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Kenya

In Kenya, a whiff of revolution

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For the past two months, Kenya has been shaken by severe turbulence. With a debt of more than 76 billion dollars, Kenya is under attack from the IMF, which has demanded far-reaching economic reforms that President Ruto hastened to implement. These include the introduction of multiple taxes on basic necessities. Measures considered by the international financial institution to have ‘medium risk’ social consequences. A serious mistake!

From #RejectFinanceBill2024...

The 2024 Finance Bill included taxes on products consumed by the middle and poor classes. Bread was taxed at a rate of 16%, as were mobile phone money transfers, which mainly affect people with a low level of bank penetration, and cars at a rate of 2.5%. Other products were targeted, such as cooking oil, sanitary towels and foreign exchange transactions.

These punitive taxes, as the Kenyans called them, were a serious blow to an already precarious social situation. Across the country, hundreds of thousands of young people took to the streets and even occupied Parliament, forcing MPs to flee underground.

Ruto's government responded with a ferocious crackdown, leaving 41 people dead, dozens injured and hundreds abducted by the security forces. Some were found dead with signs of torture.

But the mobilisation was such that the Finance Bill 2024 was withdrawn, and the Director of Police was forced to resign. Finally, Ruto sacked his entire government.

... to #RutoMustGo

But there was no end in sight. The mobilisation against the tax increases turned into an anti-government mobilisation. There are several reasons for this development. Ruto was elected on a populist platform against the dynasties of the rich and by claiming to satisfy the people on the street like the ‘boda boda’, motorbike drivers, or the ‘mama mboga’, small grocery sellers. For those familiar with this politician's background, everything pointed to demagoguery. Indeed, Ruto began his political career supporting the dictator Daniel Arap Moi by being in charge of ‘Youth for Kanu “92” (Kanu being the presidential party). It was on this occasion that he became rich. The rest of his political career has been one of broken promises and demagogic rhetoric. While he promised to defend the poor, his policies have been exactly the opposite.

His last card is to form a government of national unity with the aim of bringing together the country's elites to save a corrupt system.

Young people are well aware that even if the Finance Bill 2024 is withdrawn, other equally anti-social measures will be imposed. In other words, there is nothing to expect from this government or any other politician to solve the country's problems.

It's not just a generation gap between these young people and the ruling elite. It is above all a political divide.

Generation Z in the fight

This mobilisation was structured through social networks. It had no structure or leaders, which was one of its strengths, as it prevented the authorities from cracking down on the leaders as they usually do. The strength of this movement was also its democracy: in the virtual discussion forums, everyone could put forward their own vision of how the mobilisation should be run.

As the struggle continues and the question of power is raised in concrete terms through the demand for Ruto's resignation, alternative proposals must emerge. Left-wing organisations and activist networks in Kenya have an important role to play in linking up with the workers' unions and proposing immediate measures to meet people's aspirations. This is a decisive challenge for the coming weeks.

PS:

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