

Stalinist Communist Party Marxist-Kenya seeks new political trap for rising discontent among workers, youth—Part Three

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This is the third of a three-part series. Parts One and Two are available here.

CPM-K's "National Democratic Revolution" and the orientation to the Kenyan bourgeoisie

There is a clear continuity between the Communist Party Marxist-Kenya's history and its appeals to Ruto and the Kenyan capitalist state during the Gen Z protests and its defence of the "National Democratic Revolution"—a long-standing Maoist perspective that has historically been used to subordinate workers and youth to various factions of the ruling class.

CPM-K traces its origins to the clandestine Mwakenya (Muungano wa Wazalendo wa Kenya) Maoist group of the 1980s, which was the leading underground movement against Daniel arap Moi's one-party dictatorship. Amid IMF-imposed austerity measures, which fueled mass working-class protests and strikes, Mwakenya sought alliances with sections of the bourgeoisie (See: Kenya's Gen Z insurgency, the strike wave and the struggle for Permanent Revolution—Part 3).

In May 1990, the movement called for unity among sections of the ruling class to pressure Moi to resign. It issued a statement calling for unity among "all progressive democratic and patriotic political organisations, workers trade unions, peasant cooperatives, professional bodies, religious organizations, student societies, the business community, welfare and other nongovernmental interest groups to unite in a single force of action to pressure Moi to resign."

Under this strategy, Mwakenya sought to channel the rising social opposition to austerity and Moi's police-state repression into the broader bourgeois opposition led by Raila Odinga, who had emerged as the most prominent challenger to Moi's dictatorship. This marked the beginning of Odinga's central role as a focal point for mass opposition to the ruling elite. Many activists from Mwakenya, including future Chief Justice Willy Mutunga, openly joined the Odinga camp.

Other former Mwakenya members—still working in the underground movement—joined the Social Democratic Party (SDP), which the CPM-K today regards as its predecessor. It was founded in 1992 by Johnstone Mwendo Makau, then serving as Information Minister under Moi's dictatorship. Makau was infamous for enforcing state censorship and intimidating journalists. At the time, the creation of the SDP was widely perceived as a regime-backed strategy to fracture the bourgeois opposition to Moi's rule.

The founding came in the wake of two years of mass protests. Alarmed

by the growing unrest, Washington, which had long backed Moi's regime, pressured him to repeal the constitutional provision banning multiparty politics, paving the way for Kenya's first multiparty elections in 1992. The SDP did not field a presidential candidate in that election and managed to secure only 177 votes in the National Assembly elections. Makau then defected back to KANU.

The move of the Maoists to join the SDP was part of an international trend following the Stalinist dissolution of the Soviet Union. As the professors, union bureaucrats and middle-class professionals among Stalinist and Maoist groups lost the income that had come to them earlier from the Soviet bureaucracy and Beijing, their sympathies swung ever more directly towards their own capitalist state and imperialism. The Kenyan Stalinists gave a clear expression of this process.

After Makau's departure, the SDP gained prominence amid growing opposition to Moi's austerity measures. It ran Charity Ngilu for the 1997 presidential elections, advocating for greater state intervention in the economy and job creation, and campaigning against IMF-imposed Structural Adjustment Programs that had led to massive job losses, wage suppression, and cuts in public services. She won fifth place with 7.9 percent of the vote and the SDP secured 15 seats in the National Assembly. Soon after, like its first leader, Ngilu defected, forming the National Rainbow Coalition (NARC) with main bourgeois opposition figures, Raila Odinga and Mwai Kibaki. Exploiting the SDP's "left" credentials to enhance NARC's appeal, she helped propel the coalition to victory in the 2002 elections, bringing an end to Moi's 24-year rule.

James Orengo, Odinga's ally, later led the SDP, backing Odinga in the disputed 2007 election, which triggered Kenya's deadliest post-election violence. Although Kibaki's security forces gunned down Odinga's supporters, killing hundreds, Odinga entered a power-sharing agreement and was installed as prime minister. Orengo was given the post of Minister for Lands. William Ruto, then Odinga's ally, played a key role in whipping up tribal violence, leading to his indictment by the International Criminal Court.

The post-election violence exposed the role of political forces like the SDP that paved the way for the different capitalist parties of the Kenyan establishment to whip up communal violence. By 2007, the SDP had faded, with its leaders absorbed into Odinga's ODM, Kibaki's government, or other tribalist formations.

General Secretary Omole has developed a falsified historical account, describing this period as one of a factional dispute within the SDP between social democrats and revolutionaries aiming "to drive the party to the left." Omole ignores the active collaboration between the Maoists in the SDP and the ruling class.

The SDP was deeply involved in crafting Kenya's 2010 capitalist constitution. CPM-K proudly acknowledges its role, stating on its website

that its predecessor, the CPK, “participated actively in the struggle for the progressive reforms that are summarised in the national Constitution of Kenya 2010. We were involved in the debates of the Constitution-making conference at Bomas of Kenya in Nairobi between 2003 to 2005 and fought for the inclusion of the progressive articles in the Constitution that included Article 10 on national values and principles of governance that also form the summary of the minimum program of the CPK.”

In 2017, historic Stalinist figures within the SDP, such as Onyango Oloo, supported Odinga’s latest bid for the presidency, while another faction threw its support behind the rival bourgeois faction of President Uhuru Kenyatta.

In 2019, the SDP rebranded itself as the CPK to capitalise on growing youth radicalisation amid soaring unemployment and inequality. This occurred against a backdrop of global mass struggles. The CPK’s then leader Mwandawiro Mghanga claimed this shift distinguished the party from mainstream bourgeois coalitions which the Stalinists had backed for years.

Shortly after, the CPK’s Youth League split with one wing leaving to found the Morenoite Revolutionary Socialist League (RSL). It became the Kenyan affiliate of the International Socialist League, now notorious for whitewashing Ukrainian fascism and backing NATO’s proxy war on Russia.

The split was primarily driven by differences over foreign policy, particularly the CPK’s increasing alignment with Beijing. The RSL, which openly supports the US-NATO imperialist bloc, portrayed Russia and China as emerging “imperialist powers” to justify the US-led military build-up against them. As the RSL itself framed the dispute, the CPK “held the position that China is not an imperial power because it has a Communist Party [sic], demonstrating not only a flawed understanding of the global situation but also a fundamental misunderstanding of dialectics.”

This did not stop these unprincipled anti-Marxist parties from working together. Today the National Provisional Coordination Committee of People’s Assemblies (NCCPA) is fronted by Stalinists in alliance with the Morenoites.

The CPK’s founding in 2019, however, was rapidly exposed as a deceptive maneuver in 2022 when CPK’s top leadership—including Mghanga himself alongside General Secretary Benedict Wachira—joined the Kenya Kwanza Alliance, led by then-Deputy President William Ruto. The CPK leadership openly backed Ruto’s presidential bid in the August 2022 elections.

A majority faction opposed this move, opting to remain nominally outside the political establishment, though their orientation to the ruling elite and Ruto remained—as shown by its intervention in the Gen-Z struggle (see Part Two).

The CPM-K’s alignment with the bourgeoisie has long been masked under the “National Democratic Revolution” perspective. Although this concept remains vaguely defined, an analysis of speeches and the newly unveiled manifesto reveals its core principles.

Firstly, the democratic revolution in Kenya—encompassing “full independence and sovereignty” along with bourgeois democracy—is deemed unfinished, making it the first stage, while socialism is indefinitely postponed. Second, the 2010 Constitution, which the Kenyan Maoists helped draft, is seen as a vehicle for completing this revolution if fully implemented. Third, workers are urged to confine their struggle within the national framework, exerting pressure on supposedly “progressive” and non-comprador factions of the Kenyan bourgeoisie, who are presented as the natural allies in achieving the “National Democratic Revolution.”

The manifesto upholds the Stalinist two-stage theory that holds that the struggle for socialism and capitalist bourgeois democracy are two different stages. CPM-K is “the comprehensive leader and centre of the

revolution in both the national democratic and socialist stages,” it states.

It further declares that the 2010 Constitution is a “site of class struggle” because the bourgeoisie has been “incapable of implementing the constitution for the benefit of the exploited and oppressed majority.” Its own role is to help enforce the constitution. According to the CPM-K, “the struggle to enact the progressive reforms embodied by the constitution is, therefore, an ongoing class struggle that will, inevitably, lead to socialism.”

The CPM-K’s leader, Omole, declared at the opening of the Congress, “we will reaffirm our analysis that Kenya remains a capitalist and semi-feudal society, where the comprador ruling class serves imperialist interests. This congress is a declaration of our intent to complete the country’s independence by dismantling the existing order and laying the foundations for socialism.”

Omole’s conjuring of a “comprador” bourgeoisie at the service of imperialist interests versus a “non-comprador” national, patriotic bourgeoisie, is to create the fiction that there exists a section of the ruling class that workers need to subordinate themselves to so as to fulfil the “National Democratic Revolution.”

The CPM-K’s manifesto explicitly puts forward an alliance with the bourgeoisie, stating: “together the basic toiling masses and the urban petty bourgeoisie as the basic forces of the revolution, wins over the middle bourgeoisie to the national democratic revolution and takes advantage of the factional strife among the exploiting classes to isolate and destroy the enemy that at the given time is the worst reactionary faction or an invading foreign aggressor.”

The twentieth century is littered with examples of the tragic results of this political orientation to the bourgeoisie.

Leon Trotsky, the co-leader with Lenin of the October Revolution in Russia in 1917 and founder of the Red Army, subjected Stalin’s class-collaborationist “bloc of four classes” in China to a withering critique when the revolutionary situation erupted across the country.

Stalin’s proposed “bloc of four classes”—consisting of the working class, the peasantry, the petty bourgeoisie and the national bourgeoisie—called on the young Chinese Communist Party (CCP) to subordinate itself to the bourgeois nationalist Kuomintang of Chiang Kai-Shek in the name of carrying out the national bourgeois revolution and ensuring liberation from imperialist domination. Trotsky and the Left Opposition warned of the devastating consequences for the socialist revolution in China. The fact that China was oppressed by imperialism did not lessen the conflict between the Chinese bourgeoisie and the working class. Indeed, the opposite was the case. As Trotsky wrote:

It would further be profound naiveté to believe that an abyss lies between the so-called comprador bourgeoisie, that is, the economic and political agency of foreign capital in China, and the so-called national bourgeoisie. No, these two sections stand incomparably closer to each other than the bourgeoisie and the masses of workers and peasants...

It is a gross mistake to think that imperialism mechanically welds together all the classes of China from without... The revolutionary struggle against imperialism does not weaken, but rather strengthens the political differentiation of the classes.

Trotsky’s warnings were confirmed. In April 1927 the military forces of the Kuomintang, under the leadership of Chiang Kai-shek, carried out a massacre of the Shanghai working class. A large section of the CCP leadership was murdered. After April 1927, the Chinese Communist Party was ordered to enter the “left” Kuomintang. The “left” KMT then crushed the workers’ and peasants’ movement no less brutally than Chiang Kai-

shek.

The two-stage theory of revolution and alliances with the bourgeoisie under the banner of a “National Democratic Revolution” have long served to disarm the working class in the face of its class enemy. The anti-Marxist doctrines of Stalinism and its Maoist variant play a dual role: providing the CPM-K with leftist rhetoric to maintain control over workers while legitimising its long history of class collaboration and betrayal.

CPM-K’s virulent hatred of Trotsky and Trotskyism

The CPM-K reserves its deepest hostility for Trotskyism, a reaction that reveals its fundamental allegiance to the nationalist betrayals of Stalinism and its twin, Maoism. More than a century after Trotsky’s critique of Stalinist class collaboration and defence of world socialist revolution, the CPM-K still parrots the distortions that justified the Soviet bureaucracy’s purges, framing Trotsky as an enemy of socialism while glorifying Stalin’s disastrous policies.

A document posted in 2022 described Trotsky as “the chap who held an important post in the Bolshevik Party and became an enemy of the Soviet state.” It continued, “After the removal of Trotsky, how remarkably socialist construction was promoted in the Soviet Union! Trotsky thought that without him, everything Stalin did would fail, and the Soviet state would go to ruin. But the Soviet people built their country up to be the leading socialist power in the world, as well as a global power.”

In another document, the CPK states, “It was Stalin and his leadership that mobilised communists, the working class, and the anti-fascist forces of Russia, Soviet Union, Europe, and the World that after one of the greatest sacrifices ever made by human beings, managed to defeat Hitler and liberate the World from fascism. ... Stalin led Russia towards becoming a great scientific, technological, industrial, and military superpower in the World. ... Stalin is remembered as a communist revolutionary leader and legend.”

As for Mao, he “perfected theory of peoples’ war and created a large communist army, movement, and ... defeated feudalism, capitalism, Japanese and US imperialism, and established the socialist state in China in 1949.” Under his leadership China was transformed “from a peasant and feudal economy into a great scientific, technological, industrial, military and economic superpower it is today.”

The dissolution of the Soviet Union by the Stalinists in 1991 and the reintroduction of capitalism in China are a vindication of Trotsky and the Trotskyist movement. It was the final stage in a counter-revolution that had begun in the 1920s with the usurpation of political power from the working class by a privileged bureaucracy, based in the state and party apparatus and led by Joseph Stalin, that had arisen because of the isolation and backwardness of the first workers’ state.

The bureaucracy repudiated the internationalist perspective of Lenin and Trotsky, who conceived the Russian Revolution’s fate as inseparably bound up with the world socialist revolution. Under the banner of “Socialism in One Country”, Stalin sought to arrive at peaceful coexistence with the imperialist powers, transforming the various the Communist parties into instruments of the Moscow’s counter-revolutionary foreign policy. During the 1930s, the Kremlin bureaucracy, acting to preserve its privileges as a nationalist caste, orchestrated a series of devastating betrayals that crushed revolutionary movements and paved the way for World War II.

Today the CPM-K’s hatred of Trotsky, like the Stalinist regime’s relentless campaign of lies and mass murder in the 1930s, is because Trotskyism’s socialist-internationalist opposition to Stalin’s bureaucratic-

nationalist rule, and the defence of the perspective of world socialist revolution, continue to be the main political threat to the capitalist order and its political defenders.

The Kenyan working class cannot rely on Stalinist, Maoist, or petty-bourgeois nationalist formations to lead the struggle for socialism. These forces exist to misdirect revolutionary energy into dead-end appeals to the bourgeois state, preventing workers from developing their own independent political movement.

What is needed is the building of a revolutionary party, armed with the lessons of the past century of struggle. Such a party must reject the illusions of reforming the capitalist system, the myth of a progressive faction of the bourgeoisie, and the dead-end of “national democratic” stages that indefinitely postpone the fight for socialism. It must base itself on Trotsky’s theory of Permanent Revolution, recognising that the democratic and socialist tasks in Kenya and across Africa can only be realised through the independent mobilisation of the working class against capitalism and imperialism, as a by-product of the working-class seizing power through socialist revolution.

Above all it means adopting an internationalist perspective that connects the struggles of Kenyan workers with their class brothers and sisters worldwide, particularly in the imperialist centres.

The lessons of the past year are clear: No faction of the ruling class—whether aligned with Western imperialism or capitalist China—can solve the deep-seated crises facing workers and youth. The only path forward is the building of a Kenyan section of the International Committee of the Fourth International.

Concluded



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