

# The Role of MI6 in the Assassination of Patrice Lumumba

The Congolese leader was overthrown, kidnapped and executed by imperialists forces in 1960-61

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*A recent letter to the London Review of Books has opened back up discussions about those responsible for the assassination of revolutionary Congolese leader Patrice Lumumba. Lumumba, a charismatic and popular organizer during the 1958-1960 period, captivated the hearts and minds of the majority of his people and the African continent during the struggle against Belgian colonialism.*

David Lea, a member of the House of Lords, wrote the letter in response to a review of a book on the history of MI6 entitled “Empire and Secrets: British Intelligence, the Cold War and the Twilight of Empire” by Calder Walton. Lea’s letter referenced the passage in the book by Walton that said “The question remains whether British plots to assassinate Lumumba...ever amounted to anything. At present we do not know.”

Lea wrote that “Actually, in this particular case, I can report that we do. It so happens that I was having a cup of tea with Daphne Park.... She had been consul and first secretary in Leopoldville, now Kinshasha, from 1959 to 1961, which in practice meant head of MI6 there.”

Lea continues claiming that “I mentioned the uproar surrounding Lumumba’s abduction and murder, and recalled the theory that MI6 might have had something to do with it. ‘We did,’ she replied, ‘I organized it.’”

This same British official reports Park felt, as many in the West did at the time, that if a pro-imperialist regime did not take control of Congo the country’s mineral resources would be taken by the Soviet Union. Lumumba was labeled as a communist during this time and such propaganda by the western press was utilized to justify the coup against him and his ultimate brutal assassination.

In an interview with The Hindu, Lea stressed “That’s the conversation I had with her and that’s what she told me. I have nothing more to add” in regard to how such allegations could be substantiated.

After retiring from the diplomatic and intelligence divisions of the British government, Park was appointed as a Life peer as Baroness Park of Monmouth. Her colleagues in the House of Lords noted that she was a spokesperson for the Secret Intelligence Service. In addition she had served briefly as the head of Somerville College, Oxford University.

MI6 refused to comment on the allegation made by Lea. Lumumba's assassination sparked protests throughout Africa and the world.

### **Role of the U.S. in the Overthrow and Assassination of Lumumba**

It was not only Britain that sought the overthrow of Lumumba. Many people believe based upon U.S. foreign policy at the time as well as the subsequent release of formally classified documents, that the White House under Dwight D. Eisenhower engineered the plot against the Congolese patriot.

The U.S. role in the assassination of Lumumba was documented by the 1975 Senate Select Committee on Intelligence hearings, chaired by Idaho Senator Frank Church. A former National Security staffer, Robert Johnson, reported about a senior level meeting involving President Eisenhower and high ranking intelligence officers where the decision was reached to assassinate Patrice Lumumba.

According to Johnson's recollections, "At some time during the discussion, President Eisenhower said something—I can no longer remember his words—that came across to me as an order for the assassination of Lumumba who was then at the center of political conflict and controversy in the Congo. There was no discussion; the meeting simply moved on. I remember my sense of that moment quite clearly because the President's statement came as a great shock to me." (Taken from "The Congo Cables", p. 54, by Madelaine Kalb)

Further confirmation of the role of the Eisenhower administration in the coup against Lumumba was made by Lawrence Devlin, who served as a Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) field officer in Congo during 1960. Devlin later admitted that he had received instructions to carry out an assassination plan against Lumumba.

Devlin, in his book entitled "Chief of Station, Congo," said that the orders were given by CIA Deputy Chief of Plans Dick Bissel. He claims that one method of assassination contemplated was poisoning where Lumumba's toothpaste would be laced with a deadly chemical agent.

Although Devlin claimed that he balked at the order and later abandoned it based upon his own political judgments about the situation involving U.S.-Congolese relations, such denials of refusing to carry out orders from superiors are highly unlikely in such an organization as the CIA. It has been well documented that the CIA was involved in numerous destabilization operations, coups and assassinations in Africa and other parts of the world. (See "In Search of Enemies," by John Stockwell, 1984)

Devlin did admit to supporting two military coups led by Mobutu Sese Seko, the U.S. strongman in Congo. These coups took place in September 1960 against Lumumba and in November 1965 in response to the power vacuum left by the removal of secessionist Moïse Tshombe who was later made prime minister of Congo in 1964 after his divisive role in the mineral-rich region of Katanga in 1960.

The former CIA station chief justified his support of Mobutu saying that it was correct for the U.S. to install an anti-communist dictator as a bulwark against leftist influence in Congo. Devlin was later appointed as head of CIA operations in Laos in efforts to prevent the revolutionaries from taking power from a Washington-backed regime during the Vietnam War.

Later Devlin served as the Africa Division Chief for the CIA. He worked for the Agency

officially until 1974.

## **British Intelligence Documents Must Be Released on Congo**

It is important in light of these allegations made by David Lea and the questions raised by Walton's book that documents be released by MI6 on their role in Congo during 1959-1961. On the London Review Books' blog Bernard Porter wrote that these statements made by both Lea and Walton provide "All the more reason to open up the archives. For those of us who always suspected things like this were going on, only to be smeared by the authorities—i.e. the conspirators themselves—as conspiracy 'theorists'...." (LRB, April 5)

At the same time Porter goes on to reflect that "On the other hand perhaps we shouldn't expect too much. Another of the revelations in Walton's book was that colonial officials sometimes destroyed incriminating documents and then replaced them with forgeries, to fool the historian. You can never know where you are with secret history, which only encourages the conspiracy theorists."

The coup which overthrew Lumumba's government and the brutal execution of the Prime Minister along with two of his comrades, Maurice Mpolo, the Minister of Youth and Sports and Joseph Okito, President of the Congolese Senate, on January 17, 1961, was a devastating blow to the African Revolution. Congo became a strategic base for the CIA and its war to halt the inevitable total liberation of Southern Africa that was eventually realized in the 1990s after the massive intervention of Cuban internationalists in Angola between 1975-1989 and the fortification of the national liberation movements of the South-West Africa People's Organization (SWAPO) of Namibia and the African National Congress (ANC) of South Africa.

Even today the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) is source of instability for the African continent. Large sections of the eastern region of the country that are mineral-rich remain outside the control of the central government in Kinshasha.

Multi-national mining corporations are continuing their theft of Congolese mineral resources and consequently fueling instability. The Congolese people are still tasked with the necessity of gaining complete control over their territory and state.

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