Katanga is the heart of the Congo. When the Congo was a Belgian colony Katanga was its economic base. The export of Katangan minerals took place through Congo trade routes. The royalties and taxes which the mining company, Union Minière, paid were paid to the central government at Leopoldville. Without them, the Congolese economy could not have survived before independence.

In the last year before Congo became independent, Union Minière paid the colonial government £21 million. The rest of the Congo appears to have few economic potentialities, Katanga supplies not only 8% of the world’s copper but over 80% of the world’s cobalt and a large percentage of the world’s industrial diamonds, silver, zinc, cadmium and, even in small quantities, gold and uranium.

The Congolese economy was centrally administered, but with the Belgian colonial administration. What is euphemistically called the paternalism of the Belgians led them to keep the tribal structure of Congolese society as intact as possible. It is not surprising that no Congolese politicians emerged on the eve of independence who were not tribal politicians. This, though a consequence of Belgian

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policy, did not suit the Belgians who recognised that only a centrally organised state was possible. They therefore discouraged all separatist tribal tendencies and their political representatives, including Tshombe, and encouraged the few who appeared likely to try to transcend tribal division, such as Lumumba. When, after a week of independence, Lumumba broke off diplomatic relations with Belgium, Belgian policy reversed.

On 11 July 1960, Tshombe had proclaimed Katanga independence. Belgium was inclined to support him until its own government was reformed after the General Strike. Since then it has from behind the scenes unwaveringly supported the central Congolese government and given it large financial subsidies. In the headquarters of Union Minière in Brussels there appears to have been a division of opinion and some at least of the direction appears to show the views of the Belgian government. This raises two sharp questions. Why do the Belgians not support Tshombe? And why have most people in Britain been led to suppose that they do?

The answer to the first question is a simple one. In a wide sense Belgium has as much interest in African stability as any other power. Her quick change act from the patterns of Portuguese imperialism to those of British imperialism marks the consciousness of this in Brussels. Rwanda and Burundi, Belgium’s other African possessions are now being led through a time-table towards independence in a manner worthy of Mr Macleod himself. More narrowly, Union Minière needs a strong central Congolese government for three reasons. First, they need an export route to the sea. The only alternative to Leopoldville lies through Portuguese East Africa, a territory whose future stability is unlikely. Secondly, the Tshombe government in Katanga is inherently unstable. It is a tribal government, based on a coalition of two minority tribes against the majority tribe of Katanga. Tshombe’s writ does not run very far outside Elisabethville. Thirdly, one leading member of the Tshombe government, at least, has threatened to nationalise Union Minière and expropriate the Belgians.

Why then did Union Minière support Tshombe at all? It appears to have been committed by its representatives on the spot. One of the lessons the Belgians may have learnt is that you cannot administer a British-style colonial policy without strong white settler opposition. The white settlers of Katanga saw Tshombe as a puppet for them; in his need for a white mercenary military