

Moi's successor defeated in Kenyan election

Chris Talbot
3 January 2003

Widespread popular opposition to Daniel Arap Moi, president of Kenya since 1978, secured the victory of National Rainbow Coalition (NARC) candidate Mwai Kibaki in last weekend's presidential election.

Moi's chosen successor, Uhuru Kenyatta, son of Kenya's independence leader Jomo Kenyatta, gained only 31 percent of the vote compared to 63 percent for Kibaki. Kenyatta was the candidate of the Kenya African National Union (KANU) that has ruled the country for 40 years since independence from Britain. A number of top KANU politicians, including the vice president and internal security minister, lost their seats in the parliamentary elections that took place at the same time. NARC, a fragile alliance of more than 10 opposition political parties cobbled together in the last few months, also won 122 seats in the 210-seat parliament.

Moi is associated with increasing corruption and despotism while the mass of the Kenyan population suffer severe economic decline, with an average income of less than a dollar a day and growing poverty and unemployment. At a rally of some half a million greeting the inauguration of Kibaki in Uhuru Park Moi was booed and jeered and pelted with mud as the crowd sang "Everything is possible without Moi."

The unexpectedly high vote for NARC, on a 56 percent turnout, clearly took the opposition leaders by surprise. Kibaki was forced to make oblique references to the looting of the economy by the Kenyan elite that has taken place, particularly over the last decade. Standing next to Moi and other African leaders involved in their own corruption scandals he referred to "years of misrule and ineptitude", and said he would raise questions "about certain deliberate actions of the past that continue to have grave consequences."

However, although promising to stamp out endemic corruption, Kibaki said there would be no "witch-hunts". This is not only in deference to Moi who will be allowed to retire surrounded by security men and with his wealth intact, but will also presumably apply to Kibaki himself and the leaders of NARC. Far from representing any

political break from Moi and KANU, NARC is made up of top KANU leaders, many of whom jumped ship in the last few months as KANU became wracked by internal divisions and Moi lost his grip on power.

One of the NARC leaders is George Saitoti, vice president of KANU until September when Moi sacked him for not supporting his chosen candidate Kenyatta. Saitoti was finance minister in the 1990s and is implicated in scams in which hundreds of millions of dollars were looted. Another ex-cabinet minister who recently left KANU for NARC is William Ntimana, implicated in orchestrating tribal clashes in the 1990s in which thousands were killed.

A leading figure in NARC is Raila Odinga, son of Oginga Odinga, one of Kenya's top leaders in the period of gaining independence from Britain. Odinga—imprisoned by Moi in the 1990s—merged his opposition National Democratic Party with KANU in March 2002 in the hope of becoming Moi's chosen presidential candidate. By September, after Moi had rejected him for Kenyatta, he formed the Rainbow Coalition with Saitoti and pulled out of KANU, then joining Kibaki to form NARC.

Odinga is from the Luo tribe, whereas Kibaki is from the Kikuyu, the largest tribal grouping. Odinga may well be given a newly created post of prime minister. NARC will have to contend with the long standing tribal rivalries in Kenya's elite that Moi was an expert in manipulating.

Kibaki himself was Moi's vice president from 1978 to 1988 and only set up in opposition, standing against Moi in the elections of 1991 and 1997, when Kenya's elite agreed to hold multiparty elections under pressure from the west.

The main agenda holding together this weak and squabbling team, apart from wanting to advance their own interests as against those of the wealthy Moi-Kenyatta dynasty, is to win back loans and investment from the west. Since 1991 the International Monetary Fund has intermittently suspended aid to the country and in the last few years have been demanding implementation of anti-

corruption legislation. Kibaki claims he will push the legislation through parliament and establish the anti-corruption authority that Moi had rejected. As well as promising to clamp down on the persistent looting of state coffers that the IMF has objected to, he will also be under pressure to open up the state-run power and telephone companies to privatization by western corporations.

Western leaders were clearly relieved that the ending of Moi's rule was effected without blatant vote-rigging and a descent into violent conflict. US Secretary of State Colin Powell praised Kibaki's pledge to end corruption: "This would be good for the Kenyan people and, of course, good for relations with the United States."

Moi has only withstood western pressure to cut down on the system of corruption and patronage that is perceived to be a hindrance to free market economics because Kenya is central to US strategic interests in the Horn of Africa. It contains US and British military and intelligence gathering bases is also a site for western military exercises.

Moi retained power in the 1990s elections only by whipping up inter-tribal rivalries and ballot rigging. It appears that dissatisfaction with his rule became so acute that he was unable to use the same tactics in these elections. In particular the military and security forces seem to have been unwilling to continue unswerving loyalty to Moi's ruling clique. *Africa Confidential* refers to military leader Major General John Koech refusing to discipline officers for supporting the opposition, even though KANU leaders demanded their dismissal.

Western analysts as well as political commentators within Kenya are placing great emphasis on the eradication of corruption and Moi's "big man" politics as the main obstacle to foreign investment. Moi and corrupt leaders are held to be the major factor preventing economic growth.

For example, in the Kenyan *Daily Nation* newspaper last year a discussion article referred to the relatively high economic growth in Kenya in the 1960s and '70s. Kenya was called a "middle-income" economy and the World Bank report of 1975 stated: "Kenya is now in the second year of its second decade as an independent nation. Behind it lies a record of sustained growth in production and income that has rarely been surpassed by countries in Kenya's stage of development."

Then in the 1980s the decline set in. An MP who served in the Finance Ministry at the time is quoted: "That's when things started going wrong. Politically-correct individuals started siphoning out money. What should

have gone into agriculture, schools and hospitals went abroad. Looting started in earnest." Political appointees to top jobs took priority over technical experts and widespread corruption took off.

An unnamed cabinet minister comments: "Foreign investment in manufacturing ended in the late 1980s because of demands for kickbacks by some of us ministers. Foreign investors pulled out. Local businesses were forced into bankruptcy."

Whilst it is undoubtedly true that corruption increased from the 1980s the analysis is fundamentally false. The economic decline set in throughout Africa in the 1980s and cannot be explained by corrupt or bad individual leaders. A limited expansion of national economies in the 1960s and '70s was not due to the exemplary characters of the Kenyattas and Odingas of that generation but the condition of the world economy. From the 1980s onwards the drive to globalisation undermined all possibility of building isolated national economies in the underdeveloped countries.

The IMF and the World Bank were not giving friendly advice to Kenya in the 1980s as the *Daily Nation* suggests but imposing conditions for debt repayment and demanding the opening up of the economy to foreign depredation in a fundamental change of western policy led by the United States under President Reagan. International trade agreements have protected western economies but forced down the prices of basic commodities produced in the underdeveloped world—such as tea and coffee in Kenya.

It was these world changes that led Moi and his clique to step up their looting of a declining national economy in order to pay for patronage and stay in power. If there are illusions that Kibaki and NARC can, by showing more subservience to the west than Moi, produce greater democracy, less corruption and better living standards, they will be quickly dispelled in the coming period.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact