

Kenya's National People's Council: A petty-bourgeois nationalist trap for the Gen Z revolt

Kipchumba Ochieng
21 August 2025

The 2024–2025 Gen Z protests, the largest and most sustained mass movement in Kenya's post-independence history, erupted in June 2024 against President William Ruto's International Monetary Fund-dictated Finance Bill. The bill doubled VAT on fuel, imposed a housing levy, and increased digital services, income and excise taxes. The protests rapidly evolved into a nationwide revolt against austerity, mass unemployment and surging prices. Millions took to the streets, inspiring similar movements in Nigeria, Ghana, Uganda and Mozambique, and more recently in Angola.

The protests were followed by strike action by teachers, transport workers, health staff and sections of the civil service, signalling the entry of broader layers of the working class. But this was stifled by the betrayals of the trade union bureaucracy led by the Central Organization of Trade Unions (COTU).

On the first anniversary of the Gen Z protests last June, hundreds of thousands again marched nationwide. Just weeks later, on 7 July 2025, the Saba Saba rallies, commemorating the pro-democracy struggles of the 1990s, drew similarly massive turnouts, underscoring that the confrontation between the masses and the Kenyan political establishment is ongoing.

The state has answered with escalating violence. Over just 14 months, at least 160 demonstrators have been gunned down by police and military units, hundreds permanently injured, thousands arrested, and more than 300 charged under draconian anti-terrorism laws, while dozens have been abducted and “disappeared.”

It is under these conditions that, in early August, the Mathare Social Justice Centre (MSJC) announced the formation of the National People's Council (NPC). The initiative was launched together with the Communist Youth League, the youth wing of the Stalinist Communist Party Marxist–Kenya (CPM-K); the Revolutionary Socialist League, affiliated to the Morenoite International Socialist League; and the Pan-Africanist Stalinist Kongomano La Mapinduzi (Congress of the Revolution).

The NPC does not represent a revolutionary alternative. It has been designed to channel the insurgent movement of workers and youth into parliamentary politics, whether as a new independent electoral slate for 2027 elections or as a temporary vehicle for discredited bourgeois politicians looking for a new home. The warm welcome given by the corporate media on its launch, from the Kenya Television Network to *The Standard* and the *Daily Nation*, demonstrates the function the ruling class expects the NPC to serve: to capture the energy of the masses and redirect it safely back into the Kenyan political establishment.

At the August 4 event, NPC spokesperson Wanjira Wanjiru declared, “We are gathered here today to chart a path forward to alternative political leadership rooted in the principles of social justice, rule of law and human rights... these protests provide an ideal opportunity to address the fundamental issues facing the people of Kenya and the movement offers the momentum to defeat the current neo-colonial system and achieve complete Kenyan independence. It is indeed a pivotal moment for a

national revolution and the fulfilment of our generational mission.”

Born in Mathare, one of Nairobi's slums, Wanjiru, now 30, rose to prominence as a campaigner against police killings after her 19-year-old brother was shot dead. She was nominated as Human Rights Defender of the Year in 2020 for raising awareness about extrajudicial police killings, and has been interviewed in *Al Jazeera*, the *Guardian*, *DW* and the *New Humanitarian*. She co-hosts the *Liberating Minds* podcast.

In 2015, she co-founded the Mathare Social Justice Centre (MSJC) as a response to the wave of police killings. The model quickly spread, with similar community justice centres emerging in working-class and slum areas such as Kayole, Githurai, Kibera, and Dandora. Today, more than 60 such centres exist across the country. They document human rights abuses, promote social justice, and mobilise grassroots action. While they have exposed real crimes by the Kenyan capitalist state and provided a platform for victims of police violence, their activities remain limited to lobbying, community meetings, and awareness-raising in the informal settlements, without advancing a programme capable of mobilising the working class in a struggle against the ruling elite.

In mid-2025, as anti-government protests intensified, Wanjiru became the target of a smear campaign and explicit threats. A Ruto-aligned commentator took to social media, posting a message urging, “*if you see Wanjira Wanjiru in the streets, mumaliza*” (Kiswahili for “finish her off”).

While the NPC presents itself as the “organ of national representation,” it functions as a political safety valve for the Kenyan ruling elite as it escalates repression under IMF dictates.

The NPC's “Road Map”: A pro-capitalist trap for the Gen Z revolt

The NPC's founding document, the “Road Map to People's Revolution in Kenya,” makes clear its pro-capitalist orientation. Cloaked in militant rhetoric against Ruto and his policies, it defends a “mixed economy where the government plays a central role in safeguarding and enhancing public assets,” a formulation designed to preserve capitalist property relations and the domination of Kenya's economy by big business and international finance capital. Land reform is reduced to denunciations of Ruto's policies for favouring multinationals, framed in the language of economic nationalism about “food sovereignty” and “self-sufficiency.” There is no call for expropriating agribusiness or large estates, nor for placing land under the democratic control of workers and peasants.

On taxation, NPC appeals for a “fair distribution” in which “the wealthy contribute their fair share to national development.” This leaves untouched the ill-gotten fortunes of the Kenyan elite amassed through land grabs, corruption and exploitation. Calls for debt repudiation are detached of any connection to the working class, the only social force

capable of taking political power and breaking with capitalism.

The NPC denounces the official opposition for being incapable of solving the “national crisis” and condemns them as “only interested in returning to power to continue their selfish agenda of corruption, tribalism and cronyism.” But there is nothing uniquely “national” about the disaster facing the Kenyan masses. IMF and World Bank austerity dictates, the plunder of resources and labour by transnational corporations, and a comprador bourgeoisie that manages this exploitation on their behalf while sending its troops to oppress Somalis, Haitians and Congolese on behalf of Western powers are all expressions of the world system of imperialist oppression.

By presenting the social crisis in purely national terms, the NPC conceals the decisive fact that the fight against austerity, dictatorship, and imperialist war in Kenya cannot be other than as part of an international struggle. The true allies of Kenyan workers and youth are their class brothers and sisters internationally, including in the imperialist centres themselves.

The NPC and the poisoned well of Stalinism and Pan-Africanism

The petty-bourgeois outlook of the NPC is summed up in the Road Map’s conclusion:

The people’s revolution in Kenya is a fight for independence, sovereignty, and a pro-people government. The National People’s Council is committed to intensifying the struggle, expanding the movement, and institutionalizing central coordination to achieve these goals. The unifying minimum program provides a clear roadmap for the people’s revolution to address the root causes of the national crisis and build a just and equitable society.

This is the vocabulary of Kenyan Stalinism: “independence,” “sovereignty,” and an undefined “pro-people” government, bound together by a minimum programme that explicitly excludes socialist revolution. Behind the radical phraseology lies the same two-stage theory that has always subordinated workers to alliances with “progressive” faction of the bourgeoisie. This language flows directly from the political traditions of the forces that make up the NPC. At its core stand Stalinist and Pan-Africanist organisations.

Chief among them is the CPM-K, whose politics are rooted in the anti-Marxist and counter-revolutionary tradition of Stalinism. Descended from the Maoist Mwakenya movement of the 1980s, it channelled opposition to Moi’s dictatorship behind Raila Odinga, today in power with Ruto. It later rebranded itself the Social Democratic Party to ally with Mwai Kibaki, and in 2022 openly endorsed William Ruto.

During the Gen Z protests, this perspective translated into appeals for Ruto to reverse austerity and calls for his resignation in favour of an ill-defined “pro-poor” government. At the centre of its programme is the glorification of the 2010 Constitution, which it helped draft, portrayed as a “site of class struggle.” The CPM-K claims the main obstacle to progress is the bourgeoisie’s failure to implement its provisions, insisting that enforcing them will somehow “inevitably” lead to socialism.

Externally, the CPM-K orientation is toward China, portraying Beijing as a model for national development against Western domination. It reflects the interests of the affluent middle-class strata who have benefitted from Chinese-funded highways, railways, and infrastructure contracts. This orientation will not liberate Kenya from imperialist

domination but entangle workers and youth in the sharpening preparations for war by the US against China, to which the Chinese ruling class has no progressive answer.

The US State Department has already opened investigations into Ruto’s human-rights abuses, a signal of Washington’s hostility to his Beijing visits and Chinese loans, with voices in the American establishment now calling for a review of Kenya’s status as a non-NATO ally.

Kongamano la Mapinduzi (Congress of the Revolution (KLM) echoes the CPM-K’s rhetoric, presenting the 2010 Constitution as the basis for “transformative governance” that “provides for various state interventions to ground the paradigm of a Socialist radical democracy.” “These state interventions,” it continues, “will politically serve the purpose of the creation of a fundamental basis for the overthrow of baronial politics, end to imperialism and the building of a better society”.

It concludes with a call for the National Democratic Revolution, which appears as a titled section in its founding charter. Its charter promises to “not rest until we establish a government of Kenya that serves the people.”

But the Constitution itself, drafted under US and British guidance after the 2007–2008 crisis, was a safety valve to stabilise bourgeois rule, preserve imperialist bases, and contain mass anger. The police killings, kidnappings, and corruption that continue unabated today under Ruto prove it is not a “site of class struggle” but a façade for class domination.

The other chief founding party of the NPC is the Revolutionary Socialist League (RSL), which split from the CPM-K in 2019 on an entirely unprincipled basis. The dispute centred not on the CPM-K’s Stalinist political foundations, its nationalism, or its orientation to different factions of the ruling class, but on its pro-China orientation.

In the aftermath, the RSL scoured the global pseudo-left landscape for an international affiliation that could supply it with “revolutionary” legitimacy. It found this in the Morenoite International Socialist League (ISL), an organisation notorious for its open support for NATO’s proxy war against Russia in Ukraine and its whitewashing of Ukrainian fascist forces. The ISL, long accustomed to handing out Trotskyist credentials to nationalist and petty-bourgeois outfits, was only too eager to adopt the RSL.

The RSL’s decision to work with the CPM-K in launching the NPC gives the lie to its claims to represent Trotskyism. Since the start of this year, the CPM-K’s leader, Booker Omole, has slandered Trotskyism, celebrated the Stalinist bureaucracy’s counter-revolutionary role in destroying the Bolshevik Party—orchestrating the Great Purges of 1936–1939, during which hundreds of thousands of socialists, including the finest representatives of generations of Marxist workers and intellectuals, were physically exterminated—and defended Stalinism’s counter-revolutionary sabotage of the Spanish Civil War. Omole has vowed to suppress “Trotskyist deviations” with “iron discipline.”

The RSL’s founding manifesto, posted on the ISL’s website in 2021 under the title “Kenya: Manifesto of the Revolutionary Socialist League,” does not even mention “Trotsky” or “permanent revolution.” Its programme is that of Pan-Africanism. In the words of its leaders Ezra Otieno, Lewis Maghanga and Ochiewara Olungah in an interview for the ISL’s website:

The kind of Pan-Africanism that we are now trying to continue and expand is the one envisioned by Kwame Nkrumah, a revolutionary Pan-Africanism. It is an ideological concept that tries to bridge the gap and create an understanding between Africans, people who may have been born outside of Africa, and those who believe in a free, liberated and socialist Africa. ... Revolutionary Pan-Africanism is the unification of the whole of Africa into one unified socialist state.

Pan Africanism was historically built in explicit opposition to Trotskyism. It was the main ideology of the aspiring African bourgeoisie like Kwame Nkrumah, Julius Nyerere and Jomo Kenyatta. These bourgeois nationalists used it to rally popular support for the transfer of political power from colonial administrators to African elites, while safeguarding the fundamental property relations and the dominance of imperialism over the continent.

Its leading intellectual architect, George Padmore, was a loyal Stalinist in the 1930s, tasked with rooting out “Trotskyists” in the Chinese Communist Party. Though he broke with Moscow in the late 1930s over Stalin’s diplomatic deals with imperialism, Padmore’s Stalinist-derived nationalism remained intact, shaping the petty-bourgeois programme that continues to dominate Pan-Africanist politics today. As Padmore said: “The only force capable of containing Communism in Asia and Africa is dynamic nationalism based upon a socialist programme of industrialisation...”.

Trotsky always insisted that the fight for socialism meant building an independent and politically conscious working-class movement to overthrow imperialism. The Pan-Africanists were opposed to this and wherever they came to power in the 1960s throughout Africa, they suppressed strikes and put down working class opposition.

Today, Pan-Africanism is the slogan of all Africa’s ruthless leaders, from Rwanda’s Paul Kagame to Kenya’s William Ruto, South Africa’s Cyril Ramaphosa, Uganda’s Yoweri Museveni, and Nigeria’s Bola Tinubu. But they seek only to secure a more advantageous position for their respective national ruling classes within the imperialist system. Their “unity” is based on their shared interest to manage the capitalist exploitation of African labour and the plunder of the continent’s resources on behalf of imperialism, and has never prevented them from going to war against one another when their rival interests collide.

What unites all the tendencies that launched the NPC is their shared argument that Kenyan independence was somehow “incomplete” and the central task today is the “completion” of the national democratic revolution through the 2010 Constitution and parliamentary manoeuvres within the rotten Kenyan political establishment.

None of the problems confronting the Kenyan masses, whether poverty, mass unemployment, austerity, corruption, dictatorship, or imperialist war, can be resolved by a purely Kenyan solution. As the last six decades since independence have demonstrated, national perspectives for the perfectability of capitalist democracy are incapable of breaking the grip of imperialism or realising the democratic and social aspirations of the masses.

The essential task posed before the Kenyan and African working class is the building of a new revolutionary party armed with the perspective of Marxism and Trotsky’s Theory of Permanent Revolution.

Such a party must fight to unify workers across tribal, regional, and national divisions, linking their struggle to that of the international working class against global capitalism. It must advance a programme for the seizure of power by the working class, the expropriation of the banks, agribusiness, and major industries, and the reorganisation of economic life on socialist lines to meet human need, not private profit.

The way forward is the fight to establish a Kenyan section of the International Committee of the Fourth International as part of the movement to build the United Socialist States of Africa.



To contact the WSWs and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact