

Austerity protests in Uganda violently crushed

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23 July 2024

Yesterday, protests against soaring costs of living, corruption and poverty erupted in Kampala, Uganda. They were savagely repressed by the US-backed Yoweri Museveni regime, which has ruled the country with an iron fist since 1986 when he ended a bloody civil war and imposed a brutal capitalist regime to allow the country's rich resources to be plundered by his imperialist backers.

Hundreds of protesters mobilised under the hashtag #March2Parliament, defied Museveni, who deployed the police, counter terrorism units, military police, plain-clothed officers and the army around and within Kampala city. Armored vehicles and police patrolled the streets all day, while key roads leading to parliament were closed and police-manned barricades set up. "It's like a war zone," Edwin Mugisha, who works in Kampala, told Reuters.

Over 20 arrests and abductions were made including in the hours leading up to the protest. Any sign of a protest was rapidly shutdown by the police and dozens were arrested.

Despite this, protestors managed to march on central street Nasser Road, chanting against the corrupt Parliament Speaker "Anita Among must go," echoing the Kenyan "Ruto must go" call, before they were arrested.

The protests have instilled fear within the Museveni regime of unrest similar to that in neighboring Kenya. In a televised address Saturday evening Museveni threatened the protestors, "We are busy producing wealth... and you here want to disturb us. You are playing with fire because we cannot allow you to disturb us."

"Some elements have been planning illegal demonstrations, riots," Museveni added.

As the ruling elite loot state coffers dedicated to education, healthcare, and infrastructure, practice land theft, receive hefty bribes from corporations, and ruthlessly exploit the working class in key world commodities, what they describe as "producing wealth" is a euphemism for securing their own privileged lifestyles.

Museveni, 79, one of Africa's longest serving dictators, has now promoted his son Lieutenant-General Muhoozi Kainerugaba to general and appointed him the Chef of Defense Forces of the Ugandan Popular Defense Forces (UPDF), to maintain his dynasty.

Muhoozi is a graduate of Fort Leavenworth, the US Army Command and General Staff College, referred to as the "Intellectual Centre" of the US army. He is a darling of

Washington.

Earlier this year, Muhoozi held a meeting with the US Defense Attaché to Uganda, Lt. Col. Chris Noumba. According to a message from the Chief of Defence Forces office, the meeting discussed "strengthening the traditional strong relationship between the UPDF and US military."

Uganda acts as Washington's proxy in the Horn of Africa and the resource-rich central Africa, deploying the UPDF to support US-aligned governments in South Sudan and Somalia. In Somalia, the UPDF has joined the US-backed African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) to counter the Al Shabaab militia. Previously, Washington provided equipment and training for Ugandan forces to combat the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) in northern Uganda. US military interventions in the region have become crucial in attempting to counter Chinese investments in infrastructure projects aimed at facilitating the extraction of African oil and mineral wealth.

Another key backer is French imperialism. Just last week, Uganda's Deputy Speaker of Parliament, Thomas Tayebwa, praised cooperation between Uganda and France, anticipating the benefits for Uganda's corrupt elite from some crumbs thrown at them by French corporations' profits in agriculture, agribusiness, minerals, oil and gas, and tourism sectors.

"We are looking forward to increasing the trade volumes between our two countries and the European Union in general," Tayebwa said. "Uganda is ready to continue improving the investment environment to attract strategic investors and ensure good return on their investment. French companies in Uganda numbering over 40, are today reputed to employ around 3,000 Ugandans and directly contributing strongly to revenue through taxation."

French Ambassador Xavier Sticker lauded Ugandan troops for helping French imperialism's attempts to control Africa's resources, necessary for the US-NATO war against Russia and preparations for war against China. "This is illustrated in particular by the cooperation between the UPDF and the French forces stationed in Djibouti, in support of peace operations in Somalia and the Democratic of Congo," said Sticker.

Museveni was one of the middle-class students attracted to Maoism at the University of Dar es Salaam in Tanzania in the late 1960s under the bourgeois nationalist regime of Julius Nyerere, who ruled Tanzania from 1961 to 1985. He went on to win a five-year guerrilla war against the regime of Milton Obote under a

banner of anti-tribalism, land distribution and a “no-party democracy.” In his “Fundamental change” swearing-in address on January 29, 1986, Museveni said:

No one should think that what is happening today is a mere change of guard: it is a fundamental change in the politics of our country. In Africa, we have seen so many changes that change, as such, is nothing short of mere turmoil. We have had one group getting rid of another one, only for it to turn out to be worse than the group it displaced. Please, do not count us in that group of people.

During the following decades, the Museveni regime imposed mass privatisations and sold Uganda’s assets to international financiers, as he and his cohorts benefited through corrupt deals. This wholesale robbery and looting of resources has had a catastrophic effect on the working class and the rural masses.

The national poverty rate stands at 41 percent. Between 2013 and 2017, the number of people living in poverty in Uganda increased from 6.7 million to 10 million, according to charity Oxfam. The wealthiest 10 percent of the population receives 35.7 percent of national income; the poorest 10 percent earns a meager 2.5 percent and the poorest 20 percent just 5.8 percent.

Over the past years alone, the Museveni regime has killed and maimed scores of protestors, while hundreds remain as political prisoners without trial. In 2020, Ugandan security forces gunned down protesters, killing 54 and injuring scores, and arrested over 2,000. Over the past decades, his victims run into the tens of thousands.

Museveni has repeatedly targeted the opposition National Unity Platform (NUP), led by rapper-turned-politician Robert Kyagulanyi, popularly known as Bobi Wine. Wine, who grew up in one of Uganda’s poorest neighborhoods in the capital Kampala, has garnered widespread support for his music, which speaks out against poverty and Museveni. In the 2021 election, despite facing mass repression, Wine won 34.83 percent of the vote (3.5 million votes) amid significant voter abstention.

On Monday, roads leading to the Kampala headquarters of NUP were blocked by security forces. In posts on X/Twitter, Wine said the military had surrounded the headquarters, barring anyone from entering or exiting. Wine added, “I didn’t organise this protest, but both the party and I support it.” Several leaders and senior members of NUP were arrested.

Wine’s pro-capitalist platform is no alternative to Museveni. Apart from rhetoric regarding corruption and unemployment, and “freedom,” NUP offers little more than turnover among the looters running the Ugandan state. Wine is a millionaire, estimated in \$12 million, owning a mansion in Kampala, a fleet of luxury cars including a bullet-proof Toyota Land Cruiser V8, a kilometer-long private beach on Lake Victoria and business interests in real estate, leisure, farming and retail.

Despite NUP’s popular support among the working class and youth, it articulates the interests of an upper middle class whose aspirations to run businesses and the capitalist state have been

blocked by the domination by Museveni and his political cronies tied imperialism.

In words of Wine, “I was very smart and talented young man. I got successful much earlier. In fact, if we were all well governed, I would be much more successful,” citing American rapper Jay Z, with a net worth of \$1.3 billion.

NUP’s programme, “A New Uganda,” is a pro-capitalist manifesto, declaring, “To restore trust and confidence in our economy, we shall stabilise our business environment and render it more predictable by good governance that empowers the private sector to create jobs and stimulate growth.”

Wine has also promoted illusions in the imperialist powers, particularly the UK and the US. Last month, Wine thanked the US imposition of sanctions on the Parliamentary Speaker Anita Annet Among and four other officials for their involvement in corruption and human rights violations. “We hope that more individuals and organisations responsible for the suffering of our people will face sanctions,” he said. Wine revealed he had lobbied for UK’s April sanction of Among.

The NATO powers are no allies of the Ugandan masses. They are not defending human rights, but positioning themselves in case they need to shift support away from the hated Museveni and his son. They are currently backing a genocide against Palestinians in Gaza, bound up with plans for a new military carve-up of the world and its resources, centred on advanced preparations for war with Russia, Iran, and China. In Eastern Europe, they are arming the far-right Kiev regime in Ukraine against Russia that could result in a nuclear catastrophe.

Uganda and Kenya are being drawn into the sharpening geopolitical conflicts between US and China. The ruling elites in Uganda, whether led by Museveni or Wine, are incapable of addressing any of the basic social and democratic issues confronting the working class and rural poor.

Only an independent political movement of the Ugandan working class, rallying the rural toilers, to overthrow bourgeois rule and establish a government of workers and rural masses committed to socialist policies, can resolve burning social problems. This is an inseparable part of the broader struggle for socialism across Africa and internationally, and the building of a Ugandan section of the International Committee of the Fourth International.



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