

Communist Party Marxist-Kenya's "International Theoretical Conference": Stalinist parties gather to disorientate workers and youth

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On May 23–24, the Communist Party Marxist-Kenya (CPM-K), together with the Communist Party of the Philippines, is organising the Fourth International Theoretical Conference (TC4) in Nairobi, under the theme "Understanding Comprador and Bureaucrat Capitalism in the Neocolonies in Advancing the Struggle for National Liberation and Against Imperialism".

The conference is timed to coincide with the first anniversary of Kenya's Gen Z uprising against International Monetary Fund-imposed austerity under President William Ruto, which signalled a growing political radicalisation of the working class and youth in Africa.

Across the continent, inequality is deepening, imperialist powers are intensifying their scramble for strategic resources, and the drive to war against China is escalating. What most threatens the alliance of global capital and the African bourgeoisie is this revolutionary awakening.

Dressed in the language of revolution, anti-imperialism and internationalism, TC4 is a Stalinist conclave aimed at suppressing this emerging struggle. Its purpose is to channel mass opposition behind a nationalist, pro-capitalist perspective defending the existing social order. This is underscored by the record of its organisers in defending the interests of the bourgeoisie.

The CPM-K is a recent creation that emerged in 2019, following the rebranding of the Social Democratic Party of Kenya. As the WSWS has documented extensively in a three-part article, the party's political orientation is based on seeking alliances with factions of the bourgeoisie based on promoting economic relations with China as an alternative to domination by the United States.

CPM-K's co-organiser is the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP), which for decades has intervened in every major strike, protest, and upheaval to divert mass anger into alliances with capitalist politicians. Most infamously, it paved the way for the rise of the fascistic Rodrigo Duterte in 2016, hailing him as a "socialist," and endorsed his murderous "war on drugs," which murdered over 30,000, mostly urban poor youth. When Duterte inevitably turned on his Stalinist partners, branding them terrorists, the CPP responded with appeals for clemency.

TC4 is expected to host around 50 international participants, drawn from the familiar Stalinist and Maoist parties aligned with the CPP and the CPM-K. Those who sent greetings to its 2024 congress include the Communist Party of China (CPC), which defends the interests of the Chinese capitalist class; the Communist Party of India (Marxist), which where it has held power as in West Bengal, has violently suppressed peasant protests on behalf of multinational capital seeking land for Special Economic Zones; and the South African Communist Party (SACP), a key component of the African National Congress (ANC)-led Tripartite

Alliance, which has functioned for decades as a defender of South African capitalism. The SACP infamously justified the 2012 Marikana massacre, where police murdered 34 striking miners, by denouncing the strikers as "counter-revolutionary." In 2025, it defended the Stilfontein massacre, where 78 miners were left to die underground after being sealed off without food or water under ANC's orders. As outrage mounted, an SACP official declared, "We support the programme of the government."

The bourgeois politics uniting these parties finds clear expression in the perspective put forward by the CPM-K General Secretary Booker Omole. In his Opening Address to the TC4 Preparatory Assembly in late April, Omole defends the Stalinist two-stage theory insisting that the struggle for socialism must be postponed in favour of building a "national democratic" capitalist economy.

"Imperialism has stunted capitalist development, reducing Kenya to a petty commodity society" Omole bemoans. He adds, "A recurring question within the Party is whether Kenya is a capitalist economy and whether it will ever achieve full capitalist development. The answer is clear: as long as imperialism dictates Kenya's fate, capitalist industrialisation is impossible. Institutions like the IMF, World Bank, and WTO ensure that Kenya remains underdeveloped, deindustrialised, and dependent, a client state of imperialism. While capitalist relations do exist in Kenya, our theoretical summation must emphasise that feudal relations are more dominant. Thus, like other neocolonies, Kenya is best defined as a semi-feudal economy."

Kenya, like all former colonial countries, is not a semi-feudal society but a fully capitalist one, integrated into global markets and dominated by capitalist social relations. Nairobi is a financial hub for East Africa, hosting the African headquarters or regional offices of global banks such as Citibank, Standard Chartered, and JPMorgan Chase, alongside multinational corporations including Google, Microsoft, General Electric, Maersk, and Coca-Cola. Kenya's agricultural, industrial, and service sectors are oriented toward global export, from horticulture and tea to digital finance and call centres.

Far from being a "petty commodity economy," Kenya is, despite being a country oppressed by imperialism, a site of intense capital accumulation, speculation, and exploitation, ruled by a bourgeoisie tied to international finance capital. It is not shaped by feudal landholding or subsistence exchange, but by wage labour, commodity production, and the imperatives of profit.

In fact, feudalism has never existed as a dominant social structure within the territory of present-day Kenya. The only partial exception was limited to coastal areas controlled by the Imam of Oman prior to British colonialism. And these regions were swiftly drawn into the early circuits

of capitalist world trade and accumulation, particularly through ivory, spices, and slave trade, and did not develop into a feudal order in any classical sense.

Today, even pre-capitalist remnants like pastoralism in northern Kenya have been entirely subordinated to the market. Cattle, once central to communal life, are now commodities.

The crisis facing Kenya's workers and youth is not due to "incomplete capitalism," as Omole claims, but to the brutal, predatory logic of capitalism in the imperialist epoch in which the national bourgeoisie functions as local representatives of the major banks and corporations in administering the oppression of the working class and rural masses. This is a reality that the TC4 seeks to obscure to block the development of revolutionary leadership in Kenya and throughout the former colonial world.

This perspective seeks to justify subordinating the working class to so-called progressive factions of the bourgeoisie. The "National Democratic Revolution", which Omole describes as a necessary stage to develop capitalism and secure Kenyan independence before any socialist struggle can begin, is to be carried out, he claims, through the mobilisation of "the broadest possible democratic forces." This includes uniting "the Kenyan working class and the peasantry" while winning over "the middle forces, the petite bourgeoisie and national bourgeoisie to the people's camp."

This is the standard Maoist "bloc of four classes" variant of the Stalinist two-stage theory of revolution. It insists that basic democratic and national tasks, such as independence or land reform, must be accomplished under the leadership of a supposedly progressive "national bourgeoisie," in opposition to a "comprador" faction aligned with foreign imperialism.

This is a political fiction, deployed to legitimise alliances with whichever bourgeois faction the Stalinists deem tactically useful. It has produced only political paralysis and betrayal, blocking socialist revolution and enabling the defeat of countless working-class uprisings throughout the 20th and 21st centuries.

South Africa provides a stark example. The South African Communist Party (SACP) subordinated the working class to the African National Congress (ANC), promoting it as the vehicle for national liberation. It was the SACP that drafted the ANC's 1955 Freedom Charter, limiting its programme to establishing bourgeois democracy and black majority rule while preserving the capitalist system intact. Instead of expropriating South Africa's vast financial and mining empires, the ANC-SACP alliance cultivated a layer of black capitalists to manage the same exploitative structures.

Today, 37 years after Joe Slovo, then General Secretary of the SACP, declared that "The winning of the objectives of the national democratic revolution will, in turn, lay the basis for a steady advance in the direction of deepening our national unity on all fronts—economic, political and cultural—and towards a socialist transformation," post-Apartheid South Africa remains one of the most unequal societies on earth, with the ANC regime, propped up by the SACP, zealously defending the interests of South African and international capital.

Likewise, the trajectory of the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) in Sri Lanka offers another bitter lesson. Founded in 1966 on a toxic blend of Maoism, Castroism, and Sinhala populism, the JVP embraced the Stalinist two-stage theory, insisting that imperialism had "pooled" all classes together and demanding a strategy of national unity under bourgeois leadership. In the 1980s, it unleashed a fascistic terror campaign, murdering thousands of workers, youth, and political opponents, including Trotskyists, who refused to support its right-wing patriotic agitation against the Indo-Lanka Accord. Decades later, the JVP is in power, having abandoned its socialist rhetoric. Today, it holds private talks with US embassy officials and serves as a loyal enforcer of IMF austerity, overseeing privatisations, wage cuts, and brutal attacks on the working class.

Stalinist parties across the world adapt themselves to their national bourgeoisies and attach labels like "national bourgeoisie" or "anti-imperialist" to the fortunes of sections of the bourgeoisie or rival capitalist powers.

For the CPM-K, the "national bourgeoisie" is identified as that faction of the Kenyan ruling class which, like themselves, is oriented toward Beijing. The party fosters illusions in Chinese capitalism, presenting it as a progressive alternative to US imperialism and promoting the idea of a multipolar world that will displace American hegemony. According to the Stalinist theoreticians, Washington's dominance will be peacefully supplanted by a coalition of capitalist states, China chief among them, presiding harmoniously over the global order.

This is a dangerous fantasy. The idea that imperialist and capitalist powers can peacefully divide and manage the world's resources ignores the fundamental contradiction between the integrated global economy and the nation state system upon which capitalism rests, a contradiction that inevitably drives inter-imperialist conflict and war. The US is not sitting back waiting to be supplanted by China. Under Trump, Washington has identified China as its main rival, has launched trade war against it and is preparing for military conflict.

Other Stalinist parties, nationalist to the core, adopt an opposite orientation, aligning instead with US imperialism and its allies. The Communist Party of India (Marxist) aligned itself with US imperialism and the Indian ruling class by backing the BJP government's recent military assault on Pakistan. It joined the entire political establishment in denouncing Pakistan as the "aggressor" and lauding the Indian military's barrage of missiles and artillery as "professionalism." By supporting the war drive, the Stalinists have helped bolster the Hindu-supremacist far-right, shielded the predatory geostrategic aims of Indian capitalism, and legitimised India's deepening role in the US-led anti-China axis.

These betrayals confirm Leon Trotsky's Theory of Permanent Revolution, which insists that in the imperialist epoch, the most basic democratic and anti-colonial tasks can only be realised through socialist revolution, led by the working class and extended internationally. Trotsky demonstrated that the national bourgeoisie in oppressed countries is organically incapable of breaking with imperialism because it is economically dependent on it and politically terrified of the proletariat from whose exploitation it accrues its wealth and social privileges.

Omole, echoing generations of Stalinists before him, identifies Trotskyism as the chief threat to his pro-capitalist programme. In his Opening Address to the TC4 Preparatory Assembly he calls on party members to wage "a fierce ideological struggle against all erroneous ideas," specifically naming "Trotskyist and ultra-leftist deviations" that "must be defeated."

Today, the political expression of this threat is the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) and its publication, the *World Socialist Web Site*. The ICFI and WSWS have exposed the CPM-K's reactionary role with clarity and political precision. It has responded with a hysterical diatribe against the WSWS, denouncing Trotskyism, praising Stalin's purges of old Bolsheviks during the 1930s, and vowing to crush "Trotskyist deviations" with "iron discipline."

The future does not lie in the dead-end of Stalinist fronts promoting capitalists politicians, but in organising workers internationally against capitalism. This means first and foremost fighting to bring the history and theory of Marxism into the struggles of the African working class by building sections of the ICFI.



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