

New President of the Gambia, Adama Barrow opens the country for plunder

Eddie Haywood
24 February 2017

Newly elected president of Gambia, Adama Barrow, was inaugurated last month after a contentious election held in the small Western African nation. Gambia comprises a sliver of land following the Gambia River, and is bounded by Senegal.

The outgoing president Yayha Jammeh at first conceded defeat to Barrow, and agreed to cede power, but backtracked days later, declaring last December's poll fraudulent and cited unsubstantiated "abnormal irregularities" in the vote count. The Obama administration and governments throughout Europe sharply condemned Jammeh's refusal to concede to Barrow.

Barrow was sworn into office last month in neighboring Senegal under fears of a violent crackdown by the Jammeh government. Jammeh had declared a state of emergency, and the Gambian armed forces occupied the streets in the capital city Banjul.

With the approval of the United Nations Security Council, a military force led by the Senegalese military was organized comprising of forces from the West African nations of Nigeria, Mali and Ghana, and invaded the Gambia with the explicit mission of forcing Jammeh out of the country. Without a shot fired, Jammeh voluntarily boarded a plane in Banjul and left the country.

The universal condemnation of Jammeh heard in the capitals of Western Europe and Washington is a clear indication that Jammeh had fallen out of favor with international finance capital.

The autocrat's 22-year rule was beset by a souring of relations between his government and the imperialist powers; in 2013 Jammeh had withdrawn the Gambia from the British Commonwealth, the organization comprised of 52 former British colonial African nations. Last year Jammeh rescinded the Gambia from

the jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court.

In 2014, in response to the sharp international displeasure with Jammeh, the European Union withdrew its economic aid to the nation.

Jammeh had conducted a campaign of expropriating industry during his rule and operating it for the benefit of himself and his clique which raised the ire of international capitalist interests. Jammeh's confiscated enterprises consisted of sectors throughout the Gambian economy, including agriculture, telecommunications, and the service and tourism sector.

The repressive regime was also viewed unfavorably by Western governments not on the basis of democratic rights, but that such brutality is considered "bad for business" in exploiting the Gambian economic resources.

Also viewed intolerably were Jammeh's imposition of overvalued exchange rates for the Gambian dalasi, seeking to prop up the Gambian currency at the expense of the world currency exchange market. These moves provoked a 33 percent drop of international investment in the Gambia in 2014.

With the end of Jammeh's rule, the Gambian economy has been bankrupted, collapsing under years of corruption, cronyism, mismanagement, and ostracism from international markets. It has been reported that Jammeh looted the state coffers of as much as \$11 million before his departure from the country.

Barrow, in contrast, is welcomed favorably by Washington and its partners in Europe. Since his inauguration, Barrow has declared that the Gambia is "open for business", and the new government has agreed to cooperate with the recommendations of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank for

“economic reform” in the country. Interpreted bluntly, this “reform” is nothing short of the complete opening up of the Gambian economy to plunder.

Washington and Europe, in the face of the global crisis of capitalism, are salivating at the massive profits to be made out of exploiting the African continent’s resources and labor in a new “scramble for Africa.”

For its part, Washington sees Africa as a geo-political prize to be lodged securely under its control. For several years, China has increased its economic investment in Africa, and Washington is threatened by Beijing's vast economic influence on the continent.

Barrow has been busy in the first days of his administration lining up investors seeking to carve up the Gambia’s economy. According to *African Business* magazine, Barrow has pledged to work with investors to create a climate in the country that is consistent with business and market expectations.

The main sectors of the Gambia's economy are agriculture, tourism, and remittances from the Gambian diaspora throughout Europe. Barrow has vowed to expand the Gambian economy further for exploitation.

The oil industry is keen to exploit the Gambia for what it calls “significant reserves” discovered offshore of the tiny nation. CAMAC energy, a conglomerate of oil producing corporations headquartered in Houston, Texas, obtained an exclusive contract last year for the development of oil extraction in the country.

Barrow has promised that the Gambia will return to its membership in the British Commonwealth, the organization set up to continue the capitalist exploitation of the former colonies of Africa after the nations won official independence from British colonialism.

UK Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson paid a visit to the Gambia on February 14 to meet with the new president. In an statement to the media, Johnson said, “President Barrow is determined to take Gambia back to the Commonwealth, and the Commonwealth is ready to welcome Gambia back,” Johnson vowed to do whatever possible to “speed up” the process.

Barrow has also guaranteed that the Gambia will return its cooperation in the International Criminal Court.

With the Barrow in place the European Union has committed €225 million in new funding to Gambia. In *African Business* magazine Neven Mimica, the

European Commissioner for International Cooperation and Development, praised the Barrow government, stating that he wishes to work with the Barrow government in “promoting inclusive entrepreneurship schemes along various value chains with [...] potential for exports.”

The Economic Organization of Western African States (ECOWAS), the economic trade bloc comprising the region of Western Africa, has hailed Barrow's election as a promising sign of new investment opportunities in The Gambia.

ECOWAS was set up in 1975 as a regional trade bloc to oversee and facilitate the ease of exploitation and trade of Western Africa's economic resources. Headquartered in Lagos, Nigeria, ECOWAS works in tandem with the United Nations and the African Union.

Underlining this foul climate of capitalist exploitation are the Gambian masses, who, according to the UN, are among the poorest populations in the world. Some 60% live in at or below the poverty line, and earn little more than a dollar a day.

The Barrow administration’s proclamation of “new era for Gambian democracy” and its promises of improvement in living standards is a lie, intensified capitalist exploitation will only deepen the immiseration of the Gambian masses.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact