

Background

Congo gained independence from Belgium on **30 June 1960**. Before independence, the Belgians followed a policy of **paternalism**, treating Congolese people like children and giving them very little political responsibility. Congo had many political parties based on different ethnic and regional groups. Patrice Lumumba's **MNC** gained the most support because it had support from different parts of Congo.

Political Policies

After independence, **Joseph Kasavubu became President and Patrice Lumumba became Prime Minister**. They disagreed about how Congo should be governed. Kasavubu supported a federal system, while Lumumba wanted a strong central government. At the same time, **Moise Tshombe** wanted Katanga to separate from Congo. These disagreements caused political instability.

In **1965, Mobutu Sese Seko took power through a military coup**. He created a strong central government and later introduced a **one-party state** under the Popular Movement for the Revolution (MPR). He stopped opposition parties and ruled as a military dictator. Although this brought some political stability, it removed democracy and gave Mobutu almost complete control.

Mobutu also introduced **Mobutuism** and developed a personality cult around himself. He was supported by the USA because he was strongly **anti-communist**. His government was also affected by **nepotism and kleptocracy**, where people close to him were given positions and government money was abused.

Economic Policies

At independence, Congo was one of the richest African countries because of its natural resources such as **copper, cobalt and diamonds**. However, much of the economy was controlled by foreigners. Mobutu later **nationalised important industries**, especially copper mining, and used the profits for industrial development.

Mobutu also introduced **Zaireanisation**, which replaced many foreign business owners and skilled workers with Congolese people. However, many replacements lacked the necessary skills. This resulted in **corruption, poor management and theft**. The economy became weaker, infrastructure such as roads declined, and inflation increased.

Mobutu's government became a **kleptocracy**, where officials used their positions to become wealthy. Because the economy continued to decline, Mobutu had to introduce **retrocession**,

allowing some foreign owners to return. Congo eventually became dependent on **foreign aid and investment**, including support from the World Bank.

Cultural Policies

Mobutu tried to promote African culture and national identity. Western-style suits were discouraged and replaced by the **abaco**, meaning “down with the suit.” African hairstyles, music, art and dance were also encouraged. Mobutu also promoted national unity and presented himself as a traditional African leader.

Education faced many problems. At independence, Congo had only **14 university graduates out of about 14 million people**. French remained the language of education, and the education system mainly benefited the urban elite. However, primary school enrolment increased from about **1.6 million learners in 1960 to 4.6 million in 1974**. Later, when government funding was reduced, parents had to pay more, causing education to decline.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Congo experienced both **successes and serious challenges** after independence. Mobutu brought some political stability and promoted African culture, but his dictatorship, corruption, nepotism and poor economic management weakened the country. Although Congo had valuable natural resources and experienced growth in school enrolment, economic decline, poor education and political repression remained major problems.