

# *Kenyans rally against U.S. imperialist schemes, protesting IMF-imposed tax bill*

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By Musa Iqbal \*

Nairobi, July 12 (RHC)-- For weeks, Kenyans have been rallying across the country against an unpopular bill that aims to significantly increase taxes on essential goods and services while ignoring the rampant spending of corrupt politicians.

The tax hike, under the "Finance Bill 2024," is part of a structured debt repayment plan imposed by the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the global lending body that reports directly to the United States.

Widespread dissent, using tactics ranging from street protests to online "hacktivism," has forced Kenyan President William Ruto to withdraw the bill, but not without several protestors being killed by state forces.

Repression against peaceful protesters has also resulted in mass arrests and unprecedented police brutality, particularly against protest leaders.

According to conservative estimates, over 20 demonstrators have been killed and more than 200 have been arrested in the past month and the repression continues. On one hand, Ruto dubbed the protests "treasonous," while on the other, he asserted that he heard the voice of Kenyans and retracted the bill in its current form.

Protest leaders expect more state repression as the government formulates new ways to pass the bill while protecting its own elite political and capitalist class.

Finance Bill 2024 sought to impose taxation on Kenyans in several controversial ways to meet the IMF's structural criteria. For instance, the unpopular bill aimed to impose a 16 percent value-added tax on essential items such as baby diapers, gas, and internet data.

Financial transactions of different varieties would also be subject to taxation, while the bill failed to meaningfully curb government spending, allowing raises for its own representatives.

The goal was to use the taxed revenue to increase Kenya's overall domestic revenue. However, billionaires, who seem to be either part of Kenya's political elite or close to it, were not burdened anywhere near as much as average Kenyans, if at all.

Tax loopholes and other financial tricks allowed them to dodge the bill's amendments, barely being affected. Ruto's government, as well as members of the opposition, have not slowed down their own expenditures, spending egregious sums of money on lavish lifestyles far beyond the reach of the everyday Kenyan worker.

For example, Kenya's Parliamentary Service Commission's spending has surged by 19 percent, totaling nearly Sh 1.86 billion, and the bill for members of parliament has grown by 4 percent to Sh 4 billion.

This elite class is openly tethered to the US imperialist project, which not only supports the reckless privatization policies of the IMF but also uses Kenyan forces as a proxy to push American interests in the country.

It is no surprise that Kenyan forces have been deployed to Haiti to curtail widespread protests against American exploitation, which is also subject to predatory IMF loans. U.S. President Joe Biden even dubbed Kenya a major non-NATO ally of his country. Thus, it is not just a tax increase that Kenyans are rejecting; it is the very predatory system ensnared in the debt crisis imposed by the IMF.

The demands have inspired a new wave in public consciousness, calling for President Ruto's resignation over his role in suppressing protests and subjecting the workers of the country to imperialist schemes designed to keep Kenya weak and dependent on foreign exploitation.

President Ruto's election win two years ago was challenged by protesters and cannot be left out of context in the current situation.

Indeed, a sizable chunk of Kenyan society feels they were cheated in the previous election, and this discontent has only grown with Ruto's handling of the IMF loans.

Instead of placing the weight of taxes on a growing neocolonial elite billionaire class, his insistence on raising taxes on ordinary Kenyans could be the last straw.

The IMF loans in Kenya, and indeed throughout the rest of the world, offer large sums of money to financially unstable states (states that are often unstable themselves because of decades to centuries of colonialism and imposed war).

In turn, the states are subject to Western capitalist penetration, typically starting with the liquidation of worker rights and protections, followed by the privatization of publicly owned or state-owned enterprises and endeavors.

This prepares the ground for imperialist takeover of key markets and resources, where Western capitalists are free to exploit the country's resources in exchange for setting up shop and "developing" the country.

Clearly, it is no development at all. The general population's democratic rights to determine the direction of their country's future are stripped away and placed in the hands of foreign capitalists who are only interested in making profits.

Money is funneled into the pockets of a small elite that serve the interests of foreign capitalists instead of their own people, a core dynamic within neo-colonialism.

Thus, the Kenyan masses continue their protests not only to oppose predatory tax hikes but also to challenge a predatory system at the root level.

It is no surprise that despite Ruto's withdrawal of the Tax Bill, multiple organizations have vowed to continue protests and demand his removal.

Many view the president's reversal as a strategic move to sidestep growing resentment of the status quo.

Mass participation from Kenyan youth, as well as traditionally non-participatory elements like the Kenyan "middle class," has forced the government to reconsider its approach while beefing up security in key protest areas.

It is no surprise to anyone familiar with Kenyan politics that the current government will attempt another pass at pushing the bill through while cracking down on protest leadership.

The growing security presence and protest leaders vowing to fight back against any similar tax proposals promise confrontation in the near future. W

The defeat of the bill and the taking of Kenyan affairs into the hands of working Kenyans would be a drastic blow not only to Kenya's corrupt elite but also to the world imperialist system that seeks to exploit billions of people for the enrichment of a few.

Nothing can be truly understood without the context of imperialism, and Africa is still a massive battleground against it.

As people in countries such as Burkina Faso, Niger, Mali, and others take matters into their own hands to carve a path for their future, Kenyans are also seeking a path forward without tethering themselves to imperialist debt traps and foreign penetration.

This is not just about a tax hike, it is about the very sovereignty of the African country.

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