

Protests erupt across Senegal as President Sall cancels elections

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Protests have erupted across Senegal after President Macky Sall announced on February 3 the indefinite postponement of presidential elections scheduled for February 25. Protests are continuing, with calls for demonstrations in the capital, Dakar, and other major cities after the Constitutional Council voided Sall's election decree.

On February 3, Sall cited conflicts between the judiciary and the legislature as well as the banning of key candidatures to declare that Senegal "cannot afford another crisis." The government had banned many candidates, including both Ousmane Sonko of the middle class African Patriots of Senegal for Work, Ethics and Fraternity (PASTEF) party and Karim Wade of the Senegalese Democratic Party (PDS), the son of the previous president, Abdoulaye Wade.

Sall called for "an open national dialogue to create conditions for a free, transparent and inclusive election." He proposed to remain in power until elections could be held no earlier than this December, in an extra-constitutional grab for power.

It marked the first time since 1963, three years after Senegal's formal independence from France, that presidential elections were postponed. Throughout this era, the Senegalese regime has served as an instrument of French, US and NATO imperialist policy in Western Africa. Sall's regime has been the center of French plotting to invade Mali, Niger and other Sahel countries who sought alliances with Moscow after France withdrew from its 2013–2022 war in Mali.

The opposition parties initially refused to take action against Sall's power grab, organizing protests of only a few dozen people that were rapidly dispersed by police. "We must find new strategies with disparate actions across the country," an unnamed politician close to the PASTEF-PDS coalition told *Le Monde* on February 7.

Union bureaucrats said that they were considering a general strike, but that they could not call one. Cheikh Diop of the National Federation of Workers of Senegal (CNTS)

said: "The struggle to preserve an electoral process that respects the Constitution is imposed upon us. Creating a balance of power does not exclude a general strike, but we must take the time to go to the rank and file to get organized."

Mass protests erupted however on February 9 in Dakar and across the country after calls for protests spread across social media. The Sall regime, which organized a wave of arrests before the protests, launched a bloody crackdown in which security forces shot and killed at least two young men, as well as firing upon dozens of journalists. Nevertheless, protests continued, notably in Dakar, in Ziguinchor where Sonko and the PASTEF have an electoral base, and in the northern city of Saint Louis where a student had been killed.

Photos circulated of demonstrators brandishing the Russian flag, to oppose Sall's collaboration with Paris against Mali, Niger and other Sahel countries seeking alliances with Moscow.

The French government, which is infamous for its relentless violence against social protests at home, issued a statement effectively endorsing Sall's rationale for his attempted coup. "France reiterates its appeal to the authorities to organize the presidential election as quickly as possible," French Foreign Ministry spokesman Christophe Lemoine said in a communiqué. Lemoine also called on Sall to "make a proportionate use of force" against protesters opposed to his coup attempt.

The protests have also panicked Senegal's official bourgeois opposition parties, who are working to bolster the regime. On February 11, former Senegalese presidents Abdou Diouf and Abdoulaye Wade issued an open letter appealing to Sall for "national dialogue." They called on the Senegalese people to "put an end to our differences and political crises." They told the youth "to stop violence immediately."

Sall has cut off mobile internet connections in Senegal and banned a nationwide protest called for Tuesday that the opposition parties then called off. Nonetheless, protests have continued in Senegal and also in the Senegalese diaspora

internationally.

WSWS reporters interviewed protesters at a march in Paris against Sall's coup attempt. Mustafa said: "We cannot accept this, so we are here to show our anger, to show to Macky Sall the great dictator that we do not agree. Sall had promised us a government in which everyone would feel better, where there would be equity and the justice system would be impartial. But we see that justice is served in his interests. The balance sheet of Macky Sall is negative, he has failed, he leads Senegal and there have been 80 people killed in demonstrations" while he was president.

He continued, "Income from natural resources are never redistributed to the population. From every standpoint Macky Sall has failed. It is disgusting, we don't want him anymore."

"Sall put the French back in position" in the region, Mustafa added. "But we are in solidarity with the Malians who were mobilized" to demand the end of France's war in their country.

Mendy also criticized Sall for trying to join a French-backed alliance threatening to attack Mali, Niger and other nearby Sahel states to bolster French imperialist interests in the region.

Mendy said, "I would be surprised if Senegal joined the military alliance. You see already, in Mali, they don't want the French and are allied to the Russians. This debate is starting to interest many people in Senegal. We would rather have the Russians as allies than the French, who have been in Senegal for so many years since independence in 1960. Of course we're not against France being present in Africa, but it must be equitable. We must be able to benefit from the resources we have. We are not against France, but we are against France's policies."

Mendy noted similarities with the ongoing, NATO-backed Israeli onslaught against the Palestinians in Gaza: "The people of Gaza are victims. The Israelis are heavily armed, the Palestinians only have stones, so you see that it's a totally unequal fight."

He explained, "France does not want the natural wealth of Senegal to escape its control. They have lost Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso, other countries. Now they are basing their policies on Senegal, and President Macky Sall is complicit in that. As far as I am concerned, it is Macron who is pulling Macky Sall's strings."

The struggle for democratic rights and against the prevailing, grotesque levels of social inequality can only proceed by a revolutionary struggle to transfer power to the working class and implement socialist policies. This struggle must be waged across the artificial national borders drawn up by the imperialist powers in Africa, and with workers in France and other imperialist powers. This requires a struggle

for Marxist internationalism, that is, for Trotskyism, against bourgeois nationalist forces that seek to subordinate workers to the local capitalist elites.

The bitter lessons of the revolutionary uprisings of Egypt and Tunisia in 2011, as well as many other recent struggles across Africa, must be drawn. The political parties that promised to build a flourishing capitalist democracy proved to have no perspective besides hoodwinking the masses, and serving as a cover for reestablishing the dictatorships the workers had just brought down.

Currently, the Sall and Wade political dynasties are maneuvering with PASTEF to try to bring protests back under the control of the political establishment. Karim Wade announced on February 14 that PASTEF leader Ousmane Sanko is "in negotiations with President Macky Sall to rapidly obtain his freedom and that of other people imprisoned with him." Echoing Sall, Wade said this would permit the holding of "elections on December 15 with a democratic, open, transparent and inclusive poll" to select the next president.

PASTEF portrays itself as radical, but it is a pro-capitalist party speaking for layers of the affluent middle class, hostile to socialism and workers power. It describes itself as a party of "young managers of the Senegalese public administration, the private sector, the professions, teaching circles and businessmen who, for the most part, have never been active in politics." It promotes "a pragmatic doctrine, which does not identify itself with any historically known ideology: socialism, communism, liberalism, etc."

The essential precondition to defend democratic rights and stop the spread of war and dictatorship, across Africa and internationally, is to build a revolutionary Marxist vanguard in the working class, opposed to bourgeois nationalism, and fighting to bring the working class to power and build socialism.



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