

Parliament passes Zaire constitution.

Wrong, Michela

Reuters, April 8, 1994

KINSHASA, April 8 (Reuter) - Zaire's transitional parliament passed a new constitution on Friday after weeks of wrangling between supporters and opponents of President Mobutu Sese Seko.

"All's well that ends well," Archbishop Monsengwo Pasinya, the assembly's chairman, told foreign diplomats, businessmen and deputies gathered in the People's Palace. "The transitional act is now ready to be promulgated."

The ceremony came not a moment too soon. Monsengwo, who has played a crucial role in the successful adoption of the act, was due to leave on Friday night for Rome, where he will attend the first African synod.

There was a palpable sense of relief in the hall that the act had finally been passed. But political analysts agreed that the real issues still remained to be settled.

The Sacred Union opposition coalition, which last week walked out during a debate on the key article 76 dealing with the prime minister's election, was back in parliament after several of its suggestions were incorporated in the final text.

As now drafted, the newly-numbered article 78 stipulates that the premier must come from outside the presidential camp, gives Mobutu's supporters a purely consultative role in the choice, and sets a 10-day deadline for agreement on a candidate once Mobutu has promulgated the act.

By dropping a clause which defined the prime minister as being "elected by the national conference", the opposition has implicitly accepted that the prime minister's post is vacant, a step they swore they would never take.

That represents a major challenge to hardline opposition leader Etienne Tshisekedi, who was elected prime minister by the national conference in 1992 but was later fired by Mobutu.

He maintains he is Zaire's rightful premier and has refused on principle to stand against alternative opposition candidates waiting in the wings.

The issue of the premiership is already in danger of splintering the opposition, dividing radicals from moderates.

The Sacred Union on Wednesday expelled one of its three anchor parties, the centrist UDI, accusing it of selling out the national conference.

Kengo wa Dondo, the man tipped as Tshisekedi's most likely replacement, is a member of the UDI.

Before closing the session, Archbishop Monsengwo delivered a bleak speech in which he listed Zaire's chronic social problems, ranging from soaring inflation to crumbling industrial facilities and the huge divide separating the masses from the country's cossetted elite.

Calling a minute's silence for the victims of the recent killings in neighbouring Rwanda, he reminded the audience that Zaire could go the same way if no political progress was made.

"This country has enough orphans, widows and handicapped from its previous wars...dialogue remains the only way to settle conflicts," he said.

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