

Burkina Faso is Not Alone as Strikes Escalate in West Africa

Class struggle intensifies as imperialist system continues to decline

By [Abayomi Azikiwe](#)

Global Research, November 18, 2014

Region: [sub-Saharan Africa](#)

Theme: [Police State & Civil Rights](#), [Poverty & Social Inequality](#)

A new transitional leader was announced for Burkina Faso on Nov. 17 in the aftermath of a nationwide uprising creating the conditions for the ouster of longtime neo-colonial dictator Blaise Compaore. Coup leader Lt. Col. Isaac Zida has been largely rejected by the masses inside the mineral-rich landlocked former French colony.

A previous foreign minister and United Nations representative, Michel Kafando, was appointed interim president until national elections can be held during 2015. Kafando served for thirteen years under the imperialist-backed regime of ousted President Blaise Compaore.

On Oct. 30, millions of Burkinabe took to the streets demanding the resignation of Compaore who was seeking through political manipulation within the parliament to extend his 27-year-old rule. After thousands entered the parliament shutting it down and setting the building on fire, Compaore fled to neighboring Ivory Coast.

The appointment of Kafando may not calm the social unrest inside the country if there are no genuine reforms implemented to alleviate the mass poverty, unemployment and lack of food security. This interim leader was favored by the military which has been castigated by most Burkinabe who want a return to what they perceive as democratic civilian rule.

Lamine Konkobo of the British Broadcasting Corporation's (BBC) Afrique service wrote on Nov. 17 that "Reaction to Mr Kafando's appointment has been lukewarm among the youth who were instrumental in ousting Mr Compaore."

It was contingents of working class youth wearing t-shirts and carrying placards evoking the revolutionary legacy of martyred Marxist leader Thomas Sankara, who ran Burkina Faso between 1983-87, that led the mass demonstrations against the neo-colonial system supported by France and the United States.

Konkobo went on to assert that "All this leaves many with the feeling that they have been sold short with Mr Kafando's appointment. Many youths would have preferred Josephine Ouedraogo. She served in the government of Thomas Sankara, the post-independence leader whose mysterious killing opened the way for Mr Compaore to seize power in 1987."

Strikes and Unrest Spreading Throughout West Africa Region

The workers, farmers and youth of Burkina Faso are by no means alone in their struggle

against neo-colonial rule. In Ghana, Niger and Nigeria, strikes and mass demonstrations are occurring on a weekly basis.

In Ghana, tens of thousands of public sector and education workers went on strike during Oct. demanding higher wages and better conditions of employment. The government of President John Mahama took the unions to court and secured an order forcing the workers back on the job.

Nonetheless, the unions threatened to resume their work stoppage if the government did not meet demands for pay raises and the guaranteeing of pensions. The strike actions also impacted the burgeoning oil producing industry in Ghana where workers refused to unload barrels of oil until their grievances were adequately addressed.

In an article published by starafrica.com it says "A request by the Trade Unions Congress (TUC) for the Finance Minister tell the true state of the economy in the 2015 budget speech and the clash between the labor unions and the government in court, are some of the stories making headlines in Ghana on Wednesday (Nov. 12). The Daily Graphic newspaper reported that the TUC has called on the government to introduce policies that will strengthen domestic industries and create employment in both the private and public sectors."

Niger is one of the world's largest producers of uranium yet the mines are controlled by a French firm, Areva. At the same time, as in Burkina Faso, Niamey is an outpost of the U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM) where Pentagon troops are stationed in these states carrying out aerial surveillance, drone station construction and surveillance in the so-called "war on terrorism" in the region.

On Nov. 13 Mayor Assane Seydou of Niamey fired the entire municipal police force due to their strike and protests over the lack of security and decent wages. The national police arrested twenty striking municipal officers who had been accused of setting up a blockade at the entrance of the city hall on Nov. 10.

In the Federal Republic of Nigeria, designated as having the largest economy on the African continent, labor unrest has accelerated over the last several weeks. In the education, oil and healthcare sectors there have been strikes and threats to walk off the job due to poor working conditions.

The Joint Health Sector Workers Union of Nigeria (JOHESU) has embarked on an indefinite strike. JOHESU is an umbrella federation of healthcare workers who are demanding that the government of President Goodluck Jonathan honor a previous agreement on wages signed over two years ago.

As a result of the JOHESU strike, codewit.com reported "Now healthcare services in hospitals are grounded, patients are suffering, the sick cannot obtain care and lives are on the line. Nigerians are suffering, and those without the means to patronize private hospitals or travel abroad are the hardest hit." (Nov. 16)

Nigeria depends on the revenue generated by oil sales for the bulk of its foreign exchange earnings and consequently the government and petroleum industry are concerned over threats by workers to shut down production. The country is the largest exporter of oil from the continent into the U.S.

The Nigerian Leadership newspaper reported that “The two major oil workers union in the country, the Nigeria Union of Petroleum and Natural Gas Workers (NUPENG) and the Petroleum and Natural Gas Senior Staff Association of Nigeria (PENGASSAN) on Oct. 31 in Abuja threatened to shut down the oil and gas industry in Nigeria if the constant victimization of its leaders is not stopped forthwith. The unions issued the federal government a 14-day ultimatum to address what it described as precarious working conditions in the oil sector and victimization of its members by Total Corp., failure of which will lead to withdrawal of its services.” (Nov. 1)

World Capitalist Crisis Will Prompt More Industrial Unrest

These developments illustrate clearly that despite the substantial increases in foreign direct investment in these West African states as a result of the extraction and export of oil, gold and other natural resources, the workers are not being justly compensated for their labor power. With the decline of oil and other important commodity prices, the impact on mineral-producing states is enormous.

All of these states are subject to the terms of trade and finance controlled by the major imperialist political and economic capitals of the western world in Washington, New York, London, Paris, Ottawa, Brussels, and others. Until African states take control of their resources collectively in order to establish a system of equal trade, the workers will be subject to declining wages and living standards even though the profits margins of the transnational corporations continue to rise.

With the spread of worker unrest throughout several economically significant states in West Africa, the potential for broader and more politically directly uprising will escalate. These mass demonstrations and strike actions must be consolidated through the formation of a united front of labor organizations and political parties that seek to link the struggles of workers, youth and farmers all across the West Africa region and beyond.

The declining wages and conditions of labor for workers and farmers across the region reveal that the current international division of labor and economic power still favors the ruling classes of the imperialist states. Transnational corporations and banks can only be effectively fought through the united action and organization of the most exploited and oppressed.

The original source of this article is Global Research
Copyright © [Abayomi Azikiwe](#), Global Research, 2014

[**Comment on Global Research Articles on our Facebook page**](#)

[**Become a Member of Global Research**](#)

Articles by: [**Abayomi
Azikiwe**](#)

not be responsible for any inaccurate or incorrect statement in this article. The Centre of Research on Globalization grants permission to cross-post Global Research articles on community internet sites as long the source and copyright are acknowledged together with a hyperlink to the original Global Research article. For publication of Global Research articles in print or other forms including commercial internet sites, contact: publications@globalresearch.ca

www.globalresearch.ca contains copyrighted material the use of which has not always been specifically authorized by the copyright owner. We are making such material available to our readers under the provisions of "fair use" in an effort to advance a better understanding of political, economic and social issues. The material on this site is distributed without profit to those who have expressed a prior interest in receiving it for research and educational purposes. If you wish to use copyrighted material for purposes other than "fair use" you must request permission from the copyright owner.

For media inquiries: publications@globalresearch.ca