**Colonization in the Congo Activity**

**June 9, 1904: The Moment of Decision**

Parliament held a debate to decide how to handle Leopold and the situation in the Congo. Throughout the debate it was clear that Members of Parliament were aware of the public desire for action. Casement’s report had convinced all MPs that the Congo Free State authorities were committing atrocities on a mass scale. Numerous MPs remarked upon how uncommon it was for all members of the House of Commons to agree upon the nature of a problem. Opinions were not as unanimous regarding the solution. The issue involved how to create change most effectively in the Congo while also considering the diplomatic consequences for Britain’s relations with the other Great Powers.

All Members of Parliament remained very conscious of the fact that public opinion strongly favored stopping the abuses in the Congo. They also recognized that their decisions had life-or-death consequences for millions of people in the Congo and would directly affect the British economy. Furthermore, they knew they were setting a precedent for future cases involving human rights abuses and colonial administration in Africa and elsewhere.

**Option 2: Cooperate with the Other Great Powers**

While only three other governments have expressed interest in the cause so far, careful and determined diplomacy can bring others around to our point of view. Since it was a conference of the Great Powers in 1885 that brought the Congo Free State into existence, it is for all the Powers to take action to address problems. We are living in a new age of international organizations such as the Hague Tribunal, The Red Cross, and the League for Human Rights that are laboring to create a sense of law and norms of behavior that are expected of all civilized nations. Solving this problem collectively will enhance this new cooperative spirit. If we are to believe that international agreements have any meaning, we must act together to enforce these agreements.

Acting alone could disrupt the balance of power among the nations of Europe and create further diplomatic problems for Britain. The last thing we want is to give the Belgian government the impression that we see them as an enemy. We must carefully distinguish our concerns with King Leopold and our friendship with the Belgian people and their government. We must not push Belgium into an alliance with Germany that would be hostile to British interests. We must also be careful regarding our friendship with France. Sadly, the French Congo has adopted some of the same practices we now criticize in the Congo Free State. The French must not come to see us as adversaries, since they too could easily form a hostile alliance with the Germans.

The atrocities of the Congo Free State are so severe that they should be the concern of people from all civilized countries, not just Britain. Britain, while capable of acting on its own, can be far more effective by working with the other powers. Unless we are ready to deploy the British army and navy to yet another trouble spot in the world, we must act hand-in-hand with other countries.

In addition to the Congolese themselves, citizens of many European nations have been wronged by the administration of the Congo Free State. European merchants have been persecuted for attempting to practice the free trade that the Berlin Act guarantees. We should capitalize on this widespread dissatisfaction to form a united front against Leopold’s government.

We must work with sympathetic individuals and organizations in France and Belgium, as well as across Europe and in the United States to end the horror of King Leopold’s Congo.

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**Considering Your Option—June 9, 1904**

As a member of the House of Commons, you must constantly remember that you are an elected official. Therefore you are expected to react to public opinion, but you are also expected to follow your conscience in making decisions that are for the good of the nation, both now and in the future.

Your goal is to persuade undecided MPs who are present at this debate. Your group will present a persuasive three-to-five minute summary of your option. Use this worksheet will help you prepare. After all three groups have presented their options, the MPs of the other groups will have a chance to ask you questions or challenge your ideas.

**Questions to Consider:**

1. According to your option, what primary British interests are at stake in the Congo debate?

2. How does the situation in the Congo relate to the manner in which Britain administers its own vast colonial empire?

3. How might Britain’s response to the situation in the Congo affect our country’s relations with the other nations of Europe?

4. How will your option affect free trade and humanitarian causes in the Congo region?

5. How has history influenced our rights, privileges, and obligation to act in the Congo?