

25 Years Later, Marxism Remains a Tool for Our Struggle

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Abstract: Brian Mathenge notes the actions of successive regimes in Kenya in overseeing the suppression of staunch Marxists and progressives who seemed a threat to the establishment - including political assassinations and arrests of those who happened to have different perspectives or ideological orientation - primarily because the ruling class was (and still is) frightened by efforts to educate and develop the consciousness of the masses. But as he reminds us, young cadres from the Social Justice Centre’s are today adopting Marxism as a tool for struggle, and 25 years after the publication of *Kenya: A Prison Notebook*, a defiant generation with a fighting spirit is ready to advance the struggle for socialism as a generational mission.

This year marks 25 years since the publishing of the Prison Notebook, a contemporary read written by Maina Wa Kinyatti, and published. The book is of unparalleled relevance to the current generation, especially in educating and radicalizing young progressives based on its account of the outrageous experiences and callous treatment Marxists faced during the establishment of the republic. The Kenyan masses expected a new dawn with the transition from colonialism to independence, only to be frustrated by a bunch of selfish individuals who advanced the entrenchment of capitalism and the establishment of a comprador class of organized criminals masquerading as the nation’s political steers.

Successive regimes in Kenya have overseen the suppression of staunch Marxists and progressives who seemed a threat to the establishment, carried out political assassinations and arrested those who happened to have different perspectives or ideological orientation.

The first K.A.N.U. government headed by Jomo Kenyatta oversaw the assassination of Pio Gamma Pinto, a great socialist and an inspiration to the world’s quest for a socialist society. It also sent many Kenyans into forced exile whilst subjecting many more to illegal detention and torture. However, this did not scare the committed and selfless determination of Marxists, especially in academia.

His successor, Daniel Moi, also from the same old oppressive party was no different. Maina Wa Kinyatti, a History Professor, details the hostile suppression exerted by the K.A.N.U. government under Moi’s rule in *Kenya: A Prison Notebook*. The book contains spikes of aggression, pain, agony and the silent voice of the Kenyan people.

Maina was arrested in June 1982 and forced through harsh, coercive situations for ‘Possession of Seditious Material’, a colonial offence that is still present in the penal code today. His crime was holding strong to the conviction and values of Marxism. The government (Moi) was angry that he and other University lecturers, including Kamonji Wachira and retired Chief Justice Willy

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Mutunga were using the science of Marxism to develop consciousness of the University students. This clearly proves that the Ruling Class was (and still is) frightened by attempts to educate and develop the consciousness of the masses.

After Maina was arrested, he underwent a brutal interrogation, frustrations in court, and undignified conditions in prison to weaken him and make him surrender - but these conditions instead radicalized and strengthened him and many other comrades. They chose to hold dear to their beliefs and conviction. In a quoted Statement, Cde. Willy Mutunga says, ‘What the K.A.N.U. government doesn’t understand is that we are ready to walk on fire.’

The Colonial prison conditions that subjected prisoners to inhumane and degrading conditions still exist in today’s society, exposing the current system collapse and the uninventive character of the system. But those conditions did not deter the political prisoners. They agreed to use the prison as an organizing unit, made friendship with guards and other prisoners and started off a process of developing their consciousness. Even in prison, Maina continued organizing, writing letters and receiving letters from Comrades. His family, especially Mumbi and her sister, played a vital role in strengthening Prof. Over those solitary times. The students that Maina had taught were also worried after his arrest.

Maina’s contributions at the University, in underground organizing through the December 12 Movement, the Mwakenya publication, the academic research on Mau Mau, (The Kenya Freedom and Land Army) and great support for Kamirithu theatre group are clear examples that Comrade Maina Wa Kinyatti was a selfless soldier and defender of Socialism. He proudly admits that he is a Communist, and that figures like Fidel Castro inspire him during his interrogation. The relevance of Maina’s work and struggle to our conditions today is majorly reflected in arrests, digital surveillance, and the thirst of imperialist powers to assassinate and get rid of communists and socialist progressives. The Communist Party of Kenya, for instance, fought a tedious battle in its registration as a party - facing resistance from other bourgeois parties and the state. Party registration in Kenya is also expensive thus separating and distancing the masses from actively participating in politics.

The state also tends to deploy its machinery and instruments of violence to civil/political disruptions that lean towards the left, such as the #SabaSabaMarch organized annually by the Social Justice Center Working Group, in commemoration of the historic sabasaba rally that greatly contributed to the end of single party rule through the repealing of section 2A of the Constitution. The protests have today developed into a force denouncing systematic state violence, extrajudicial executions, arbitrary arrests, and pushing for reforms of the police force and abolishment of some units within the force. The annual march has been received with violence from water cannons, teargas canisters, arrests, and physical assault of demonstrators. The State has also extended its aggression on student’s organizations by formulating and applying harsh policies to strain and disintegrate student organizations, such as the Students Amendment Act that limits the students from taking part in progressive political organization.
Cadres from the Social Justice Centres have been using *Kenya: A Prison Notebook* to ground cadres. Adopting Marxism as a tool for struggle and inspired by the book, 25 years later, a defiant generation with a fighting spirit is ready to advance the struggle for socialism as a generational mission.

Thanks to Comrade Gacheke Gachihi of Mathare Social Justice Center for his consistency, and especially for buying this book for many comrades in the movement. For sure, it is a gift that can never be equated to any other. We are thankful and honoured. Thanks to Vita Books for the publishing and continued spread of the book.

The first duty of a Revolutionary is to be educated.

We shall not bow, we shall not trade our identity, we shall not betray the cause!