

Kenya's Gen Z insurgency, the strike wave and the struggle for Permanent Revolution—Part 3

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Maoism's counter-revolutionary role in Kenya assisted by Pabloism

In this each of these criminal betrayals, Maoists were assisted by the anti-Trotskyist Pabloite tendency, which first covered for the murder and persecution of Chinese Trotskyists under Mao and then promoted illusions that Maoism represented a progressive variant of Stalinism and supposedly proved that socialism could be established without the independent intervention of the working class. Pabloite leader Ernest Mandel even praised the Maoists as having “come close to the theory of permanent revolution.”

In countries like Kenya, as mass disillusionment with the role of bourgeois nationalism and the treacherous role of Stalinism emerged across Africa, and with Pabloite liquidationism having destroyed much of the Fourth International across the world, the left vacuum in Kenya was filled by Maoist forces.

It created enormous political confusion, particularly among layers of left-leaning academics, intellectuals, workers and radicalised peasantry. This was epitomised by world-renowned cultural figures like writer and playwright Ngugi wa Thiong'o, who was detained by Kenyatta and persecuted by Moi, and acted as a leading spokesperson of Maoist tendencies in exile for decades. His popular plays like *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* (1976) and *I Will Marry When I Want* (1977), and novels like *A Grain of Wheat* (1967), *Petals of Blood* (1977) and *Matigari* (1986) promoted Maoist conceptions—particularly the betrayal of “unpatriotic” sections of the bourgeoisie in national liberation, the glorification of the peasantry and the promotion of Kenyan patriotism.

In the words of wa Thiong'o in *Writers in Politics* (1981), “Mao Zedong emphasised that revolution is not a dinner party; it is an act of violence by which one class overthrows another. In Africa, where the majority of our people are peasants, it is they who will be the vanguard of our liberation, and it is to them that our literature must speak.”

The first Maoist party to be created in Kenya was the Workers Party (WP) in 1974. It called for the “National Democratic Revolution” striving for “unity of all democratic forces, including the petty-bourgeois, and the workers and peasantry”. The WP then founded the December Twelfth Movement (DTM) in the 1980s, which later morphed into the Mwakenya Movement, short for “Muungano wa Wazalendo wa Kuikomboa Kenya” (Union of Patriots to Liberate Kenya).

Their perspective was based on the “two-stage theory”. As the DTM

said in its magazine *Mpatanishi*, in February 1984:

The DTM is a united, anti-imperialist, anti-fascist front that aims at bringing together all democratic forces as a first phase of the general struggle towards Socialism. In the process, the democratic forces, mainly the workers, peasantry and progressive intellectuals are to be trained and prepared for a future communist party.

Three years later, in the Draft Minimum Programme published in 1987, Mwakenya laid out as its central objective of the movement as bringing about a “national democratic revolution” as the spring board for meaningful social change:

MWAKENYA is a democratic party of the workers, peasants, progressive intelligentsia and all the patriotic Kenyans fighting for the interests of the oppressed, exploited and humiliated majority of the people in all the nationalities of Kenya. MWAKENYA is totally opposed to the ruling neocolonial regime in Kenya now reduced to a clique of corrupt, dictatorial, repressive and traitorous minority of wealthy thieves and robbers sheltering under the KANU flag.

Mwakenya insisted that the role of sections of the bourgeoisie was progressive: “Our Party believes in the industrialisation policy geared towards basic self-sufficiency. Kenya's national capital must be involved in industrial ventures in the country.”

Although DTM played a crucial role in shaping petty-bourgeois political conceptions, particularly among the middle class, it never developed a mass base. As one of its leading academic members, historian Maina wa Kinyatti confessed in *Mwakenya: The Unfinished Revolution* (2014), “The bulk of its membership, however, was militant university students, primary and high schools teachers and the lower petty-bourgeoisie in government departments. Most of them were not serious; they were flirting with revolution. As the democratic struggle deepened and the repression intensified, some of these elements slipped into the morass of petty-bourgeois opportunism, vacillation, inconsistency, falsification and cowardice. The party had not succeeded in building a mass base amongst the workers and peasantry.”

As Kenyatta's successor, Daniel arap Moi, intensified repression—particularly after the failed 1982 coup attempt by military factions—and implemented the first rounds of IMF-imposed austerity, the

class struggle intensified. This unrest was part of a broader wave of protests and strikes that swept across many former, heavily indebted colonies in the 1980s. These movements were triggered by the IMF's structural adjustment programmes, which enforced austerity, privatisation, and deregulation.

In 1986 alone, there were 65 wildcat strikes involving over 42,000 industrial workers protesting low wages. These strikes occurred despite being illegal and the risk workers faced losing their jobs, as well as facing police brutality and the paramilitary GSU.

The following year, mass struggles erupted among the rural masses over land theft, land shortages, deterioration conditions, non-payment of wages, delays in payments of crops, and hatred against Kenyan big landowners, many of them from Kenya's political class. In 1988, 80,000 bus drivers and other transport workers brought national transport to stand still. By the end of the year, 160,000 teachers went on strike, forcing the government to withdraw its planned reduction of housing allowance as part of its IMF attacks. Tens of thousands of students also went on strike, over corruption, poor educational standards and lack of teachers and books.

By 1989, the class struggle had erupted to levels not seen since the struggles on the eve of independence years. Factory workers, municipal workers, farm cooperative wage worker, road construction workers went on strike.

But as the class struggle intensified, Kenyan Maoists redoubled their efforts for an alliance with a section of the bourgeoisie. In May 1990, Mwakenya issued a statement calling on "all progressive democratic and patriotic political organisations, workers trade unions, peasant cooperatives, professional bodies, religious organizations, student societies, the business community, welfare and other nongovernmental interest groups to unite in a single force of action to pressure Moi to resign".

Odinga heads off the working class

The main beneficiaries of these conceptions were politicians like Raila Odinga, whose reputation as the son of independence leader Jaramogi Oginga Odinga, was boosted by his repeated detentions under Moi in the 1980s.

On July 7, 1990, mass protests erupted against Moi's rule, organised by Odinga and other bourgeois nationalists Kenneth Matiba, and Charles Rubia, sections of the Christian clergy and middle-class NGO activists calling for the reintroduction of formal democracy. Terrified of the mass protests, Washington put pressure on the Moi regime, which it had backed for years, to repeal the constitutional section that prohibited multiparty politics, paving the way for the first multiparty elections in 1992.

This would be the start of Odinga's leading role in acting as a lightning rod of mass opposition to the ruling class. As mass opposition emerged to Moi during the 1990s, Odinga, despite being tortured by the regime in 1982, organised mass protests only to then support Moi. He merged his then National Development Party with Moi's hated KANU party and served as energy minister. In 2002, Moi would be defeated in elections led by Mwai Kibaki, ending his brutal 24-year long regime.

Odinga would continue playing his role, while making it clear he was opposed to socialism. In his autobiography, *The Flame of Freedom* (2013), Odinga described how shortly before the 2007 elections he auditioned before the bankers and big business, distancing himself from his father Jaramogi Odinga's ties with the Soviet bureaucracy as Kenya's first vice-president:

Because of my fathers and my longstanding support for equitable distribution of national resources, I had often been accused of being left-wing anti-capitalist (the latter a strange misconception about a man who, like his father before him, had long been involved in private enterprise). It was said that, as president, I would reverse some privatisations and make radical changes to the Kenyan stock market. The latter probably also had a connection with the charge I had made that the extensive profits from illegal drug-dealing had been ploughed into the national bourse. In mid-October, I visited the Nairobi Stock Exchange to offer assurances of my support for its continued activities.

In 2007, mass opposition broke out after then-President Kibaki stole the election from Odinga. He once again called off the mass opposition and entered into Kibaki's government as Second Prime Minister, even though his supporters had been gunned down by Kibaki's security forces. Ruto, then an ally of Odinga, played a criminal role, whipping up ethnic violence for which he was indicted by the International Criminal Court. Over 1,300 people died, and at least 650,000 others were displaced in the most violent post-election in Kenya's history. Odinga would rule with Kibaki for five years, until 2013.

In 2018, following another disputed election the year before involving Uhuru Kenyatta, son of the first President, Odinga again made a deal.

Last August, fearing a working class offensive that would threaten its place in the established order, Odinga's ODM joined Ruto's violent military-police state order. Odinga's latest deal is yet another exposure of the rotten character of the "Second Liberation".

The pseudo-left insists on the "Second Liberation"

What passes as left in Kenya continue to assert the need to complete the "Second Liberation". The Communist Party of Kenya (CPK), founded in 1992 from factions of Mwakenya, has over the years backed different factions of the ruling class. In 2017, it supported, Kenyatta's candidature. In 2022, leading CPK members, National Chairperson Mwandawiro Mghanga and Secretary General Benedict Wachira, deserted the party to join Ruto's Kenya Kwanza party, creating a crisis in the CPK.

The Morenoite Revolutionary Socialist League (RSL) was founded in August 2019 as a split off of the CPK's Youth League, and became the Kenyan affiliate of the International Socialist League, notorious for whitewashing Ukrainian fascism and backing NATO's war on Russia in the Ukraine.

The major reasons for the split were differing orientations to factions within the Kenyan bourgeoisie and on differences in foreign policy, particularly around Kenya's alignment to Washington or Beijing. While the CPK maintains close relations with China and its leadership regularly visits Beijing and meets the ambassador, the RSL, expressing its support for the US-NATO imperialist bloc, presents Russia and China as two new "imperialist powers". As the RSL described their own dispute, "The party [CPK] held the position that China is not imperial power because it has a Communist Party [sic]. Which showed a lack of understanding not only of the global situation, but even of fundamental dialectics."

Russia and China, although reactionary capitalist regimes, are not imperialist powers but the main targets of US-NATO imperialism's aggression. The depiction of China as a new imperialist power is used by pseudo-left groups like the RSL and others to legitimise the US war drive. A similar position has been advanced by the pseudo-left on Russia, which many employ to back the US-NATO proxy war in Ukraine. This does not

give any credence to the CPK, which continues to falsely claim China as a “socialist state”, instead of what it is: a capitalist regime, excised from the world economy on which it is completely dependent.

Despite their differences on foreign policy, the two tendencies came together in 2022 to form what they called a “a united front.” In the statement, “On the Unity Against the Enemy of The Majority: A United Front of Political Parties and Social Movements,” they explain how they came together, primarily to defend the bourgeois Kenyan 2010 Constitution, the apex of the “Second Liberation,” funded to a great extent by the UK and the US and worked out by the ruling class behind the backs of the working class to stabilize capitalist rule in Kenya after the 2007 post-election violence, which had threatened imperialist control over the Horn of Africa.

The CPK sent delegates to draft the constitution, proudly stating “CPK participated actively in the struggle for the progressive reforms that are summarised in the national Constitution of Kenya 2010. We were involved in the debates of the Constitution-making conference at Bomas of Kenya in Nairobi between 2003 to 2005 and fought for the inclusion of the progressive articles in the Constitution that included Article 10 on national values and principles of governance that also form the summary of the minimum program of the CPK.”

Claiming the Constitution includes “socialist-oriented articles” and is “one of the most progressive, particularly in Africa”, the united front of RSL and CPK stated:

The starting point of our discussion [of the united front] is article 10 of the Kenyan constitution on national values. The national values and principles of governance include patriotism, national unity, sharing and devolution of power, the rule of law, democracy and participation of the people; human dignity, equity, social justice, inclusiveness, equality, human rights, non-discrimination and protection of the marginalised; good governance, integrity, transparency and accountability; and sustainable development.

It revamps the Stalinist-Maoist two stage theory, insisting, “To struggle for genuine democracy, characterised by participatory democracy mixed with social and national liberation, and to struggle against the status quo represented by the ruling capitalist coalitions, we must work towards forming an alternative way: THE UNITED FRONT.”

The task identified is not to overthrow capitalism, but “to ensure a national democratic change away from the destruction, sectionalism and inequities of the past and the present”.

Both tendencies have intervened in the Gen Z struggle to block workers from breaking with the main bourgeoisie parties.

They first intervened to promote illusions in Ruto’s decision to withdraw the Finance Bill 2024, which was a tactical pullback to stem mass opposition sparked after the events of Bloody Tuesday (June 25), when police gunned down dozens of austerity protestors on the streets of Nairobi and across the country. It was part of a conspiracy hatched among the ruling class, involving ODM, COTU and influential Christian and Muslim clergy, closely assisted by the US and European Union, to buy time.

The RSL claimed, “The people of Kenya have achieved a very significant victory,” whilst the Stalinist Communist Party of Kenya (CPK), declared that “the Kenyan masses” had “forced their hand”. Both of them insisted on the demand that Ruto personally resign, failing to address what sort of regime should replace Ruto. Even now the CPK presents a battery of reforms with no explanation of who is to implement them.

When protests persisted, the pseudo-left insisted that protests must be

“leaderless”, “not politics” and “no banners”. Ezra Otieno, a leader of the RSL, told the Australian pseudo-left group Socialist Alternative:

“I think this is a good tactic not to have leaders emerging for now, because the government is actively looking for leaders. [...] As the RSL, we go there with a purpose, because we must be in solidarity with the masses—we fully agree with what they say. So we go to the streets, we try to organise our people. When joining in, we do not carry banners as people just go without anything, to move around.”

The CPK claimed that “Our immediate task is to build the highest level of organisation with the best leaders to govern a post-Ruto Kenya. We must counter the narrative that the people in the streets are leaderless, tribeless, and anarchists”, offered as an alternative an ambiguous “pro-poor people organization with selfless leaders.” The purpose of such a leadership would be to control popular discontent, arguing that this would “deflate government propaganda that misrepresents our movement and its aims.”

Both tendencies are hostile to the independent mobilisation of the working class and the fight for a socialist and internationalist programme. Representing sections of the upper-middle class, they insist that workers and young people must be confined to street protests to reinforce appeals to the parties of the bourgeoisie. By opposing any struggle for the building of a socialist leadership in the working class, the CPK and RSL sow disorientation leading to an eventual demobilisation.

The eruption of a mass insurgency among the youth and the ongoing strike wave two decades after the end of the Moi regime, despite the promises of the “Second Liberation”, is a historic vindication of the ICFI struggle for Trotskyist leadership. Stalinists and Maoists insisted that the coming to power of “progressive” sections of the capitalist class would be a step forward towards socialism.

Instead, conditions of life have worsened. According to the Oxfam charity, despite economic growth since 2005, Kenya’s wealth remains concentrated among a tiny elite. Less than 0.1 percent of the population holds more wealth than the bottom 99.9 percent. The richest 10 percent earn 23 times more than the poorest 10 percent. Kenya loses \$1.1 billion annually to corporate tax dodging, impacting public services. Nearly one million children are out of school, and 2.6 million people fall into poverty due to health expenses each year.

As for democracy, under President Ruto—now supported by Odinga—the brutal tactics reminiscent of Moi’s era are resurfacing. Abductions, the shooting of protestors, and the prohibition of demonstrations have become regular features of Kenya’s political landscape. Ruto has also taken the unprecedented step of deploying the Kenya Defence Forces onto the streets, the first time the military has been used against unarmed protestors.

No longer able to manoeuvre between imperialism and the Soviet bureaucracy, the bourgeois governments in the former colonial countries have abandoned even the semblance of independence from imperialism.

The Ruto-Odinga regime has aligned itself with Washington, which poses a threat to Kenya and the entire continent of being swept into the maelstrom of war. Washington’s designation of Kenya as a major non-NATO ally only signals potential disaster for workers and youth, as Africa risks becoming yet another front in an expanding global war.

The US is waging a war against Russia in the Ukraine with the aim of subjugating the country to the status of a semi-colony and seizing its natural resources, while supporting Israeli genocide against Palestinians and its attacks on Lebanon, Iran, Yemen to control the oil-rich Middle East. In the Asia-Pacific region, Washington and its regional allies are

preparing for war with China to counter its rise as a major economic and geopolitical competitor.

Africa's geostrategic position and vast mineral resources are viewed by Washington and European powers as critical in its conflicts with Russia, Iran and China. The continent holds approximately 7.5 percent of the world's proven oil reserves and 7.1 percent of the world's proven natural gas reserves. Key oil-producing countries include Nigeria, Angola, and Algeria are significant exporters to the US. NATO's war on Russia in the Ukraine, has made Europe more dependent on the supply of coal, natural gas and oil from Africa. Europe's gas supplies from Africa are projected to double by 2050.

Africa possesses approximately 30 percent of the world's mineral reserves and 8 percent of its natural gas. The continent boasts 40 percent of the world's gold and up to 90 percent of its chromium and platinum. The Democratic Republic of Congo alone produces over 60 percent of the world's cobalt, essential for batteries and electronics, and American and European military-industrial complex. Ghana is poised to become a leading lithium producer, and Zimbabwe has also an abundance of this mineral. South Africa is a leading producer of platinum, accounting for over 70 percent of global supply. In addition, Africa has significant reserves of rare earth elements, crucial for high-tech industries. In addition, it is home to 65 percent of the world's arable land and 10 percent of the planet's internal renewable freshwater resources.

From a geostrategic perspective, Africa's strategic waterways, including the Suez Canal, the Horn of Africa, the Strait of Gibraltar, and the Cape of Good Hope, are vital for global trade and maritime security, and to impose economic blockades on rivals.

Amid this developing new war front, the Kenyan bourgeoisie has offered itself as a proxy on the content to further US interests, as Washington continues to lose ground to Beijing, which has surpassed US influence in Africa primarily through its massive economic investments and trade relationships.

The struggle for the United Socialist States of Africa

The experience of the Kenyan working class and the rural masses is the universal experience of the masses across Africa. Across the continent, countries differ extraordinarily from one another, in terms of tribe, languages, religion, culture, colonial histories, and independence leaders and nationalist parties which took power. However, they are all characterised by their common economic dependence upon imperialism. Not one of these countries has carried its "democratic revolution" through to any real extent. The agrarian question is being "solved" through the mass exodus of desperate small-holder and subsistence farmers to major cities, particularly the youth, in search for jobs.

Bourgeois nationalist forces across the continent—from the African National Congress in South Africa to the Zimbabwe African National Union Patriotic Front—were given socialist and radical colorations by Stalinists, Maoist and pseudo-left tendencies, only to demonstrate they were incapable of establishing genuine independence from imperialism, creating genuinely democratic forms of rule or achieving the social aspirations of the workers and oppressed masses. Everywhere, they appropriated for themselves and a new rising bourgeois layer the state structures left behind by colonialism, using them to suppress revolutionary challenges from below while acting as caretakers of imperialist domination of the continent. South Africa is today the most unequal country in the world.

In the 60 years since Kenya's independence, the international working class has grown enormously. Globalisation has produced the growth of

large-scale concentrations of workers across Africa. Currently, the region is considered one of the fastest urbanising areas in the world. Between 2000 and 2030, the urban working population is projected to double, primarily due to both natural population increases and the migration from rural to urban areas.

The globalisation of capitalist production has also integrated the working class of the entire world to an extent previously unimaginable. The African workers are part of key global nodal supply chains, including the production of key minerals (South Africa, Zambia, Tanzania), oil and gas (Nigeria, Algeria, Angola), billions of dollars' worth of cash crops, including tea, coffee, cocoa, sugarcane, tobacco, palm oil and rubber (Kenya, Malawi, Ghana).

But Trotsky explained that the victory of socialism would not be realised through the automatic collapse of capitalism. The objective conditions create the basis for the development of a global movement of the working class and potential for the conquest of power by the working class. But the transformation of potential into reality depends upon the conscious decisions and actions of the revolutionary party.

The task facing workers is the building of a genuine socialist movement in the working class, that will fight to take power from the corrupt criminal oligarchs and warmongers and their accomplices, and reorganise social and economic life, on a world scale, based on social equality. Building a new revolutionary leadership requires learning from the political lessons of the Trotskyist movement's fight against Stalinism, Maoism, and its Pabloite apologists. To fight for a socialist Kenya as part of a United Socialist States of Africa, it is necessary to create a unified movement for socialism with workers in the US, Europe, and other imperialist states. We encourage workers, youth, and intellectuals to start this journey by studying the works of Leon Trotsky and building Kenyan and African sections of the International Committee of the Fourth International.

Concluded



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