

# Kenya: mass action can end President Kibaki's rule

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The Kenyan opposition is promising three days of mass protest from 16 January, as attempts at a negotiated settlement with President Mwai Kibaki fail. Ghanaian president John Kufuor went home, after failing to bring Kibaki and his rival Odinga of the Orange Democratic Movement together over the issue of the stolen elections. In fact, Kibaki has gone ahead and announced his cabinet, now safe in the presidential chair for a second term. Odinga and the ODM, which swept into power in the simultaneously held parliamentary elections, are having to re-energise a movement in the face of threats from the police and army.

## ***Elections***

The parliamentary election dealt a crushing blow to Kibaki and his Party of National Unity. The PNU won only 37 seats (against the ODM's 100-plus); 20 ministers lost their seats (out of about 27 posts); the vice-president was voted out; three members of former president and kleptocrat Daniel Arap Moi's family were defeated. This was a popular uprising at the ballot box against those tainted with the 'old regime' of corruption, big business and neoliberalism. The workers and peasants voted in their majority for a new direction and an end to poverty.

However, the presidential election delivered a different result. Counted the day after the parliamentary result was announced, it delivered victory by more than 200,000 votes to Kibaki - despite exit polls predicting a big victory for Odinga. Demonstrations, walkouts and protests against the stolen election immediately followed. A few days later, the head of the 'independent' electoral commission admitted he didn't know who'd won, and that there were some irregularities, including one constituency recording a 115 per cent voting turnout.

Kibaki's replied with brutal crackdown by the army and police, a curfew and a media blackout.

So far, about 600 have been killed, and 250,000 have fled their homes. The western media has been replete with tales of inter-ethnic conflict, and how Kenya is sliding into tribal warfare and civil war. But in truth, a large part - perhaps majority - of the violence has been carried out by state forces. Police and army have operated a shoot to kill policy; one BBC journalist spoke of seeing more than 40 dead bodies in a mortuary, all with bullet wounds in the pro-ODM city of Kisumu.

A brief look at the polls running up to the election shows that it is more than just a fight between the Kikuyu and the Luo that the western media often portrays it as. Kibaki was running at 35-40 per cent, which is more than the 22 per cent of the Kenyan population that the Kikuyu people make up, while Odinga had around 43-45 per cent, substantially more than the 12 per cent of Kenyans that are of Luo origin. Kibaki's support actually is derived from the Kikuyu elite and parts of the old regime based around the Kenyan African National Union (Kanu), while Odinga is supported by large numbers of people who have failed to

benefit from the Kenyan economic boom.

Some inter-ethnic violence has occurred, such as the burning of a church used by refugees in which more than 30 people died. But while some of this violence has been spontaneous outpourings against Kibaki supporters, mainly directed at Kikuyu businesses, a lot has been stoked by politicians of both sides in the run-up to the elections and their aftermath.

### ***Kenya since independence***

Kenya won independence from the UK in 1963 after the bloody Mau Mau war in the 1950s, which saw the British on the offensive against Kenyans, mainly the Kikuyu. From independence and up to 2002, the country was ruled by Kanu, led by President Jomo Kenyatta until his death in 1978, and then by Arap Moi until 2002. Despite Kenyatta's involvement in the struggle against the British (he was jailed for eight years), as president he was a good friend of western governments and big business, which rewarded the Kanu leadership with illegal gifts.

In the 1990s, the World Bank and IMF did pressure Arap Moi into adopting a structural adjustment programme that saw some liberalisation. Yet this wasn't enough, and in 2002 Mwai Kibaki and the National Rainbow Coalition trumped Arap Moi's successor in presidential elections. In power, Kibaki has continued privatising the economy - last year the railways were sold off - and courted new business, such as finance, banking and the IT sector. Under his rule, Kenya has seen growth rates of more than 5 per cent compared with a stagnating economy in Arap Moi's last presidential term.

But Kibaki has continued Arap Moi's policies in the field of corruption. He was finance minister under Kenyatta and Arap Moi, and so was no doubt aware of the sacking of the country's wealth by multinationals and the Kanu elite. In power, despite an abortive investigation into Arap Moi and his family, which found millions of dollars in Swiss bank accounts but led to no action, Kibaki and his government have overseen scandals, involving bribery from companies, such as, Goldenberg, Anglo Leasing and Safaricom.

The government also produced its Vision 2030 document, which called for Kenya to be the pre-eminent capitalist economy in Africa by 2030. Kenya is already seen by international capital as a staging post for further investment in the continent. The fruits of its agriculture (still dominated by white landowners) can be seen in supermarkets throughout the UK, and accounts for a quarter of the country's wealth, the rest being made up of tourism and the service sector.

Yet despite these growth rates, many Kenyans have faced only greater hardships. The per capita Gross National Income is about \$550 a year; the average annual wage for the poor is around the \$200 mark, while even Kibaki has admitted that 46 per cent of the population lives in poverty. Meanwhile MPs earn \$60,000 a year making them possibly the most affluent parliamentarians in the world. And in the countryside there is a similar story; white farmers still dominate agriculture despite some moves towards more African-owned farms, while the peasants have faced several years of famine and drought.

Despite the poverty and the growing inequality, Kenya is strategically important to world capitalism in Africa, and is also a partner in George Bush's war on terror. This accounts for the USA's early recognition of the Kibaki government, and its recent statement that there was ballot rigging on both sides. And while the EU and other international observers have spoken of irregularities, they have only done in Kenya as much as they did over the stolen election in Nigeria last year and the one in Mexico in 2006 - that is nothing.

### ***The Orange Democratic Movement***

Raila Odinga leads the ODM and has been involved in Kenyan politics for 40 years. He served both in Kenyatta's government and under Arap Moi. He fell out with Arap Moi over who was going to run as Kanu candidate in the 2002 presidential elections, the job eventually going to Kenyatta's son, Uhuru (who now sits in Kibaki's cabinet). Odinga then promised Kibaki his support in return for the premiership. After the elections, however, he was rewarded with just the transport portfolio. Spurned for the second time, Odinga set up the ODM and successfully campaigned against Kibaki's proposed constitutional changes in 2005 (which would have markedly strengthened an already powerful presidency).

What this shows is that, rather than being riven by inter-ethnic conflict, Kenyan politics is dominated by a few powerful figures and their families, Kenyatta, Arap Moi, Kibaki and Odinga, who have allied and fallen out over who has access to power and wealth for themselves and their supporters, and not over any point of political principal.

### ***Working class and resistance***

The Central Organisation of Trade Unions (the Kenyan TUC) has played a lamentable role. Its general secretary said, "The problem was politically instigated and should be solved politically." This is correct, but then COTU draws the wrong conclusion that the trade unions should not intervene. Instead it has called on Kibaki to start talks to resolve the crisis (despite his being the cause of it) and demanded safe streets and workplaces for its members, which, in the absence of a workers' militia, can only mean the police and army should take to the streets in force.

Kanu has historically dominated the Kenyan trade unions. In government in the 1990s, it banned unions in the civil service; it has interfered in union elections, appointed officials and nurtured a pliant bureaucracy. There have also been accusations of corruption. Rank and file pressure finally forced union appointees to withdraw from the governing board of the National Social Security Fund in the late 1990s, because they refused to fight for workers' interests.

Despite this, during the same period, there were also several important struggles such as over wages and jobs, so much so that the IMF tried to blame the workers for the stagnating economy. A corrupt, pro-capitalist bureaucracy may hamper the COTU, but it clearly remains an arena of struggle, where the rank and file can press its demands for action and should organise independently to oust the bureaucracy and control its own struggles.

During the current crisis, young people (the average age of the 36 million Kenyans is 18) take to their streets in their thousands. But Odinga and the people around him are part of the Kenyan political caste, and will do nothing to challenge the rule of capital, which is behind the misery and poverty of the masses. Instead socialists should take to the streets and argue for:

- o ***Committees of action*** in the towns and the country to coordinate the struggles against the stolen elections. Youths are already forming roadblocks and demonstrating; they can go further. These committees should be open to all workers and peasants whatever their ethnic background. They must also distribute food and water and organise transport as the country is at a standstill and there is already talk of starvation - a threat that can be used by the government to intimidate people back to work.

- o ***Workers and peasants militia*** The committees should unite the masses in struggle and organise defence of demonstrations against police and army attacks. Militia should be multi-ethnic and also guard against conflict between various peoples.

- o ***General strike*** The country's two million workers must use their power to prevent the government from ruling. While the country is currently at a standstill, workers must organise across unions to stay out and

put up armed picket lines around banks, firms and at the ports. Workers should also become involved in demonstrations, and give a lead to the thousands already opposed to the regime. Form a national rank and file movement to oust the reformists and the corrupt leaders, who want to abdicate from the political struggle.

o **Workers and peasants? government** The struggle against Kibaki should not stop at the election of an Odinga government or a deal between the two sides. Odinga has already said he accepts the free market and will do nothing to stop privatisation and greater inequality. Instead, we need a government for the workers and the poor. A government that can take over the banks and the stock exchange, expropriate the white-owned farms and big businesses, including the imperialist multinationals, and use the wealth of the country to raise the standards of the poor, rather feed the bank accounts of a few rich Kenyans or capitalist companies.

To implement such a strategy the masses must break from any illusions in Odinga and build a class-based party. Instead of an array of shifting alliances and myriad parties (there were more than 100 at the recent parliamentary elections), a party of the workers must be built, which can then offer a lead to other poor sections of society, such as the peasants or the youth in the shanty towns.

Workers should also reject the help of the non-governmental organisations, which reinforce ethnic divisions or populist politics by their regional influence and campaigns for reforms within capitalism. It was the NGOs that so disgracefully priced poor Kenyans out of attending the World Social Forum last year in Nairobi - until the last day, when the forum was stormed. That action shows that there are opportunities for socialists to organise, lead and learn from the masses in their struggle against capitalist exploitation.

The Russian revolutionary Leon Trotsky wrote in **Permanent Revolution** in 1905 how, in the epoch of imperialism, many unfulfilled tasks of the democratic revolution can only be achieved by the workers taking power and implementing a socialist revolution. His analysis was borne out in the Russian revolution, which resulted in a workers government based on the power of workers' councils (soviets), and set out on the road of solving the land question, establishing rights for ethnic groups, and sweeping away the vestiges of feudalism.

In Kenya, the workers and their allies can only solve the masses' burning democratic questions by taking power and setting out on the road to socialism. But for this struggle to succeed, it must end with the smashing of the state and the overthrow of capitalism, replacing it with a planned socialised economy. The current crisis in Kenya offers an opportunity to work towards that end.

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