

Kenya: people's struggle continues (1993)

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News

Kenya: People's struggle continues

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The past three years have seen major victories in the struggle of the Kenyan working people against the regime of Kenya African National Union (KANU) which is backed by Western imperialism. KANU is led by President arap Moi, who is more dictatorial than ever. The turning point came on 7 July 1990 (Saba Saba Day of Resistance) when thousands of people throughout the country defied KANU and its military forces and held mass rallies demanding the overthrow of the corrupt regime. The culture of fear and silence imposed by years of repression, which had driven all resistance underground, had finally come to an end.

The background to the Saba Saba was that every open expression of opposition to the regime had been suppressed since the coup of 1982. The only political activity was that of the underground *Mwakenya* (Muungano wa Wazalendo wa Kukomboa Kenya - Union of Patriots for the Liberation of Kenya) which has been active since the late '70s, formerly under the name of December Twelve Movement. Many *Mwakenya* activists were detained in the period 1984-88, others were forced into exile or driven underground. But the underground resistance activities continued, finding expression in the widely-distributed underground newspaper, *Mzalendo*

Mwakenya. It was this underground activity that kept alive a progressive position in the political field.

At the same time increasing corruption by the regime, and further exploitation by transnationals kept depressing people's living standards. This increased the resistance to the regime by workers, peasants, students, intellectuals and other progressive sections of the working people. The regime had no answer to this mass resistance except by increasing repression. It was in reality saved by massive economic, military and political support from its Western backers led by the USA and Britain. They needed a client regime in Kenya in order to serve their economic and political interests. Moi served this purpose perfectly. During the cold war it was important for the Western powers to have capitalist allies in Africa and elsewhere to prevent them turning to the USSR.

But following the Saba Saba resistance, the overseas backers of the regime sensed that it was not going to survive the wrath of the people however much support they give it. They appeared to change side, with the US ambassador claiming to be people's champion. In essence they were keeping their options open: supporting Moi quietly to maintain their hold over him and at the same time appearing to support democratic forces to ensure their position should they win.

The regime was forced to call multi-party elections but as *Mwakenya* predicted in its pub-

lication *Mwakenya's Democracy Plank* (1991), no real change could have come so long as Moi remained in power to oversee the elections. As expected, he changed the constitution to suit his own interests, used the nation's finances to bribe many to support him, used state machinery, including the media, to ensure that he 'won' the elections. The opposition parties could not convert their mass popularity to ensure they won power because they did not have the power of the state machinery at their service.

The position now is as *Mwakenya* had explained in its publications: there cannot be real change without implementing its ten conditions which include first that 'Moi and Kanu must go'. The people have now realised that any meaningful change will come only when the whole oppressive apparatus created by Moi is uprooted by people's forces.

The whole experience of the last few years has ensured a most significant education for the working people - that change cannot come from a reliance on petty-bourgeois parties posing as people's champions; that their own activities of mass protests, strikes, boycotts and other activities declared 'illegal' by the regime are the only way their needs will be met; that in essence they need a party that represents their interests to spearhead change. The message of the underground *Mwakenya* makes more sense than ever before. ■

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