one meal isn't enough. His brothers (meaning cousins) have gone to France, where they wait tables, bag groceries, and clean streets. That's big money. "When they left here they were poor," he says. "When they come back they have cars." Remy wants to go, too.

Charles is nineteen. He used to make jewelry in a factory for $31 a month. Then, after IMF monetary controls were imposed, jewels and gold became too costly, and started flowing out of the country on the black market. The factory closed. Now Charles looks for necklaces and bracelets to repair. In the past six months he made maybe $80. He supports his father, who had to quit work because of illness, and his mother. He says they used to eat rice, but now can afford only manioc.

John is a teacher, a recent university graduate. He is bright, articulate, and a genius at navigating the red tape of Zairian bureaucracy. He is invaluable as guide and translator for an American reporter he met on a bus. Over beer, he bemoans the government. The reporter asks why John doesn't enter politics to try to right things.

"I don't like politics," he says. "You can lose your life unnecessarily. I am very important to my family. They cannot afford to have me go to jail.

With you whites it is different. I am a black, and the money I bring home isn't just for me. It is first for my mother and my sisters and my brothers." John says he wants to work in Europe as a laborer for a few years to earn money.

Now, John earns $93 a month when the government has the money to pay him. The government is several months behind on teachers' salaries. A Belgian expatriate of equivalent credentials, teaching at the same school, gets $1,333 a month living allowance plus $500 a month set aside in Belgium, and the money is paid on time.

DUSK falls in smokey hues of rose and gray over the vast, beige, open-pit mines outside Kolwezi. Their copper and cobalt—more than exists anywhere else on earth—have lent names to gayer colors, but those colors are not in evidence here.

Half a dozen mine workers find a patch of grass on the stony hillside and rest on their elbows. They wear tattered shorts of khaki or navy blue, frayed shirts and cheap sandals. These are the "clean" clothes they donned after bathing off the sweat of the day. They look out on the source of three-fourths of the foreign exchange that Zaire will use to hold its bankers at bay this year, and next, and probably for as long as the country is managed the way it is. Several of these men are ordinary miners, encountered at random. The rest are union leaders of low and middle rank, assembled by the others for a visiting reporter.

The Zairian government's well-paid public relations machine in Washington says Zaire is a big pro–labor union country. David A. Morse, Zaire's lawyer-lobbyist who whispered the answers at the St. Regis meeting, and who is a former U.S. secretary of labor himself, says, "The Zairian trade union movement is recognized as being one of the best, if not the best, in Africa." Morse says the Zairian trade union movement is "the most effective social instrument in the country for the delivery of medical assistance, development of cooperatives, development of clinics, leadership training programs, etcetera, and has built a labor college in the country." The labor movement Morse is talking about, however, is a Zairian government-approved organization funded by the U.S. government and the U.S. AFL-CIO. The organization was developed by people working with, and by some accounts directly for, the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency.*

In other words, the organization Morse talks about is a company union, and few Zairians who need a labor union know anything about it. It has absolutely nothing to do with these miners. The union in Kolwezi, like any other that complains about working conditions in Zaire, is illegal. If the

*For the many connections between the CIA and the AFL-CIO's international labor activities, see chapter 20.

government found out what these men are up to, they would be jailed, or worse. The mere existence of this union is secret.

The men do not tell their names. They do not tell what roles they played in the Shaba uprisings of 1977 and 1978, though they make clear their sympathies lay with the rebellion. They do tell of their salaries, spitting out facts in the same bitter tone one hears from many mining workers and family members around Kolwezi.

Veteran miners get $33 a month. The lowest menials get $13. Most support large families with this money—often the African extended family, which includes an assortment of orphaned or otherwise-uncared-for nephews, nieces, and cousins. The cheapest protein source, beans, costs 33 cents a pound in this part of the country. Beef is $3 a pound. Corn or manioc flour is about $20 for a 132-pound bag, or about 16 cents for a 6-ounce cupful. A month's charcoal cooking fuel is another $8 or $9. Wives often tend 2-acre farms to help fill tables, but it isn't enough. Malnutrition is rampant, especially among children.

For all that Zaire (and the West) owes to these 32,000 miners and their families, you'd think they would be well taken care of. But very little of the mineral export billions comes back to Kolwezi, and the miners know it. Nor have the huge Western loans secured by their work helped them. They blame "*les supérieurs de chez nous*"—"the leaders of our country." "The corruption is everything," said one worker. Another added bluntly, "The president of the republic puts it in his pocket."

The government of Zaire took control of the copper-cobalt mining monopoly from Société Général, the Belgian concern, in 1972. But it is still managed largely by Europeans, and Société Général still gets a big cut of the money through various contracts, the terms of which are secret. The framework of those contracts was negotiated back in 1967, obviously a momentous event for Zairian development.

So Mobutu hired a pretty good lawyer to hammer out a formula for protecting the rights of the Zairian people to their mineral wealth, against the predatory instincts of sophisticated Western cartels. The lawyer was Theodore Sorensen, who also happened to represent Maurice Tempelsman. Tempelsman was about to organize an international combine of American, Japanese, and European companies to develop and manage the world's richest undeveloped copper and cobalt lode, right there in Shaba. And he persuaded Mobutu to hire his own lawyer to represent Zaire as the pattern was set for franchised foreign management of Zairian minerals. The incredible thing is that when Sorensen was proposed as CIA director in 1976, the nomination was thrown back at President-elect Carter, mostly on the ground that Sorenson was a naive, mushy-headed liberal incapable of the hard-nosed pragmatism the CIA job required. What a slander on Sorensen!*

*Sorensen says (in an interview with the author) that no conflict of interest existed, because in the deal Tempelsman later made with Mobutu, the Zairian government got a

The Zairian government mining agency that eventually took over legal ownership from Société Géneral under the arrangement Sorensen helped construct is known as Gecamines.* By law, it turns its products from Kolwezi over to a state sales board known as Sozacom. Both Sozacom and Gecamines are controlled by Mobutu appointees. Société Géneral has shipping and selling affiliates that are believed to get a lot, if not all, of Sozacom's business. It also has European smelting operations that process Zairian ore. The Belgians haven't done badly.

After deducting freight costs and sales commissions, Sozacom is supposed to return an average of 45 percent of revenues to Gecamines for expenses and improvements in Kolwezi. This, of course, would include miners' salaries. Mobutu's administrators say that in an average month, Sozacom receives about $120 million from Kolwezi's minerals, nets about $102 million after sales expenses, and returns about $41 million to Gecamines.

But expatriates in Kolwezi say that only about $20 million a month comes back to Gecamines. They say the other $20 million plus is skimmed off in graft. John Castiaux, expatriate chief of Gecamines's computer operations in Lubumbashi (the Shaba capital), confirmed this, though he wouldn't explain further after he found out he was talking to a reporter. "It's politics," he said.

In any case, most of the $120 million-a-month stays with the central banking system, which is also pretty clearly a conduit for thievery by the privileged. And even that is only part of the picture. Someone apparently manages to send a lot of cobalt out of Zaire without its being included in the $120 million at all. The *Wall Street Journal* has quoted commodities market authorities in the U.S. as saying that strange fluctuations in world cobalt prices are probably due to big off-the-books sales from Zaire, which dominates the market.

MIBA, which has a franchise as the national diamond mining monopoly, operates in much the same way. MIBA's expatriate engineers estimate that nearly half as many diamonds are smuggled onto the black market as are sold officially. Most people in Mbuji-Mayi seem to think that the black market share is even bigger. They note that MIBA operates only in the eastern half of the diamond region, and that the province of Western Kasai is open to other, privately owned concessions.

One such concession is held by a company owned by Maurice Tempelsman. Many educated Zairians believe Tempelsman's organization, in partnership with Mobutu, is responsible for the small *comptoirs*, or private

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minority interest in the copper-cobalt company. Therefore, he says, Tempelsman was never on the opposite side of the bargaining table from Zaire. "He was a participant in a consortium in which the government of Zaire was also a partner," Sorensen says. "The president [Mobutu] said he needed a Western lawyer. Tempelsman recommended me."

*The venture Tempelsman was organizing was separate and all new. For reasons explained in the previous chapter, it still hasn't been developed.

diamond buying offices in Western Kasai. Tempelsman insists that Mobutu doesn't have any interest in his company—in fact, he says they don't have any business partnerships and never have had. He also says that his company doesn't export any diamonds, it just looks for them.

Someone is exporting large amounts of diamonds outside the MIBA monopoly, however. The neighboring Republic of Congo, which has no known diamond deposits whatsoever, is ranked among the world's five leading diamond exporting countries.* That statistic is one of the most remarkable testimonials to corruption in world history.

Much of Zaire's coffee crop is smuggled out through Congo, too.

THE IMF team in Kinshasa admits it can't stop the outflow. In 1980, Belgian customs officials were sent to Kinshasa to supervise baggage checks at the bribery-riddled airport, but admitted they couldn't regulate the chaos. Graft is usually funneled through regional commissioners, about the rank of state governors in the U.S. The commissioners are appointed by Mobutu, and he always picks men from outside the region they are governing. Often they come from his own home region. Citizens complain about both practices.

David J. Gould, a University of Pittsburgh professor, did a field study of Zairian corruption in 1977. He says he interviewed big and small businessmen who reported paying bribes to the regional commissioner of Shaba province. Totaling up these reported bribes, Professor Gould says he accounted for $100,000 a month in graft. The commissioner's salary was $2,000 a month. Thus can the commissioners be expected to stay loyal to the regime. So, of course, can the army. With their roadside checkpoints, soldiers in Zaire are licensed to steal.

Still, despite poverty, misery, and injustice, the people of Zaire can be grateful to the people of the United States for one thing: we have kept their country from communism.

What is less widely considered, but equally true, however, is that we have also kept it from capitalism—or at least from anything that might remotely resemble a free market. And therein lies a key to many of the world's problems. The free market is demonstrably the most bountiful economic system on earth. And it has become the odd role of the United States of America to deny that system to hundreds of millions of people the world wide.

*Stated by diamond dealers and diplomats interviewed in Brazzaville. Back in the U.S., attempts to rank exporters with precise statistics failed, despite calls to the U.N., the U.S. Commerce Department and Census Bureau, spokesmen for DeBeers, and spokesmen for the European American Bank, which is active in the diamond business. One problem is that diamonds are divided into so many sub-categories, overall figures aren't kept.