

French-backed army junta sets up figurehead regime in Burkina Faso

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On November 15, Burkina Faso's army, in consultation with the pro-imperialist bourgeois "opposition," chose Michel Kafando, 72, as transitional president of the former French colony, pending elections in 12 months.

Then, yesterday, Kafando named junta leader Colonel Isaac Zida prime minister. Zida threatened that opposition to "the transitional process will be repressed with vigour and firmness."

"The prime minister is the country's new strongman, especially as he is the one who will name the incoming government," a diplomat told *Le Figaro* yesterday. The paper also cited Guy Hervé Kam, a leader of the Citizens' Broom opposition movement that helped call protests against President Blaise Compaoré at the end of last month.

Kam said, "We knew that Michel Kafando was the army's candidate. Then the army obtained the prime minister's post. One can suppose this was all planned in advance. It's a disappointment."

Zida is now setting about consolidating his position inside the ruling elite, while simultaneously trying to make populist appeals to anger over the deposed president. He has cancelled the diplomatic passports of 20 Compaoré supporters and fired a number of Compaoré supporters who occupied top positions in national oil and electricity firms.

The naming of Zida testifies to the political bankruptcy of the petty-bourgeois forces that called protests against Compaoré last month. They hoped to block his bid to modify the constitution to allow him to have a fifth presidential term, and thus ensure that they themselves would soon boost their influence in the state. However, they were stunned and dismayed by the eruption of mass protests on October 28, threatening the entire regime in which they wanted to find a place.

Now, they are lining up behind the installation of a new military regime in Ouagadougou.

The Burkinabé army has long been a proxy force helping French imperialism dominate the region, at present operating alongside French troops in Mali. It deposed Compaoré to head off the protests, and Compaoré was airlifted by the French army to Ivory Coast; he is now a guest of King Mohammed VI of Morocco, a staunch ally of Paris.

Paris itself applauded the installation of the new junta in Ouagadougou. French Ambassador Gilles Thibault congratulated Zida on behalf of President François Hollande of the Socialist Party (PS), declaring: "France will remain at Burkina Faso's side, as it has long done."

Given France's bloody history in Burkina Faso, this is a chilling threat. According to a 2011 profile in the *Dépêche Diplomatique*, Kafando supported the right-wing coup on May 17, 1983, backed by then-French President François Mitterrand, also of the PS, based on his anti-Communist and free-market views. He also backed Compaoré's 1987 coup to murder Castrote President Thomas Sankara and adopt policies demanded by the International Monetary Fund (IMF). He then served as Compaoré's ambassador to the UN from 1998 to 2011.

The bourgeois "opposition" is complicit in Zida's re-establishing of a military regime in Ouagadougou. They all took seats on the Designating College that selected Kafando, which was made up of 23 representatives of the army, the official "opposition" parties, religious and tribal bodies, and of various non-governmental organisations (NGOs).

This event exposes the reactionary character not only of France's PS government, but of pseudo-left parties like the New Anti-capitalist Party (NPA), who hailed Compaoré's ouster as a "popular victory" of the

bourgeois “opposition” in the October 28 uprising. Covering their position with cynical praise of the uprising, they themselves helped the opposition stabilize the Ouagadougou junta. (See: France’s pseudo-left NPA backs restoration of law and order in Burkina Faso)

All these forces have signaled their role as tools of French imperialism and bitter enemies of the working class.

Zéphirin Diabré—a former executive of French nuclear energy firm Areva and head of the Leadership of the Opposition grouping—acted in concert with Hollande’s call for Compaoré not to seek to extend his presidency. When the mass uprising broke out on October 28, he praised the army as an “ally of the people,” giving it political cover as it carried out a coup and established a dictatorship.

The forces which claimed the mantle of Thomas Sankara proved to be no alternative for the workers and oppressed masses of Burkina Faso. “Sankarist” General Kwamé Lougué, who enjoyed some support among the protesters, stressed that he remained fully in the camp of the army. After briefly appearing to be vying for the army’s choice of interim president and being warned off by Zida, he has been sent to France by the army in a wheelchair with a broken leg “for treatment.”

The *Observateur Paalga* asks: “Under what circumstances did this general, so hailed by crowds during the revolution, break his leg? *Observateur Paalga* is not in a position to explain this to his reader, as the officers who accompanied the press to General Lougué’s residence did not allow it to do its job.”

The petty bourgeois Citizens’ Broom, ostensibly run by two singers Smockey and Sams’ K Le Jah, who billed themselves as an independent, democratic opposition to Compaoré, collaborated closely with Zida and the coup. In an interview with *faso.net*, Smockey covered up for the army’s role and its killing of several protesters: “The army succeeded in its role of protecting the citizens. ... A large part of the army went over wholeheartedly to the side of the people.”

He defended Citizens’ Broom’s collaboration with the army. “We were negotiating with all the officers, and not just with Zida,” he said, adding that the situation called for “negotiating and passing power to the army temporarily in order to stabilize the security situation.”

Smockey bluntly admitted that when news came of

Compaoré’s resignation, “We said that it was the army’s role to inform the people of that, since it said it was for the people. ... We stayed on its side, and it was this position that led people to accuse us of selling out the struggle.”



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