

INTERNATIONAL REPORT

Used U.S. Clothes a Best Seller in Africa

By JAMES BROOKE

Special to The New York Times

KINSHASA, Zaire — The latest garments for sale at a marketplace in Kinshasa are displayed by a saleswoman brandishing a sharp knife. She cuts open a 100-pound bale and, as customers eagerly surge forward, out spill pastel polo shirts, khaki short-sleeve shirts and cotton pants — all secondhand.

It is the end of the line from last summer's New York casual wear — used clothes that have been cast out in the United States.

"A guy makes \$200 a year, so how can he afford new clothes?" said Edward Stubin, a used-clothing exporter from Greenpoint, Brooklyn, smiling contentedly at the hubbub in the Grand Marché.

Mr. Stubin participates in a boom-

ing trade in used clothes that come from the United States and are sold in the third world. By some estimates, one-third of the 470 million people in sub-Saharan Africa are walking around in cast-off European and American clothing. Some of them paid as little as 50 cents for a shirt or 75 cents for a pair of pants.

Trade Banned by Nigeria

Although the trade is criticized as demeaning by some nationalists, it thrives throughout the region. The only major African country that bans imports of used clothing is Nigeria, one of black Africa's wealthiest nations. The trade cuts across ideological lines: One of Mr. Stubin's recent shipments went to Angola, a nation with a Marxist government.

Last year used clothing was Zaire's fifth-largest import from the United States (after wheat, mining machinery, transportation equipment and parts). Zaire imported almost \$7.4 million worth of used clothing.

One threat to the trade came last year when textile manufacturers in Zaire spread a rumor that imported clothing was infected with the virus that causes acquired immune deficiency syndrome. But the notion that AIDS could be spread in such a way has been roundly rejected and the rumor has not slowed business.

"The buying power of the African is so low that it's the only way people get clothes," said Mustaq Rawji, president of Beltexco, one of the leading importers here.

Several Major Exporters

Mr. Stubin, president of Trans-Americas FSC Inc., ships about 10 million pounds of used clothing a year from New York, mainly to Africa.

A low-paid worker sometimes finds a shirt for 50 cents.

Even with so big a volume, he considers himself only "one of the top 10" American exporters to Africa.

The flow of garments from New York starts at the Salvation Army and Goodwill Industries, where many tons of donated clothing — more than the organizations can handle themselves — are received annually, usually in the spring and the fall.

A middleman buys the excess clothes, often for as little as 6 cents a pound. Placed on conveyor belts, the clothes are sorted by hand.

"The quality from New York is good," said Shokat Alibhai, a Zairean clothing importer who accompanied Mr. Stubin to the market here. "They are rich people, and they use up their things quickly."

The exporter, who must produce a certificate of disinfection and fumigation, puts the clothes in 100-pound bales, wrapped in waterproof plastic and bound with steel or plastic straps.

No Need for Warmer Garb

An importer always keeps the consumer's requirements in mind. "We don't buy many sweaters," Mr. Rawji joked as he sat in an air-conditioned cafe here, not far from the Equator.

Importers are also constrained by a national dress code imposed in the early 1970's by Zaire's President, Mobutu Sese Seko. This code, stressing "authenticity," forbids men to

wear Western coats and ties and forbids women to wear slacks.

The importers also run into supply limitations. By mid-winter, many exporters run low on short-sleeve shirts, which Americans and Europeans generally give away in early fall. Also, the preference of American teen-age girls for jeans leaves African importers with a shortage of used dresses in adolescent sizes.

Every month Beltexco buys 20 containers of 40 bales apiece. Importers pay between \$7 and \$9 a 100-pound bale.

From the port of Matadi, the bales are trucked to a company warehouse here — a 225-mile drive that takes 10 to 12 hours over bumpy roads.

American 'Quality Is Good'

"We buy 90 to 95 percent from the U.S.," said Mr. Alibhai, a Beltexco director, walking through the warehouse, which has a capacity of 25,000 bales. "The quality is good, and the U.S. currency is low now."

From here, bales are shipped to the interior of Zaire. Exactly where they are sent depends on the economic calendar. "In April we know they will have money in Shaba because of the cotton and corn harvest," Mr. Rawji said. "In Haut-Zaire it is December and January, when they have the coffee harvest."

Down at the Grand Marché, one vendor, Calmos Ngomba, wore a red T-shirt stamped "Georgia Junk Yard Dogs." For a "Budweiser" shirt, he asked 80 zaires, equal to \$1. After a little dickering, he went down to 60 zaires, or 75 cents. At a store, he said, a new shirt would cost \$4 to \$5.

"Store prices are too high," said another vendor, Emanuel Mbangu. "How can people afford a new shirt?"

European Trade Bloc's Crisis

By PETER MAASS

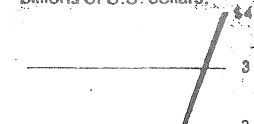
Special to The New York Times

BRUSSELS, Feb. 15 — "I am not a horse trader," Jacques Delors, president of the European Community's Executive Commission, insisted recently. "I don't ask for 10, expecting to get 5."

But Mr. Delors, who rose to prominence as France's Socialist Finance Minister from 1981 to 1985, may need the bargaining skills of a horse trader

A Growing Deficit

Budget deficit of the European Community, in billions of U.S. dollars.



sales tax imposed at each stage of producing or distributing goods.

According to community officials, Mr. Delors wants member states' contributions partly based on their gross national product rather than just the valued added tax. This could add as much as 30 percent to spending, one budget aide said.

But the larger countries, which would have to contribute more under such a system, are expected to balk at the idea. They are also likely to oppose the as-yet unspecified plan for reforming government spending



The New York Times/James Brooke

Workers unloading second-hand clothes wrapped in bales at a market in Kinshasa, Zaire, and, right, Edward Stubin, used-clothing exporter from Brooklyn, examining clothes being offered at the Kinshasa market.

