

Kenya's Ruto bans protests as hundreds of thousands of teachers threaten to strike

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Yesterday, the Kenyan government of William Ruto banned protests in the heart of the capital Nairobi indefinitely. The move targets the continued mass protests across the country against austerity, mass unemployment and the soaring of cost of living but has a much wider application, as sections of the working class enter the struggle.

In a statement late Wednesday evening, a day after mass protests erupted across Kenya demanding Ruto's resignation, Chief of Police Douglas Kanja Kiricho said, "We have credible intelligence that organised criminal groups are planning to take advantage of the ongoing protests to execute their attacks, including looting".

"No demonstrations will be permitted in the Nairobi Central Business District and its surroundings until further notice to ensure public safety," he added.

These are lies. The pretext of "criminal groups" has been repeatedly exposed. It is the Ruto government which is sending state-sanctioned goons to sow discord among protestors, loot business and stab and beat-up protestors. Goons sent by the state have publicly complained to the media after not being paid for their services.

On Tuesday's "total shutdown" protest, which saw tens of thousands protesting across the country, three people were shot dead and dozens injured. This adds to the 50 dead and 413 injured as they were shot, teargassed and water cannoned since the start of protests on June 18, according to the Kenya National Commission on Human Rights.

The Ruto government is escalating threats against the media. The head of the Communications Authority of Kenya, David Mugonyi, wrote to a media executive accusing reporters of "perpetuating" violence in their coverage of the protests, "which could potentially cause

widespread civil unrest in the country".

The ruling class and its adjuncts, from the trade union bureaucracy to the Azimio la Umoja opposition led by millionaire Raila Odinga, has closed ranks behind Ruto. But the government is widely despised. According to a report by research firm TIFA, 81 percent of respondents supports the protests, with support higher among Kenyans aged between 18 and 34 at 83 percent.

The clampdown on the protests takes place as hundreds of thousands of teachers are threatening to strike.

On Thursday, as part of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) cuts being implemented in substitute for the tax hikes on basic goods and services Ruto was forced to withdraw last month, Teachers Service Commission Chief Executive Officer Nancy Macharia announced that their overall budget had been slashed by Sh10 billion (\$76 million).

Macharia announced that the 20,000 Junior Secondary School intern teachers promised permanent employment could only take up position from January and not this month as anticipated. Teachers will also face hurdles accessing critical health services as the medical cover scheme has been slashed by 50 percent, resulting in a shortfall of Ksh.11.8 billion (\$90.4 million).

Teachers were set to enjoy a basic salary increment of up to 9.5 percent starting from July 1, 2023. The deal was signed by the Kenya National Union of Teachers (KNUT), which claims over 170,000 members, the Kenya Union of Post Primary Education Teachers (KUPPET), claiming 120,000 members, and the Kenya Union of Special Needs Education Teachers (KUSNET).

Early last month, KNUT called off the strike by Junior Secondary teachers ongoing since April to, in

the words of its spokesperson Omari Omari, “pave the way for Parliament to pass the 2024/2025 budget”. He said their demands had been accepted when in fact Ruto only promised permanent employment for 20,000 interns out of the demanded 46,000. Omari complained that strikes are “frustrating to our poor students. A strike is damaging and frustrating to us teachers. A strike is not something to be cherished.”

The bureaucrats of KNUT, KUPPET and KUSNET were terrified of a strike by teachers intersecting with the developing mass movement against Ruto’s Finance Bill 2024, that exploded in late June. This is now a real possibility.

Macharia warned, “We don’t want to see teachers going to the streets at this critical time because of retained benefits.” Another lawmaker said, “The Gen-Zs that are on the streets are children of the teachers, now you also want to set their parents against the government?” One said simply, “We are inviting trouble”.

On Monday, tens of thousands of ride-hailing corporations—Uber, Little Cab Kenya, Bolt Kenya, Faras and other e-taxis—went on a one-day strike in a bid to increase their fares per mileage. Kenyan truckers are also threatening to strike over insecurity.

On Wednesday, coffee farmers from Kibirigwi Cooperative Society in Ndia, Kirinyaga, took to the streets to protest poor pay. Workers from Ragati and Ngugi-ini factories disrupted transport on the main Sagana-Karatina highway for four hours. “We are going to close down all the eight factories and eject the entire management,” said Samuel Wanjohi to *Citizen*.

The only way to defend living standards, expand public education and healthcare, and create jobs is through the formation of rank-and-file committees independent of the bureaucracy to prepare mass and coordinated strike action. In particular, the hundreds of thousands of factory workers of Nairobi and Mombasa, and rural workers in the tea, coffee and horticulture plantations, must be called out.

The fact that the unions will not defend democratic rights was on full display Tuesday, when Francis Atwoli, President of the Organisation of African Trade Union Unity (OATUU) and Secretary General of Kenya’s Central Organisation of Trade Unions (COTU), consisting of 36 trade unions representing more than 1.5 million workers, travelled to Egypt.

Atwoli met with Egyptian Labour Minister Mohamed Gobran, representing the government of Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, the Butcher of Cairo. El-Sisi maintains his rule with an iron fist, brutally suppressing all strikes and protests. Over the past decade, hundreds of political opponents have been killed, and 65,000 political detainees are incarcerated, many without charge or trial, facing torture. Recently, eight senior opposition leaders have been sentenced to death. Independent media is heavily censored.

Ruto is hoping to follow in Sisi’s footsteps, exploiting Kenya’s new status as a non-NATO ally of Washington. In Egypt, amid its worst economic crisis in 60 years and rising social tensions, Cairo has leveraged its position as Israel’s key accomplice in the Zionist regime’s genocidal war on Gaza to secure a series of bailouts from the IMF and the European Union.

Acting like a minister without portfolio, Atwoli proposed a partnership where Egyptian investors could cultivate 2,000 acres of Kenyan land to boost agricultural output. The *Daily News Egypt* reported that Gobran “stressed the importance of African worker unions and federations as key players in the labour and production landscape, alongside governments and employers.”

As the Kenyan ruling class prepares dictatorial forms of rule, the union bureaucracy is vying for positions and privileges in the new “broad-based” government of Ruto, following his dissolution of parliament, touting their decades-long service repressing workers’ strikes and collaborating with Western-backed dictatorships like those of first post-independence President Jomo Kenyatta and Daniel arap Moi.

As Leon Trotsky, the founder of the Fourth International, wrote in the Transitional Programme, “In time of war or revolution, when the bourgeoisie is plunged into exceptional difficulties, trade union leaders usually become bourgeois ministers.”



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