

Silicon Valley Tech Giants in International Child Exploitation Lawsuit

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[Source](#)

I have to warn you up front about this blog and its accompanying article: it's not light nor easy reading; it's heartbreaking in fact. And I'm blogging about it not only because of the inherent interest of the story, but because it confirms a suspicion that I and others have held (Catherine Austin Fitts for example). We'll get back to that suspicion after the article and a bit of context.

The bit of context is this: the Congo (oops, there's another one of those countries with a definite article as part of its proper name) has long been an example of the worst features of European colonialism, with few of the benefits or pluses. Belgian rule was notoriously corrupt and cruel. Supposedly, all that changed (or at least, was *supposed* to change) at the end of colonial rule. But the Congo remained a country rich in rare resources – and a very poor population – to be exploited. In the late 1980s, Mikhail Gorbachev, still General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, accused West Germany of maintaining a large and very secret preserve in the country where it was covertly developing all manner of weapons, from cruise missiles to bioweapons under the aegis of a German corporation called OTRAG (*Orbital Transport Raketen Aktiengesellschaft*). For those who know the story, former Apollo flight director Dr. Kurt Debus retired from NASA, and

quickly became a board member of OTRAG.

S.D. shared this article, and herewith a big thank you for doing so, because what the article states indicates that little has changed in the Congo; the exploitation continues, and one wonders if it signals the confirmation of that suspicion I and others have maintained:

[Apple and Google named in US lawsuit over Congolese child cobalt mining deaths](#)

The beginning of the article says it all:

A landmark legal case has been launched against the world's largest tech companies by Congolese families who say their children were killed or maimed while mining for cobalt used to power smartphones, laptops and electric cars, the Guardian can reveal.

Apple, Google, Dell, Microsoft and Tesla have been named as defendants [in a lawsuit filed](#) in Washington DC by human rights firm [International Rights Advocates](#) on behalf of 14 parents and children from the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). The lawsuit accuses the companies of aiding and abetting in the death and serious injury of children who they claim were working in cobalt mines in their supply chain.

The families and injured children are seeking damages for forced labour and further compensation for unjust enrichment, negligent supervision and intentional infliction of emotional distress.

It is the first time that any of the tech companies have faced such a legal challenge.

Cobalt is essential to power the rechargeable lithium batteries used in millions of products sold by Apple, Google, Dell, [Microsoft](#) and Tesla every year. The insatiable demand for cobalt, driven by desire for cheap handheld technology,

has tripled in the past five years and is expected to double again by the end of 2020. More than 60% of cobalt originates in DRC, one of the poorest and most unstable countries in the world.

The extraction of cobalt from DRC has been linked to human rights abuses, corruption, environmental destruction and [child labour](#).

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In the court documents, the Congolese families describe how their children were driven by extreme poverty to seek work in large mining sites, where they claim they were paid as little as \$2 (£1.50) a day for backbreaking and dangerous work digging for cobalt rocks with primitive tools in dark, underground tunnels.

The families claim that some of the children were killed in tunnel collapses while others were paralysed or suffered life-changing injuries from accidents.

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One of the central allegations in the lawsuit is that Apple, Google, Dell, Microsoft and [Tesla](#) were aware and had “specific knowledge” that the cobalt they use in their products is linked to child labour performed in hazardous conditions, and were complicit in the forced labour of the children.

There you have it: *children* are being exploited to mine *cobalt*. And given that country's history, one wonder just what else children might be being used to mine. And being paid a pittance to do so. That, pretty much, has been the history of much of the resource-rich areas of Africa, and particularly the Congo. Imagine, for a moment, being so *poor* that \$2/ day to mine *cobalt* seems like a good thing.

So what's my suspicion? What's the high octane speculation? Well, for one thing, there's a pattern here and it's an old one: the exploitation of cheap labor by mega-corporations. But in this case, it's exploitation of a population of people that "no one will miss." One thus wonders just how extensive the practice is, and *that's my suspicion, namely, that the size and extent of human trafficking and the variety of "purposes" it "serves" – from sex slavery to organ harvesting and so on – isn't also a source of outright slavery to use people to create hidden infrastructures funded by hidden finance for hidden purposes.* In the case of the Congo, the technologies clearly exist to mine cobalt much more safely: boring machines can dig, shafts can be reinforced and air ducts can recycle air. But that would require a considerable outlay of capital, and reduce "the bottom line." But why do that, when there's a ready supply of what in effect is slave labor available? Better to have *children* breathe *cobalt dust* than to pay a real wage for real mining. If you detect that I'm both sad and angry about this story, you'd be right.

So, yes, if as alleged these corporations are doing it in the Congo, chances are they're doing it elsewhere as well, perhaps right here, perhaps right beneath our feet. It wouldn't surprise me, because if they're willing to do it there, they'll do it anywhere.

So, yes, I'm taking this article as a bit of confirmation of my suspicion...

See you on the flip side...