

# Patrice Lumumba and Congo's Search for Real Independence

It is often said about martyred revolutionaries that while you can kill a human being, you cannot kill the idea s/he embodies. What is left out of that true saying is that an idea can faint or be wounded, thereby s needing to be resuscitated or healed. Indeed, the idea of a truly independent Democratic Republic of Congo was severely injured and did indeed suffer faint the moment Patrice Lumumba breathed his last. For since his execution on January 17, 1961, Congo has struggled to stand as an independent nation and pursue nationally-defined goals and aspirations.

Patrice Lumumba's fight for Congo transcended the mere exchange of a Belgian flag with a locally-designed one to mark the "birth" of the nation then known as Zaire. For him, Independence went beyond the mere filling up government positions with Congolese personnel after the exit of Belgian administrative officers. Patrice Lumumba yearned for mental independence of the Congolese, an emancipation from feelings of inferiority to pale skinned mortals from the western hemisphere. His belief in the equal humanity of the Congolese with his Belgian counterpart strengthened him to speak truth to power.

Perhaps in no other country was the idea of independence and handover of power more of a ridicule to Africa than in the Congo. One would have thought that decades of maiming, killing, oppression and extraction of free labor and resources that characterized Belgian colonial rule in Congo would generate empathy for the colonized at the time of independence. Belgian authorities, however, left Congo with nothing; official cars were placed on board cargo ships headed back to Belgium, tiles were stripped off floors, curtains were dismantled, and even leftover toilet papers in restrooms were

yanked off their holders, refolded, packed and shipped back to Brussels.

The Independence speech by King Baudouin of Belgium came narrowly short of making a mockery of the untold sufferings of the Congolese under his country's administration. The King expressed his admiration for the awesomeness of his ancestor, King Leopold II, the architect of the killing and pillaging spree in the Congo. In the speech, King Baudouin congratulated the Congolese on having qualified, after being civilized by the Belgians, to become independent.

At the Independence ceremony, Patrice Lumumba could not stomach the falsehood being peddled by the outgoing colonialists. Being a visionary, he knew that that event was going to be watched by generations of Congolese to come. In years beyond his lifetime, the Congo Independence Day speeches were going to be studied in universities, analyzed by researchers, referred to by policy makers and re-run by media houses. Lumumba chose to, at the risk of his own life, set the record straight.

In his speech, Patrice Lumumba summarized the sufferings of his people, and rightly noted that Independence was gained through nationalist movements led by the Congolese themselves, supported by other Africans, and not as a result of the magnanimity of Belgium. Lumumba expressed hope that Independence would bring comfort at last to the masses and that the nation would unite to build a country that would be the pride of Africa.

Appalled at the audacity of Patrice Lumumba, King Baudouin stormed out of the ceremony in anger. The western world raised an outcry in the media against Patrice Lumumba. How ungrateful, devoid of tact and diplomacy could these Africans be, decried many news analyses in the Global North. From then, even Lumumba knew that his days were numbered. He would hurriedly put another short speech together, delivered in the

evening of the same day, where he tried to sound more pacifying. It was too late to undo his own death warrant which he had signed.

Patrice Lumumba's death was executed through the hands of his fellow Congolese, those who criticized his speech as being too forward, too confrontational and too direct. His assassination was wrought through the machinations of those who declared that Congo would be better off playing down colonialism and its effects on the people and continuing to look towards the former colonial masters for assistance; decades later, that mindset still pervades the nation. If Lumumba had lived, there is a high probability that he would have raised disciples in his generation, and trained the younger generation to stand up and defend the resources of Congo, the world's wealthiest nation in terms of natural resource abundance.

But with Lumumba's death came Congo's descent into further dependence on any non-African country that showed interest. With an untapped natural resource reserve conservatively estimated at \$24 trillion, the country is riddled with foreigners hustling to overtly, covertly, legitimately and illegitimately carve out some wealth from the porosity that defines governance and administration in that nation.

What Congo needs today is a restoration of Lumumba's ideas in classrooms, lecture halls, offices, religious and civil gatherings. Lumumba's ideas of real and authentic independence and how it should be pursued must be re-introduced to this generation of Congolese in order for the country to make progress and become the "pride of Africa" which Patrice Lumumba called that nation in the Independence speech. Sitting on the fence, trying to appease foreigners and wringing hands in helplessness and agony have not brought neither will it bring much progress to DRC. The change that DRC needs will come from citizens who are enlightened enough to understand their self and national worth, citizens who are fearless in the face of foreigners, and who are ready and willing to stand

up for the truth, and to live a life of truth.