

Kenyan power-sharing: business as usual

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"Neither side can realistically govern without the other"

With this compromise, Raila Odinga, leader of the Orange Democratic Movement, signed with President Mwai Kibaki an agreement for power-sharing in Kenya.

The agreement came after more than a thousand people were killed and 300,000 fled their homes after Kibaki stole the presidential election in December. (see

<http://www.fifthinternational.org/index.php?id=260,0,0,1,0,0> ^[1]

Talks brokered by Kofi Annan and the Tanzanian president led to both Kibaki and Odinga agreeing to:

- ? The creation of a new post of prime minister (for Odinga)
- ? A vice president
- ? Two new deputy prime minister posts
- ? The ODM having posts in Kibaki's cabinet.

Only the national assembly can supposedly remove the incumbents in the new posts. The agreement has also committed both parties to discussing land redistribution, economic policy and the constitution.

The agreement has given the people who voted for the ODM in record numbers nothing. The militants who were pressuring Odinga to settle for "nothing less than the presidency" have been sidelined or bought off. What the deal has done is to allow the Kenyan elite to continue plundering the country, while the multinationals can breath a sigh of relief as East Africa is stabilised for exploitation once again.

The ODM's leadership has been allowed into the very lucrative business of government. MPs of all sides voted themselves a bonus of \$22,000 last December before the new elections. According to the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, Kenyan MPs' annual salaries are about \$35,000, but with bonuses and expenses they can expect to earn \$120,000 a year. Kibaki had increased the rewards by about 25 per cent on coming to power in 2003. Ministers earn far more and can also use their bonuses to employ people in their constituencies; and this in a country where many people struggle to make \$2 a day and the minimum wage is about \$200 a year. It appears that the British parliament has passed onto the Kenyan assembly some important "democratic" lessons.

Parliament opened on 6 March and now the ODM and Kibaki's Party of National Unity will enter into a grand coalition.

International pressure

Kibaki has privatised huge swathes of the economy and delivered big profits for multinationals. The country is also a key transit route for imports to other east African countries and an important ally in the war on terror.

The standstill in the Kenyan economy during the political crisis caused slowdowns in neighbouring countries such as Uganda, Rwanda and southern Sudan.

Therefore, it was important that imperialism orchestrated a deal in Kenya but one that would maintain its interests - which meant safeguarding the rule of Kibaki.

At the outset the European Union spoke of voting irregularities but nothing more, while the US recognised Kibaki's government and said there were voting problems on both sides.

The Bush administration's response earned the ire of its domestic critics: the former neoliberal economist and now "friend of the world's poor" and Bono's best mate, Jeffrey Sachs, called the White House reaction "distressing" while the Democratic Party head of the Senate foreign relations committee said that Bush and company gave the impression that they believed "rigged elections are consistent with democracy" (which is most probably true!)

Managing Director of the International Monetary Fund, Dominique Strauss-Kahn said in January that the IMF condemned the violence and hoped for a peaceful resolution of the problems "and we continue to hope that the current political impasse will be resolved quickly so that Kenya can maintain macroeconomic stability and economic growth".

What drove the international community into action was the prospect of Kenya destabilising and the effect of this on neighbouring countries. Therefore early statements stressed the need to reduce the violence.

The United Nations security council issued a statement in early February calling for a halt to violence. UN general secretary Ban Ki-moon visited Nairobi and called on both leaders to be "open to compromise and reconciliation" in order to end the violence.

The Kenya National Dialogue and Reconciliation process was set up with the aim of finding an agreement but also to act as a mechanism to dampen down any radicalism. Reducing violence really meant that the ODM should not demonstrate on the streets as it had done when the election result was first announced. And Odinga and the leaders were true to their word, keeping their mainly youthful supporters off the streets while Kibaki could deploy the army (whose loyalty he was not always sure of owing to his purging the top brass and replacing them with his own supporters) and the General Service Unit, a paramilitary unit he had created.

By February, government rule in opposition areas had actually broken down; and as a BBC Newsnight investigation unveiled it was left to sections of the government to use the previously banned Mungiki militia to restore order.

A visit by UN leaders "made it clear to Kenyan parties that the full weight of the UN was behind the mediation process, led by former Secretary-General Kofi Annan, that was attempting to heal the rifts over the election results".

A World Bank representative who said that he wanted "to get Odinga to buy into the deal" outlined the agreement expected by imperialism; while US envoy Jendayi Frazer said that Odinga should accept a job in government.

Therefore at this stage the pressure was on Odinga to rein in his supporters, who were calling for the "nothing but the presidency", and accept some sort of government post.

However, by late February, the stumbling block had become Kibaki's intransigence. Condoleezza Rice

went to Nairobi to give her backing to Annan and the UN mediation and called on Kibaki to compromise. Eventually a deal was done when the Tanzanian president, along with Annan, explained to Kibaki what it was like having a prime minister and convinced him that he would still have enough power.

Odinga obtained his prime minister's role, but in so doing he has betrayed many of the people who voted for him by compromising with Kibaki and his government, which includes kleptocrats and some of Odinga's former supporters who were recently bought off.

Odinga even garnered support from former Nigerian president Chief Olusegun Obasanjo, a man who was up to his neck in political cheating when his appointed successor Yar Adua won a disputed election last year.

That was the kind of support that Odinga was seeking. Add to that Annan and Rice and you can see that the deal done by Odinga with Kibaki offers no hope of improving people's lives.

The real problems have not been addressed; instead they have been put off for discussion in the future.

The three main issues are land, poverty and constitutional reform.

Land

Land was the key area of struggle during the Mau Mau revolt of the 1950s. The Mau Mau (mainly Kikuyu people) started as squatters on white-owned land before becoming an anti-colonial movement. Solving the land question was central to the movement for Kenyan independence and there are still liberation fighters alive who went to jail or were tortured for fighting for black-owned land. But since decolonisation, the land has not gone to resistance fighters, but either stayed with the whites or gone to an African elite. Those who were dispossessed by the British, mainly herders such as the Masai, have had their claims dismissed as recently as 2004. Farms in the arable-rich Rift Valley have been given to whoever has been in power. Hence in the recent uprising, black-owned farms in the Rift Valley were targeted - including some Kikuyu.

The Kenyan newspaper The Standard revealed in 2004 that

? Kenya's first leader Jomo Kenyatta's family owns about 500,000 acres

? His successor Daniel arap Moi's family owns about 100,000 acres - Moi's ethnic group the Kalenjin were one of the peoples who had land taken from them by the British, but he did little to return it - apart from to himself and his close supporters.

? Kibaki owns about 30,000 acres

Added to this is the continuing existence of large white-owned farms. For example, one owner of a 100,000 acre farm, Eton-educated Tom Cholmondeley, heir to Lord Delamere, has killed two Kenyans on his land in cold blood (in 2005 and 2006). He was acquitted of murder in the first case but is currently in court over the second.

The Standard also stated that only about two million acres of land in Kenya could be farmed - yet half of that is farmed by just 20 families. The Kenyan Institute of Economic Affairs estimated in 2000 that land was in the hands of "white Kenyan farmers, foreign corporations and... the political elite." It went on to say that 70 per cent of Kenyans still work on the land but most own less than half an acre.

Furthermore, the large farms are the backbone of the Kenyan economy and so attract people looking for work. Nearby towns have mushroomed in size, creating shanty towns and more urban poverty. What is

obvious is that, like Zimbabwe, there is no equitable solution to the land question under capitalism. Instead, peasants are driven off the land and then re-employed as wage slaves or live on holdings insufficient to provide for their families.

Poverty

The pattern of land ownership shapes poverty in Kenya. The IMF says that three-quarters of the people on the land and a third of all people living in towns and cities are poor (2005 figures). Last year, despite claiming an improving situation, the government had to admit that 46 per cent of the population were living in poverty on less than \$2 a day. The IMF also says that the unemployment rate is 25 per cent, with more than 90 per cent of the 400,000 jobs created in the early part of this decade being in the informal sector. The lack of secure jobs or reliance on smallholdings and agricultural work undermines the development of a national working class.

While it is true that from the mid 1950s the expansion of the black workforce in the docks, railways and civil service, from the 1980s onwards job insecurity and privatisation has cut into workers' wages. In addition, housing ceased to be provided by employers from the 1970s onwards.

The trade union leadership in Kenya has been historically tied to the ruling parties, and benefited from government hand-outs. It has rested in the past on a thin layer of well paid workers who now appear to be losing their benefits. Sections of the workers' movement have struggled against both Moi and Kibaki, but they are led by a craven bureaucracy and subject to job insecurity.

Political leaders use ethnicity to divide peasants and workers, and money and influence buy support. This is particularly true during elections times, when there has been a history of ethnic clashes and when there is a mass uprising that has the potential to unite people against the bosses, such as the recent crisis. Workers therefore have to drive out the bureaucracy from the unions or take the mass of workers with them to form new, democratic unions.

Constitutional reforms

The third part of Kibaki and Odinga's agreement is constitutional reform. What that entails we do not know, but it may be about more transparent elections, reducing the power of the presidency, and introducing reforms to militate against long periods of one party rule which foster corruption. It may even be more decentralisation, which was Odinga's key programmatic difference with Kibaki in the presidential elections. However, this could be used to strengthen ethnic ties between bosses and the masses. There is no talk of handing over more power to the workers and peasants even within the confines of a bourgeois democracy.

The next stage of the struggle

The unresolved issues of land, ethnic rights and constitutional reform are all questions that Marxists describe as being tasks of the bourgeois revolutions of the 18th and 19th centuries. But since the French revolution of 1789, the bourgeoisie has proved itself to be a cowardly class, one that is incapable of even solving its tasks. This is even more so in the third world or global south, where the capitalist class is weak, and acts as an agent of imperialism, attacking the workers and peasants.

Kenya since independence is an excellent example of this; the freedom fighter Jomo Kenyatta was vilified when he was imprisoned by the British, yet as president became a loyal servant of imperialism rewarding himself and his clique with large tracts of land and stolen wealth. Other leaders have done, and will do the same.

The Russian Revolutionary Leon Trotsky pointed out in Permanent Revolution that only the working class can solve these democratic tasks, and only then by being completely independent of the bosses and by leading the urban poor and peasants in a socialist revolution. There is no democratic stage, i.e. whole historic period of the revolution: the petit bourgeois and Stalinist parties that have adopted this as their strategy have led the working class to defeat and in some cases to slaughter, such as in Indonesia in 1956.

Trotsky posited instead the strategy of permanent revolution, where the working class takes power, expropriates the multinationals and big capital, and helps the peasants seize the land. The constitutional questions can only be resolved by adopting the most democratic state structure: that of the workers' state, based on democratically elected councils, as there was in Russia in 1917. The working class must deal with questions of ethnicity by constructing a socialist state with full democratic rights to all peoples, including the right to self-determination.

Such a state would also make huge steps in eradicating poverty by "the expropriation of the major industries, banks and finance houses, the imposition of a strict state monopoly of foreign trade, sustained efforts to spread the revolution internationally: these must be the first steps of every victorious revolution in a semi-colonial country." [INT <http://www.fifthinternational.org/index.php?id=20,53,0,0,1,0>]Protest to Power: Manifesto for World Revolution[/INT]

This should be the strategy of Kenyan socialists. However, we recognise that the current agreement is a victory for imperialism and gives Kibaki and Odinga and their close supporters renewed chances to enrich themselves at the expense of the masses.

Therefore the main focus for socialists should be to convene a constitutional assembly. This is the most democratic form of the bourgeois state and can carry out measures to deal with many of the issues which the Kenyan agreement outlined as needing "further discussion": land, poverty, constitutional reform and ethnic rights.

Such an assembly operates in Bolivia where, despite being hamstrung by the right and the government's conciliation, it has produced land reform and a constitution to hand some power to the working and popular classes; in Ecuador where it has made itself sovereign over the national assembly and is also discussing land reform and returning power to the people; and in Nepal, it will convene in the spring to rid itself of the monarchy.

Socialists demand constituent assemblies be open rather than leave negotiations to secret cabals of politicians under the auspices of the United Nations. But the recent elections and the proven capacity for both Kibaki and Odinga to divide workers and peasants on ethnic lines underlines the importance of forming popular committees to both campaign for such a an assembly, to oversee its elections and to convene it.

Workers and peasants' councils should be formed from all ethnic groups, which can then campaign for candidates committed to radical reforms and a socialist transformation of society. The councils can also be used as a defence force against politicians' hired thugs to stoke up ethnic hatred, and as forums in which policies are debated and from which a workers party can be formed. Such a party, armed with the programme of permanent revolution, is a burning necessity.

Reforms within capitalism will not be enough; a revolutionary party would have to counterpose a worker' and peasants' government to take measures against the bosses and internationalise the revolution. It would base itself on the armed might of the working class and on the popular councils, where all delegates are democratically elected, earn the average wage and instantly recallable by the voters if they fail to carry

out the mandate of the masses. Compare that with the Kenyan MPs of today, who enrich themselves and do deals with multinationals, while the poor starve.

We in the League for the Fifth International believe the Kenyan masses can throw off their chains of exploitation and misery when they throw off their corrupt, rich leaders.

? For a Constitutional Assembly to solve the burning issues of land, poverty and constitutional reform

? For independent trade unions

? For a revolutionary workers' party

? For a workers and peasants' government

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