

Kenya's youth on the front lines: Renewed mass protests - Justice for Albert Ojwang!

by Yorick F., firstly published in Infomail 1285 of Gruppe Arbeiter:innenmacht, June 2025

About a year after the mass protests against President William Ruto's tax increases in Kenya, large demonstrations taking place again in Nairobi and other Kenyan cities since June 8, 2025. Eleven months ago, the demonstrations, which were largely led by young people and dubbed "Gen Z riots" by the media, were met with brutal repression, including several deaths and kidnappings, arrests, and the use of shotguns with so-called "less lethal ammunition" (riot control with non-lethal firearm ammunition, e.g., rubber bullets). To put the protests into context, here is an excerpt from our article on the causes of the protests from July 2024.

Imperialism as the cause of the crisis

„The protests were triggered by tax increases proposed by President Ruto, who was elected in 2022, primarily in the form of value-added taxes on essential goods. The aim was to raise a total of US\$2.7 billion to stabilize the national budget and ensure the repayment of loans. They were to be significantly increased on bread, cooking oil, and vehicle ownership. The announcement to raise taxes on menstrual products was also perceived as particularly brazen, after a politician from Ruto's party had announced during the election campaign that she wanted to make them available free of charge in the future.

These taxes are in addition to the massive price increases caused by high inflation, which are already forcing many people in Kenya to live on only one or two meals a day. Large sections of the Kenyan population are threatened with absolute poverty. On the other hand, those who are far removed from

this and will not be burdened with additional taxes are the small Kenyan bourgeoisie and, fuelling the anger of the masses, the ruling political class. Politicians' salaries are among the highest in the world compared to the average income, and President Ruto himself lives in luxury.

Kenya also ranks a less than impressive 126th out of 180 on the Corruption Perceptions Index. But even though corruption and the luxury enjoyed by politicians while the masses are impoverished are causing particular anger, many in Kenya have realized that these are only superficial problems and are dismissing Ruto's attempts at mediation, which are now beginning, on the grounds that the specific austerity measures can be discussed again and, as a sign of goodwill, can also begin in the presidential office. The real problem, as brazen as it may sound, is not that Ruto's wife receives 5 million euros from the state for no real reason, or that the president goes to church wearing a fancy belt costing 2,800 US dollars, but rather it is the austerity measures themselves that are causing the problem. Ruto himself states that Kenya has to spend more than 60% of its national budget on debt repayment. The creditors? The former colonial power Britain, the US, China, the EU and, at the top of the list, of course, the International Monetary Fund. It was the IMF that "recommended" the new budget with massive tax increases to the Kenyan government. This recommendation is likely to be similar in nature to Schäuble's advice to the Syriza government in Greece: it might be better to accept the troika's dictates if you don't want them to plunge the country into absolute misery with a brutal economic war.

Ruto, who, like most heads of state in semi-colonial countries, is only too happy to serve imperialism, in his case primarily Western imperialism, had attempted to meet the tax demands of the IMF and Co. solely at the expense of the masses, leaving his own wealth and that of his political friends untouched. Even if he now seems willing to make personal concessions in order to somehow save his position, the movement must not stop there and must direct its anger not only against the imperial governors, but against the system of global oppression itself!"

Renewed outbreak of protests

In addition to the approaching anniversary of the tax increase bill, the main trigger for the renewed outbreak of protests was the murder of Albert Ojwang, a 31-year-old teacher and blogger who had been playing a prominent role in social movements within Kenya for some time. Albert was arrested by police on June 7 at his home near the town of Homa Bay on the southern shore of Lake Victoria, on the pretext that he had “defamed” Kenya’s police chief Eliud Lagat on social media. He was then taken to the central police station in Nairobi, 350 km away, where he was found dead in his cell on June 8.

The police initially lied and said that he had inflicted his fatal injuries himself by “repeatedly banging his head against the wall.” This has since been exposed as a lie, which even Ruto had to admit publicly. The police chief responsible, Lagat, has resigned from his post but still receives a hefty salary and, like Albert’s direct killers, has not yet been prosecuted. This arrest is one of a series of arrests of well-known faces from last year’s protests, such as Rose Njeri, a software developer who created a website that made it easier for Kenyans to make demands on the government and who had also spoken out against the tax increases.

Since June 8, there have been militant mass protests demanding justice for Albert Ojwang, but also continuing to call for Ruto’s ouster, Kenya’s break with the IMF, and an end to massive state violence against the protest movement. The movement recently gained new momentum when, on the fringes of the protest on June 17, a young man selling masks was shot in the face at close range with a riot control shotgun, which passed through his head. Fortunately, the young man survived, but the anger and resistance against this act are more than justified!

On the same day, the protests were attacked not only by the police with tear gas, riot control shotguns, etc., but also by so-called “goons,” armed gangs cooperating with the police, on motorcycles and with baseball bats. However, they were successfully repelled and two of their motorcycles were burned.

Regional networking of repression

The repression of opposition figures is not limited to Kenyan territory. The government works closely with the two neighboring states of Uganda and Tanzania to suppress social movements in East Africa. This was evident, for example, in the arrest of Kenyan activist Boniface Mwangi and Ugandan journalist Agather Atuhairi on May 20. Both had previously observed the trial of opposition leader Tundu Lissu in the Tanzanian capital Dar es Salaam (Tundu Lissu is charged with high treason, which carries the death penalty in Tanzania) and were detained, interrogated, tortured, and raped by Tanzanian police for several days.

In various operations, Tanzanian, Ugandan, and Kenyan authorities share logistics and information and support each other. They are well aware that the movements in all three countries are directed against the same enemy: the bourgeoisie, which participates in the imperialist exploitation of the countries by the former colonial power Great Britain, but also by other imperialist states such as the USA, China, and Germany, and enriches itself at the expense of the working class and youth.

Regional networking of the resistance!

It is not only in Kenya that masses are taking to the streets. After Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni (in power since 1986!) passed a new law allowing civilians who endanger “national security,” including opposition members, to be tried by military rather than civilian courts, thousands took to the streets in the capital Kampala on June 15. For years, Uganda has been moving in an increasingly authoritarian direction, and in the preparing to the upcoming elections, the country is once again significantly stepping up its repressive measures.

Tanzania has also seen massive repression in recent years, not least against the aforementioned Tundu Lissu and other members of the largest opposition party, CHADEMA (Chama cha Demokrasia na Maendeleo; Party for Democracy and Progress), a right-wing liberal party. This repression took place in the context of mass protests demanding the removal of President

Samia Suluhu Hassan from office and a restriction of her powers. The protests were supported by masses of the working class but, in the absence of an alternative, were very poorly led by Chadema. The Tanzanian police responded with massive repression against the protests, arrests, and extrajudicial killings of Chadema members.

The close cooperation between the rulers of Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania shows that they are afraid of a coherent regional and ultimately international movement against their complicity with imperialism!

We say: This is a good sign! The rulers should tremble before the justified, powerful anger of the East African working class and youth!

For a revolutionary perspective!

But the fear of the rulers does not yet mean victory. As impressive and heroic as the current and previous protests are, they currently have no clear strategy for defeating state terror and imperialist exploitation of their countries in the long term across national borders. Last year, the protests in Nairobi spread to Kampala and, to a lesser extent, to Dar es Salaam. Now it is necessary to consciously link the struggle against ongoing corruption and the coordinated state terror of the three countries! In the course of this, important strategic questions must be clarified in all states: Under what leadership are the protests taking place? What is needed for a new major offensive against the regimes, preferably simultaneously in all three countries?

This requires conscious forces that not only demand reforms, but can also draw up a transitional program and show a way forward from the current struggles to the end of capitalism. Pressure must be exerted on the forces currently dominating the struggles. The CKP (Communist Party of Kenya) is a party rooted in the working class, but it pursues a purely reformist policy and has become more oriented towards China in recent years. As important as it is to demand that the CKP break with all wings of the Kenyan bourgeoisie, its program does not offer a solution to the leadership crisis of the Kenyan working class. Rather, it is part of the problem. What is needed instead is a

revolutionary workers' party that combines the struggle for the expropriation of international and national corporations with the struggle for a government of councils of workers and the poor!

There are signs of this happening, now that parts of the youth have split from the KP to the left, including the Revolutionary Socialist League, the Kenyan section of the International Socialist League, with whom we are in discussion and who have recognized that a break with Stalinism is necessary in order to offer a revolutionary perspective to workers and youth!

How does this affect us?

Here too, in one of the hearts of imperialism, we see waves of cuts coming our way. The same people who are squeezing Kenya's youth are also cutting our education, social services, and much more. They too are building up an increasingly authoritarian apparatus of repression to nip resistance in the bud. Of course, we are struggling with these developments in a much less acute and sharp way than the youth in East Africa. This is because we are located in the imperialist center. Our bourgeoisies oppress the workers and youth in "their" semi-colonies, by the very nature of imperialism, even more than they do in their own countries. And yet they also oppress us, they also squeeze us, they are not our national friends, but our class enemies! Our struggle and the struggle of the Kenyan youth are closely linked! That is why we must also fight here, whether in Germany, Britain, France, or the US, against the debts of semi-colonial countries, under which the Kenyan youth, like so many other oppressed people around the world, groans.

- For the immediate cancellation of all debts of the semi-colonies to imperialist states and financial institutions such as the IMF! End the exploitation of one part of the world by another!
- Build self-defense organizations of workers and youth against police attacks and reactionary gangs! Build workers' and youth militias and agitate among rank-and-file soldiers to break with their officers and the state they serve!
- For the overthrow of the bourgeoisie and the control of councils in

the workplaces, schools, and neighborhoods over economic production, education, and administration! For a workers' government based on these councils and militias that reorganizes the country's economy on the basis of a democratic plan!

- For a union of socialist states in East Africa!
- For the building of a revolutionary youth international and a new revolutionary international, so that we can wage our struggles, which are in reality interconnected, together!