

Tanzania's CCM government suppresses the main opposition CHADEMA

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Tanzania's President Samia Suluhu Hassan and the ruling Chama Cha Mapinduzi (Party of the Revolution—CCM) are intensifying their repression of the main opposition party, CHADEMA (Party for Democracy and Progress).

CCM, one of the longest-ruling parties in Africa, traces its roots to Julius Nyerere's Tanganyika African National Union (TANU), the bourgeois nationalist movement that led the country to independence from Britain in 1961 and governed under a one-party system for decades.

On April 9, 2025, opposition leader Tundu Lissu, CHADEMA chairman and presidential contender in the upcoming October elections, was arrested after addressing a rally in Mbinga district. Lissu had been leading a nationwide campaign under the slogan "No Reforms, No Election," demanding changes to the electoral process. He was charged with treason, a capital offense carrying the death penalty, for inciting rebellion and calling for election disruption.

Days later, Lissu was disqualified from contesting the 2025 general elections and CHADEMA was banned from participating in elections until 2030, citing its refusal to sign a code of conduct. At a sham court appearance in Dar es Salaam, Lissu was barred from entering a plea on the treason charge but pleaded not guilty to a separate accusation of publishing false information. Two senior party officials, Deputy Chairperson John Heche and Secretary General John Mnyika, were arrested en route to the hearing and released the following day. At least one party member was reportedly killed by police outside the courtroom, while dozens more were detained as police in full riot gear violently cracked down on protests.

Last September, a senior CHADEMA official was abducted and brutally murdered amid a wave of abductions targeting government critics. During the November 2024 local elections, CHADEMA reported that thousands of its candidates were barred from standing, as the ruling party claimed 98 percent of the seats.

The mounting repression and attacks on democratic rights in Tanzania are part of a broader authoritarian turn across East Africa and globally. In Uganda, the regime of Yoweri Museveni denied bail to opposition leader and four-time presidential candidate Kizza Besigye on fraudulent treason charges, after kidnapping him in Kenya and transferring him to

Kampala for a military trial. In neighbouring Mozambique, FRELIMO has overseen the violent suppression of protests against its half-century rule, leaving over 350 dead. In Kenya, President William Ruto continues to escalate repression following the brutal suppression of protests against IMF-backed austerity measures that left over 60 dead and hundreds injured. Abductions and extrajudicial detentions of protesters have become routine, openly supported by the military and endorsed by the trade union bureaucracy. Even children's school plays have been targeted.

These developments reflect the global resurgence of authoritarian rule, driven by the intensifying crisis of capitalism and accelerated by the attempts of Donald Trump administration to impose a dictatorship in the United States with attacks on migrants, anti-genocide protesters, and even sections of the judiciary. Across the globe, ruling elites are responding to deepening inequality and mass opposition with repression, censorship, and militarisation.

In Tanzania, repression unfolds against a backdrop of worsening social conditions for the working class and rural masses. Despite annual GDP growth of over 5 percent, fuelled by foreign investment in mining, energy, and infrastructure, the majority of Tanzanians remain mired in poverty. The country is rich in natural resources vital to the global economy: it is one of Africa's top gold producers, has significant offshore natural gas reserves at Songo Songo and Mnazi Bay, and boasts rare minerals like tanzanite, alongside substantial deposits of diamonds, nickel, coal, and uranium. Fertile agricultural land supports exports of coffee, cashew nuts, and cotton.

Yet, 43 percent of Tanzanians still live below the international poverty line of \$2.15 per day. Over 65 percent of the population is employed in agriculture, overwhelmingly in informal or subsistence conditions. Meanwhile, the working class, concentrated in the service, mining, and construction sectors, faces chronic underemployment, low wages, and precarious conditions.

The richest strata grow ever wealthier. Mohammed Dewji, CEO of Mohammed Enterprises Tanzania Limited—a conglomerate operating across 11 countries—has amassed a net worth of \$2.2 billion, equivalent to about 3 percent of Tanzania's GDP. Rostam Aziz, with interests spanning

telecommunications, energy, and mining, has a net worth of \$700 million, while Said Salim Bakhresa, founder of the Bakhresa Group, holds \$400 million.

Foreign investors, particularly in the mining and tourism sectors, extract billions of dollars in profits annually, while the Tanzanian state receives a pittance in royalty fees. These crumbs are bitterly fought over by rival factions within CCM, whose internal battles revolve around control of rent-seeking and bribe-taking schemes connected to mining and government contracts.

Tanzania's trade unions, grouped under the 320,000 strong Trade Union Congress of Tanzania (TUCTA), are entirely subordinated to the state. Nominally representing workers in various sectors, from education and health to mining and communications, they ensure that labour struggles are episodic while strikes are routinely criminalised.

CHADEMA has become the vehicle through which many workers, sections of the middle class and youth have sought to express their opposition to the CCM. It has performed well in elections, particularly in urban areas such as Arusha, Kilimanjaro, Mbeya, Mwanza, and Dar es Salaam. In January 2025, Lissu was elected chairman of Chadema, beating the incumbent Freeman Mbowe who favoured a more moderate line towards the government.

A lawyer by training, Lissu entered parliament in 2010 and ran for president in 2020. He was shot 16 times in a 2017 attack most likely orchestrated by the government. After losing the 2020 election to John Magufuli, who had served as Tanzania's president from 2015 until his death in 2021, Lissu fled the country to Belgium. He returned in 2023, amid speculation that Magufuli's successor, the current President Samia Suluhu Hassan, was moving to relax restrictions on the opposition and the media.

CHADEMA represents a faction of the elite that complains of being excluded from power and wealth under the TANU/CCM rule. Founded in 1992 during the transition to multi-party democracy, CHADEMA's leaderships consist of many former CCM politicians and government officials. One of the most prominent is Edward Lowassa, a former prime minister and high-ranking CCM member, who defected to CHADEMA in 2015 after failing to secure CCM's presidential nomination. His move brought a significant number of former CCM members into CHADEMA's ranks.

CHADEMA is a pro-business party. Its 2023 election manifesto called for measures like a reduction of corporate tax from 25 percent to between 15 and 20 percent. On mining, oil, and gas, the party called for a "conducive environment for investors." Its proposed reforms include privatizing the energy sector and making state-owned enterprises more "efficient," a code word for privatization.

Across East Africa, similar bourgeois opposition movements have already exposed their bankruptcy. In Kenya, the Orange Democratic Movement (ODM) of billionaire Raila Odinga,

long trading on calling protests for "more democracy" and "anti-corruption," has integrated into Ruto's corrupt and brutal regime, as it intensifies repression against workers and youth opposing IMF-backed austerity.

The same fate awaits those who place any confidence in CHADEMA or other capitalist parties in Tanzania. Their function is to channel mass discontent back into the safe confines of capitalist rule, preserve the profits of foreign investors, and maintain the subordination of Tanzania to imperialism.

It is sixty years since the launch of Ujamaa, the so-called "African socialism" championed by Julius Nyerere and the Tanganyika African National Union (TANU). Workers and youth must reject the dangerous illusions that Ujamaa represents a model to which they can return.

Nyerere's African socialism had nothing to do with socialism. It was a nationalist project, utterly dependent on Western aid and designed to prevent a genuine social revolution. Far from challenging imperialist domination, Nyerere became a favoured ally of the World Bank, securing aid to maintain a limited system of patronage that enriched a narrow elite while leaving the masses impoverished.

When Cold War priorities shifted in the 1980s and aid dried up, Nyerere and his successors in the CCM capitulated without resistance to World Bank and IMF diktats, initiating decades of privatisation, deregulation, and the deepening the poverty of the working class and rural masses.

The way forward for workers and youth in Tanzania does not lie in nostalgia for Ujamaa or faith in the bankrupt factions that emerged from Nyerere's CCM. Nor does it lie with capitalist opposition parties like CHADEMA, or the supposed "left," the Labour Party, which has for decades acted as an appendage of the CCM.

What is required is the building of a new revolutionary leadership committed to the programme of Permanent Revolution—the struggle to unite the working class with the oppressed rural masses across Africa and in alliance with workers in the imperialist centres in a common struggle to overthrow capitalist rule, end imperialist plunder, and reorganise society on the basis of social need, not private profit.



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