

Kenyan protesters defy Ruto's threats

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Mass protests continued for a sixth week yesterday calling on Kenyan President William Ruto to resign. Demonstrations have been mobilised using hashtags such as #TotalShutdown, #OccupyJKIA, and #RutoMustGo, opposing soaring costs of living and taxes. Protests have also spread to neighbouring Uganda.

Demonstrators sought to block the Jomo Kenyatta International Airport, one of the busiest in Africa, after reports of its privatisation. Scenes at the airport indicated little to no activity, as the military deployed to Pipeline, a working-class neighborhood near the airport.

Across the country, protestors blocked major highways.

In Nairobi, all roads leading to State House were barricaded by heavily armed police. Nairobi's Central Business District remained a ghost town during the morning, until state-paid goons on motorbikes were allowed in carrying signs stating "Give Ruto time".

In the afternoon, tens of thousands marched into Nairobi from Mombasa Road, linking port-city Mombasa to the capital, chanting "Ruto must go".

On the outskirts of Nairobi, in Kitengela, at least 10 protesters were arrested after attempting to organise a protest and block the Nairobi- Namanga Road, the main highway between Nairobi and neighboring Tanzania.

In Mombasa, police teargassed hundreds on the main street Moi Avenue, injuring a deaf trader selling sweets. He was hit in the forehead with a tear gas canister. Protests were also reported in Kisumu.

In Migori, police used teargas to disperse youths who had blocked the Migori-Rongo highway. Businesses in the town remain closed and transport is paralysed.

The protests are a rejection of Ruto's announcement last Friday of the first batch of Cabinet Secretaries, replacing those dismissed on July 11 after weeks of mass anti-austerity demonstrations. In a provocative move, Ruto reinstated half of the officials he had fired just two weeks ago, including the blood-soaked Interior Cabinet Secretary nominee Kithure Kindiki.

Kindiki is infamous for overseeing the violent crackdown of protests, resulting in at least 53 deaths, over

600 injuries, and scores of abductions.

The new appointments also included Aden Duale for Environment, the former defence minister known for deploying the military against unarmed protesters—an unprecedented move in Kenya's history. Duale also dispatched 1,000 police officers as US-funded mercenaries to Haiti to suppress the local population. He has close ties with Washington, holding frequent meetings with US military-defence officials. This resulted in the signing of a five-year defense cooperation framework, enhancing military interoperability and designating Kenya as a Non-NATO ally. This enables Kenya to acquire modern US weaponry and receive training to deploy troops as proxies across Africa.

French imperialism has also backed Ruto. President Emmanuel Macron, who has his own experience crushing anti-austerity and anti-war protests, said yesterday, "I really hope these demonstrations will end soon. You have a great country and a great President, Ruto".

On Sunday Ruto, mentored by the brutal Western-backed dictator Daniel arap Moi, cynically proclaimed, "Kenya is a democracy and a peaceful country. We must never, as a country, agree to replace our democracy with a dictatorship and tyranny of faceless, anonymous people who want to use violence and destruction of property and loss of life in place of democracy."

The threat to dictatorship stems not from the protestors, but from the Kenyan ruling class and its US and European backers, which are fully aware that these class tensions are rooted not in exclusively Kenyan but global conditions of social inequality incompatible with democratic rule.

Ruto has the backing of the main leader of the opposition, millionaire Raila Odinga of the Azimio la Umoja coalition. Odinga, 79, first announced that Azimio would join Ruto's government, only to backtrack amid a torrent of opposition on social media. He then stated Azimio would only do so if Ruto paid lip service to addressing issues such as police brutality, healthcare, and education.

On Friday, Kenyans again opposed Odinga's move under the hashtag "Ruto and Raila must go now".

Odinga is opposed by Wiper Leader Kalonzo Musyoka, which works within the Azimio opposition. Musyoka has called Raila's move a "betrayal of the Kenyan people". Musyoka, however, represents the same filth, having been Moi's Foreign Affairs Minister, Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly and National Organising Secretary of KANU—the only legal party under Moi.

Odinga, however, appears to be a spent force for the ruling class, as his ability to control protests is now in question. *The Standard* acknowledged, "Until last year, he was the big boy in opposition who could call protests on and off at will. He enjoyed the monopoly of pushing the government to a corner. But times have changed, and Raila is now faced with a huge monster that will either mark the end of his dominance in the country's politics or propel him to greater power."

The "huge monster" that terrifies the ruling class is the working class. The first signs of workers threatening to enter into struggle were seen last week. Hundreds of thousands of teachers are threatening to strike after Ruto refused to increase their wages as promised and provide 20,000 permanent positions to intern teachers.

Fearful that opposition will escalate outside the union bureaucrats' control, Aggrey Namisi, vice chairman of the Kenya National Union of Teachers (KNUT), warned Ruto: "If they do not pay by the end of the month, we will have a serious industrial problem which will result in a nationwide strike."

Anger among civil servants is also mounting after Ruto's government announced a wage freeze. The National Treasury also failed to release more than \$230 million to the county governments, in charge of essential services like education, healthcare and infrastructure. It is part of austerity measures being imposed by Ruto to compensate the withdrawing of the savage tax hikes on basic goods last month.

Over the weekend, privately owned minibuses used as share taxis, which transport millions of workers and students across Kenya, issued a seven-day strike notice over an increased Road Maintenance Levy from Ksh.18 per liter to Ksh.25 per litre, despite Ruto's assurances he would not raise it following the mass anti-austerity protests.

Tens of thousands of ride-hailing drivers went on a one-day strike last week to demand higher fares per mile. They are threatening to strike again on Wednesday. Kenyan truckers are also considering striking.

Coffee farmers last week blocked major highways over poor pay rates. Kenya is home to approximately 800,000 coffee farmers, primarily smallholders. The sector employs over 6 million people directly and indirectly, with coffee workers possessing immense power.

Yesterday protests spread to neighboring Uganda. They were violently crushed by US-backed Yoweri Museveni, who has ruled the country with an iron fist since 1986.

The expansion of protests globally testifies to the tendency of the movement of the working class to sweep over national borders. However, everywhere, the struggles of workers are being strangled by the pro-imperialist and nationalist trade union apparatus. Controlled by an upper-middle class stratum, the unions everywhere are hostile to the interests of the workers.

Workers need to develop new forms of militant rank-and-file organisation in factories, neighborhoods, and plantations to organise independently of all capitalist parties and their trade unions. Democratically elected workers' action committees will develop the means for a common struggle against the Ruto government and its escalating austerity and police state attacks. They will reach out to workers internationally now coming into struggles against austerity, rising costs of living, jobs and wage cuts and the suppression of basic democratic rights.



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