

Communist Party Marxist - Kenya defends counter-revolutionary Maoist strategy against Trotskyism—Part 5

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This is the fifth and concluding part of a series. Parts one, two, three and four are available here.

The disaster of the Stalinist-Maoist “national democratic revolution” across Africa

At the height of the anti-colonial struggles that swept Africa after the Second World War, Maoism offered the continent’s aspiring national bourgeoisie a radical vocabulary with which to dress up a fundamentally capitalist programme. Its appeal lay not in a break from the Soviet Union in 1956, but in a more militant version of the same two-stage schema. Socialism, it insisted, was not the immediate task. The workers, peasants and oppressed masses first had to pass through a bourgeois-democratic stage, led by nationalist forces and directed toward the construction of an independent capitalist state.

This was the significance of Mao’s 1959 statement to African delegates that “The task of the whole of Africa is to oppose imperialism and to oppose those who follow imperialism, not to oppose capitalism, not to establish socialism.” To call for socialism in Africa, he insisted, was “to make a mistake,” because “the nature of the African revolution is a bourgeois democratic revolution, not a proletarian socialist revolution.”^[1] Maoism supplied guerrilla radicalism, “anti-imperialist” rhetoric and the prestige of the Chinese Revolution to a strategy whose central purpose was to block the independent struggle of the working class for power.

The 1956 split between Moscow and Beijing did not represent a struggle between Marxism and revisionism. It expressed the rival national interests of two bureaucratic regimes upholding the anti-Marxist programme of “socialism in one country.” Moscow sought stable relations with postcolonial autocrats and promoted “peaceful coexistence” with Washington. Beijing, weaker and encircled by pro-US regimes, promoted “people’s war” as a means of cultivating influence among oppositional bourgeois-nationalist movements and dispersing US imperialist pressure. Maoism was Stalinism under different national and geopolitical conditions (i.e., Stalinism “with Chinese characteristics”). Its armed radicalism merely gave the two-stage theory a guerrilla form.

Beijing’s support for liberation movements in southern Africa was bound up with the foreign policy interests of the Chinese bureaucracy and its competition with both Washington and Moscow. Maoism armed and advised movements whose goal was capitalist national independence. Its devastating results can be seen in Mozambique, Namibia and Angola.

In all three countries, the national liberation movements cloaked their struggles in the language of “people’s democracy,” “scientific socialism,”

“anti-imperialism” and national reconstruction. But beneath these phrases stood the subordination of the working class to a bourgeois nationalist bloc and the construction of a postcolonial capitalist state on the borders imposed by imperialism.

In Mozambique, FRELIMO waged a decade-long guerrilla war against Portuguese colonial rule, culminating in independence in 1975. Influenced in its methods by Mao’s strategy of “protracted people’s war,” FRELIMO based itself in the countryside, mobilised the peasantry and established liberated zones.

Under Samora Machel, FRELIMO defined the revolution as a transition from national liberation to the construction of a “people’s democracy.” Its 1977 Congress declared the party the “vanguard of the worker-peasant alliance” and the leading force of the state, while incorporating “patriotic strata,” including sections of the national bourgeoisie, into the postcolonial order. Nationalisation and planning were not implemented on the basis of workers’ power, but were instruments for building an independent national economy under party-state control.

In Namibia, SWAPO’s 1976 programme called for independence, a “democratic people’s government,” public ownership of the main means of production and exchange, agrarian reform, cooperatives, state farms and “national self-reliance.”^[2] It claimed to unite workers, peasants and progressive intellectuals into a vanguard party capable of building a “classless, nonexploitative society,” and still claims today to defend “socialism with Namibian characteristics.”^[3]

In Angola, the MPLA justified a multi-class nationalist front by arguing that Portuguese colonialism had relegated “to a secondary place the contradiction between the various Angolan classes.” Its programme called for “a single front of all the anti-imperialist forces of Angola, regardless of political shades, the social position of individuals, their religious beliefs or philosophical views.”^[4] After taking power in 1975, the MPLA refashioned itself as a “Marxist-Leninist” party and added “Party of Labour” to its name to align itself more closely with the Soviet bureaucracy.

The subsequent history of all three regimes exposes the class content of the NDR. FRELIMO and the MPLA imposed one-party governments that have now lasted half a century and in Namibia SWAPO continues to rule after 35 years. They have integrated themselves into the world market and presided over the enrichment of narrow state-connected elites while the masses remained trapped in poverty, unemployment and social misery. Mozambique and Angola both dropped the labels of “Marxist-Leninism” as soon as the Soviet bureaucracy had liquidated the Soviet Union.

Mozambique remains one of the poorest countries in the world, while the FRELIMO state answered the 2024–25 post-election protests with bullets, killing over 300 people. Angola remains dominated by oil wealth, mass poverty and informal labour; in 2025, unemployment still stood at

26.9 percent and around 80 percent of jobs remained informal, while protests against fuel-price hikes were met with state violence that left at least 22 dead and more than 1,200 arrested. Namibia, remains among the most unequal societies in the world, with the richest 10 percent's share of net personal wealth at around 72 percent.

But the most important example for exposing the CPM-K's programme is South Africa, a model explicitly invoked by the CPM-K in the form of the tripartite alliance between the African National Congress (ANC), the South African Communist Party (SACP) and the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU). CPM-K insists that revolutionaries must learn from this experience the need to maintain "the class leadership of the proletariat," guard against "bourgeois capture" and embed the "mass line." But South Africa is the most brutal historical outcome of the NDR.

Kaluka invokes Stalinist leaders such as Joe Slovo, one of the most influential leaders of the SACP. Slovo was the SACP's general secretary from 1984 to 1991, a long-standing member of the ANC National Executive Committee from 1985 to 1995, and a commander of uMkhonto we Sizwe, the ANC's armed wing. Kaluka cites Slovo's verbiage to justify the two-stage theory:

It is necessary at once to state a rather obvious proposition, namely, that it is implied in the very concept of stages that they cannot be considered in isolation; they are steps in development. A stage which has no relation to a destination is not final, and constituting a stage for yet another destination is a linguistic and logical absurdity. The concept of 'stage' implies that it is at one and at the same time a point of arrival and a point of departure...

This is part of *The South African Working Class and the National Democratic Revolution* (1988), where Slovo insisted that "neither the SACP nor the ANC nor any of their authoritative spokespersons have advanced socialism as the immediate objective," defining the NDR as the "present stage of struggle," a "revolution of the whole oppressed people" involving "different classes and strata," including the black petty bourgeoisie and "significant strata of the emergent black bourgeoisie."

The Freedom Charter, drafted under decisive SACP influence, was, as Slovo admitted, "not, in itself, a programme for socialism."⁵

In *Has Socialism Failed?* (1989), Slovo again rejected any immediate struggle for workers' power, arguing instead that the SACP should operate within a multi-party post-apartheid democracy and that, if "real democracy" were established, this would open the way for a "peaceful progression" toward the party's "ultimate objective" of a socialist South Africa. This perspective found its practical expression in his later 1992 paper *Negotiations: What room for compromise?*, where he advocated "sunset" clauses and compulsory power sharing for a fixed period with the apartheid regime, providing the political rationale for a negotiated settlement with the white capitalist ruling class.

The SACP was deploying a counterrevolutionary strategy under conditions in which the black South African working class was shaking the apartheid regime through mass strikes, township uprisings and the formation of powerful workers' organisations in the 1980s. The ANC and SACP intervened to subordinate this movement to the negotiated transfer of political power. The revolutionary energy of the masses was channelled behind the perspective of a national democratic settlement with the white ruling class.

The outcome was the preservation of capitalist property relations. The mines, banks and major industries remained in private hands, mostly white. The brutal police state machinery of repression was reconstituted. The SACP, far from starting to lead a subsequent struggle for socialism,

entered the government of the new capitalist state. Slovo became a capitalist statesman in the first ANC government after apartheid, becoming Minister of Housing from 1994 to 1995 before he died.

To this day, the SACP functions as a faction within the ANC and shares responsibility for three decades of uninterrupted capitalist rule. South Africa remains one of the most unequal societies in the world, with the richest 10 percent controlling over 80 percent of all wealth, while the bottom half owns virtually nothing. Official unemployment is above 40 percent on the expanded definition, and youth unemployment exceeds 60 percent. More than half the population lives below the upper bound poverty line, while millions lack secure access to housing, electricity and basic services.

The post-apartheid state has repeatedly turned its security forces on the masses. In 2012, police massacred striking miners at Marikana, shooting down workers engaged in a struggle against one of the major mining corporations. More recently, the state has deployed soldiers into townships, starved to death at least 78 informal miners, and presided over escalating xenophobic campaigns that scapegoat migrants for the crisis produced by capitalism.

This is not the unfinished first stage of a revolution moving toward socialism, but the ugly face of capitalism backed by Stalinism.

The CPM-K continues to uphold the SACP as an ally and model, identifying itself with the political forces that strangled the South African working class and helped preserve capitalist rule after apartheid.

Conclusion

The historical record, written in blood, constitutes a devastating refutation of the two-stage Stalinist-Maoist National Democratic Revolution. Everywhere, in every decisive test, it has served as a political mechanism for the subordination of the working class to the capitalist class. Its outcome has been the preservation of capitalist property relations, the integration of former liberation movements into the state apparatus, and the suppression of revolutionary struggles.

In defending the NDR, the CPM-K places itself squarely within this counterrevolutionary tradition. Its calls for a "People's Democratic State," the development of "national capital" and alliances with sections of the bourgeoisie express the interests of privileged petty-bourgeois layers seeking a more favourable position within capitalist rule.

Its open embrace of Stalin signals an identification with the bureaucratic counterrevolution in the Soviet Union, which exterminated hundreds of thousands of revolutionary Marxists and workers. Should the working class come into conflict with CPM-K's "People's Democratic State" and its "national capital"—that is, with the personal enrichment of the privileged layers for whom the party speaks—the response will be bloody repression and violence against workers and their revolutionary leadership.

Nor does its orientation to China alter this class content. The CPM-K merely repackages the old Stalinist-Maoist programme of national capitalist development in the language of "multipolarity." But the rise of China has not created a peaceful road to African sovereignty. It has intensified the struggle among rival capitalist powers over the continent's resources, labour, ports, markets, transport corridors and supply chains. US and European imperialism will not passively accept the erosion of their domination by Beijing. Their response is already visible in the proliferation of military agreements, resource corridors, investment summits, sanctions and coups, and the drive to reassert more direct and openly colonial forms of domination.

The claim that the BRICS and other capitalist regimes are paving the

way for a new world order of “true independence, peace, and social justice” is a dangerous illusion. These states do not represent an alternative to imperialism, but rival capitalist powers and bourgeois regimes seeking their own place in the world market. A Kenya aligned with Beijing rather than Washington, London or Paris would remain a capitalist state, subordinating the working class to exploitation and exposing the country to even sharper imperialist intrigue.

The objective situation in Africa has developed far beyond the framework within which the NDR was first formulated, further exposing its reactionary implications. The regimes that emerged from the national liberation struggles—FRELIMO, MPLA, SWAPO, the ANC, CCM—are in advanced crisis. They confront mass opposition rooted in intolerable social conditions of poverty on a vast scale. Their response is teargas and bullets.

These struggles are expressions of a continent-wide process of radicalisation. The protests that have erupted across Kenya, Nigeria, Mozambique, Angola, Tanzania and beyond involve tens of millions. They are increasingly conscious of their common character, transcending the borders imposed by imperialism and directed against regimes that function as instruments of global capital.

Africa is no longer defined by the peasantry. Decades of capitalist development have produced massive urbanisation and integrated the continent into the global division of labour. A substantial working class occupies strategic positions in transport, extractive industries, agriculture, manufacturing and services. It is bound, through the process of production itself, to the international working class.

Under these conditions, the conception of a “progressive” national bourgeoisie is ludicrous. These classes are organically integrated into global capitalism. Their interests are tied to imperialist finance, multinational corporations and the exploitation of labour. Whether oriented to the US, Europe or China, they defend the same social order.

The perspective of Leon Trotsky, developed in opposition to Stalinism and Maoism, proceeds from these objective realities. Permanent revolution establishes that the democratic tasks in countries of belated capitalist development cannot be realised under bourgeois leadership. They are inseparable from the conquest of power by the working class and the extension of the revolution internationally.

The central issue is political independence. The working class cannot share power with the bourgeoisie. The state is an organ of class rule. So long as capitalist property relations are preserved, the dictatorship of capital remains intact.

The present wave of struggles will not resolve this contradiction spontaneously. Without a revolutionary leadership, grounded in an internationalist programme, the movement will be diverted and suppressed.

The decisive task is the construction of sections of the International Committee of the Fourth International in Kenya and throughout Africa. There is no national solution. The crisis is global. Its resolution requires the unified struggle of the international working class for socialism.

As this polemic was being completed, two events in Kenya confirmed its analysis above.

The arrest of CPM-K members and leading representatives of its international Stalinist allies opposing the French imperialist-backed Africa Forward Summit showed in practice that there is no “vacillating national bourgeoisie” that will come to the defence of democratic rights or anti-imperialist opposition. Not a single section of the bourgeois opposition rallied to their defence, underscoring that the defence of democratic rights depends upon the independent political mobilization of the world working class.

Days later, mass protests and a nationwide transport strike erupted over fuel prices, paralysing Nairobi and prompting renewed repression that left

at least four dead and more than 700 arrested. The mass protest was both a powerful confirmation of the revolutionary capacities of the young Kenyan working class and proof that their problems are rooted in the global crisis produced by the imperialist war against Iran.

Taking place alongside similar mass protests in the Comoros and Bolivia, the worldwide protests against price hikes and austerity and strikes such as that in Italy against the Iran war are a powerful argument for socialist internationalism and against pursuing the chimera of a “sovereign” capitalist “People’s Democratic State”.

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