

Kenya's Gen Z insurgency, the strike wave and the struggle for Permanent Revolution- Part 2

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This article is the second in a three part series.

The International Committee of the Fourth International and the struggle against Pabloism

Armed with the lessons of Trotsky's Theory of Permanent Revolution, the Trotskyist movement, the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) warned about the treacherous role of bourgeois nationalism, backed by Stalinism and petty-bourgeois tendencies such as the Pabloite renegades from Trotskyism led by Michel Pablo and Ernest Mandel. The ICFI's British section, the Socialist Labour League, issued a warning in May 1961, two years before Kenya's independence:

An essential of revolutionary Marxism in this epoch is the theory that the national bourgeoisie in under-developed countries is incapable of defeating imperialism and establishing an independent national state. This class has ties with imperialism and it is of course incapable of an independent capitalist development, for it is part of the capitalist world market and cannot compete with the products of the advanced countries...

While it is true that the stage of 'independence' reached by countries like Ghana, and the national independence movements led by men like [Tom] Mboya of Kenya, acts as a stimulant to national liberation movements in other countries, the fact remains that Nkrumah, Mboya, Nasser, Kasseem, Nehru, Soekarno, and their like, represent the national bourgeoisie of their own countries. The dominant imperialist policy-makers both in the USA and Britain recognize full well that only by handing over political 'independence' to leaders of this kind, or accepting their victory over feudal elements like Farouk and Nuries-Said, can the stakes of international capital and the strategic alliances be preserved in Asia, Africa, and Latin America.

The ICFI, founded in 1953, was waging a bitter political war for the survival of Marxism against the tendency of Pabloism, which, under the pressure of the post-war restabilisation of capitalism, called for workers to subordinate themselves to the dominant bureaucratic leaderships in the working class—Social Democratic, Stalinists and the myriad bourgeois and petty-bourgeois nationalist tendencies that dominated the anti-colonial movements. Attributing a revolutionary potential to these forces, the

Pabloites sought the liquidation of the Fourth International as an independent political force. The SLL warned:

It is not the job of Trotskyists to boost the role of such nationalist leaders. They can command the support of the masses only because of the betrayal of leadership by Social-Democracy and particularly Stalinism, and in this way they become buffers between imperialism and the mass of workers and peasants. The possibility of economic aid from the Soviet Union often enables them to strike a harder bargain with the imperialists, even enables more radical elements among the bourgeois and petty-bourgeois leaders to attack imperialist holdings and gain further support from the masses. But, for us, in every case the vital question is one of the working class in these countries gaining political independence through a Marxist party, leading the poor peasantry to the building of Soviets, and recognizing the necessary connections with the international socialist revolution. In no case, in our opinion, should Trotskyists substitute for that the hope that the nationalist leadership should become socialists. The emancipation of the working class is the task of the workers themselves.

Across the world, the Pabloites promoted bourgeois and petty-bourgeois nationalists, including the Algerian National Liberation Front (FLN) which took power after the 1954-1962 Algerian independence war against France, Fidel Castro's guerrillas who took power in Cuba in 1959, and the capitalist regimes that emerged from the partition of India imposed as part of formal independence from Britain in 1947. In Kenya, they boosted illusions in the left flank of Kenyatta's KANU.

On the eve of independence, the January–March 1963 edition of *Fourth International*—the theoretical organ of the Pabloites—stated that on the land question, federalism versus centralist future of independent Kenya, constitutional boundaries, regionalism and attitude to British settlers:

the left-wing [of KANU] is lacking in clarity on all these issues and it is necessary that they must seek to find way out of the present confusion and reactionary atmosphere in Kenyan politics. They must base themselves upon one thing—the tremendous militancy of the African masses, and above all the desire of the peasant masses for land. It is impossible for the mass militancy to be sidetracked into tribalist channels for long, for despite whatever reactionary constitutions are worked out, the elementary demands of the masses will burst through. The Land Freedom Army [Mau

Mau] is a guarantee that corrupted politicians will not be able to have everything their own way.

The illusions sowed in the Kenyan left nationalists and the radicalised peasantry were thoroughly refuted after independence, and vindicated the perspective of the ICFI.

The “left -wing” coalesced behind Vice-President Odinga, and Bildad Kaggia, a Mau Mau leader. To secure a popular base among workers and rural masses that were striving for socialism, they advanced a programme of state driven nationalist-capitalist economic development within the boundaries imposed by colonialism, the seizure of European settler farms without compensation and the rapid Africanisation of the civil service and public-sector jobs, leveraging on close ties with the counter-revolutionary Soviet bureaucracy, not by the working class in alliance with the rural masses.

Kenyatta and Mboya eventually turned against KANU’s left wing. Kenyatta and his close associates looted vast tracts of land and wealth, using loans from the US, UK and Germany to buy land from white settlers at the expense of the rural masses. Civil service and parastatal jobs, government contracts and loans and ministerial positions were allocated to elite members of all communities, although Kenyatta’s Kikuyu benefitted the most, laying the seeds for tribalist violence in the decades to come. Kenyatta also strengthened Kenya’s relations with British and US imperialism, allowing the establishment of military bases which continue to exist until today.

In the years following independence, the forces promoted by the Pabloites, from the KANU “left” and the remaining small groups of Mau Mau fighters, were systematically suppressed and eliminated by the Kenyatta regime. General Baimungi, one of the last Mau Mau leaders to remain in the forests, was executed on Kenyatta’s orders just months after independence, and Mau Mau organisations banned. Pio Gama Pinto, a former Mau Mau fighter and journalist, was assassinated in 1965, followed by the populist nationalist J.M. Kariuki in 1975. Vice President Oginga Odinga was marginalised before he left KANU to form the petty-bourgeois Kenya People’s Union, which was banned, with its leaders jailed in 1969.

Stalinist union leader Makhan Singh, was only released in 1961, detained for 11 years by the British colonial authorities. On his release he declared “the duty of all freedom loving peoples in Kenya is to unite under the leadership of Jomo Kenyatta for immediate independence”. He joined KANU, and Mboya’s KLF soon after and attempted to obtain a seat in parliament, but was sidelined by the Kenyan political establishment due to his association with Odinga and the Soviet bureaucracy. Tom Mboya, a key architect of the post-independence regime, was himself also assassinated in 1969—Kenyatta widely being the prime suspect.

The fraud of the “Second Liberation”

Like across the rest of Africa—Ghana’s Nkrumah, Guinea’s Sékou Touré, Tanzania’s Nyerere, Mozambique’s Machel and South Africa’s Mandela—Kenyatta’s rule (1963-1978) followed by that of his successor, Daniel arap Moi (1978-2002), exposed the organic incapacity of Africa’s bourgeois nationalists to realise the aspirations of the African masses for freedom from foreign domination, democracy and social justice.

As the treacherous role of the national bourgeoisie became evident, underground Maoist tendencies in Kenya emerged during the 1970s and 1980s with the perspective of struggling for a “Second Liberation.” This was a revamp of Stalin’s reactionary “two-stage theory”—first

independence and bourgeois democracy, and in the next stage, socialism.

Where bourgeois nationalists had taken power and imposed capitalist dictatorships backed by imperialist powers, like in Kenya, the Maoists insisted that the “democratic” stage had not been completed. To this end they sought to build alliances with supposedly “progressive” and “patriotic” forces among all classes including the bourgeoisie.

Maoism emerged as a distinct Stalinist tendency in the late 1950s after Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev delivered his “secret speech” in 1956, in which he denounced some of Stalin’s crimes, but deliberately excluded from his list of victims the leaders of the Trotskyist Left Opposition and those condemned to death at the Moscow Trials.

Mao denounced “Soviet social imperialism” and followed this with a pragmatic turn toward US imperialism in 1971 and the formation of a de facto anti-Soviet alliance with Washington. His rapprochement with the US was the essential precondition for foreign investment and increased trade with the West, which would initiate market reforms and the final restoration of capitalism. Mao’s heirs transformed China into the sweatshop of the world after brutally crushing the working class in Tiananmen Square in 1989. The Soviet Stalinists also ultimately restored capitalism in the former USSR in 1991.

The split with the Soviet bureaucracy led to divisions within Stalinist Communist parties worldwide, resulting in the formation of Maoist groups, especially in oppressed countries across Asia, Africa, and Latin America. These parties would play a major role in blocking the construction of genuine Marxist parties.

In the former colonies, Maoism projected itself as a left-wing alternative to Soviet Stalinism. Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai visited 10 African countries in 1963–64, promising economic, technical and military support to newly independent states and national bourgeois liberation movements, and returning in June 1965 to visit Tanzania, where he said “Africa is ripe for revolution”, clearly aimed largely at Kenya under Kenyatta, who reacted by with Beijing.

However, Maoism based itself on the same explicit Stalinist “two-stage revolution” and its corollary, “the bloc of four classes,” codified as the struggle for a “national democratic revolution”. It based itself on an eclectic combination of bourgeois nationalism, peasant radicalism and Stalinism.

In country after country, Maoists forged alliances with one wing or another of the bourgeoisie, blocking the construction of genuine proletarian revolutionary parties and producing catastrophes.

Most notable was Indonesia. There, the largest Beijing-line CP in the world subordinated the working class to the bourgeois nationalist regime of Sukarno. This left the Indonesian proletariat politically disarmed in the face of a military coup, which led to the extermination of an estimated one million workers and peasants in 1965.

To be continued



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