

## Calling for the Elimination of Bourgeois Democracy in Ghana

Many observers have described Ghana's recent elections as one of the most important in recent decades. It is said to **represent** a 'significant shift in the national political landscape' not only because it indicates domestic stability but because Ghana's **democracy** is 'paramount to the future of democracy in West Africa more broadly'. Post 1992, elections became the dominant criteria for how leaders are chosen and evaluated (prior to this, Jerry Rawlings had ruled by coup for a second time from 1981–1992). The United States-led Western countries have always kept a firm eye on the democratic process in Ghana and encouraged other African countries to emulate the Ghanaian example. Yet, absent from these discussions is whether or not Ghana's democratic processes have delivered tangible benefits for the people of Ghana? Can the bourgeois democratic model actually do so?

Looking at a range of development standards, it becomes clear that so-called democratic consolidation in Ghana has not yielded any dividends. Key social and economic indicators have worsened significantly over the last thirty-two years of bourgeois multiparty, parliamentary democracy. In 2023, **almost** half of Ghana's population was multidimensionally poor; a similar figure to 1992. Ghana **ranks** in the top ten African countries with the largest debt-to-GDP ratios. Unemployment is **soaring** among the youth at 21.4% (almost double the 1992 rate), and youth unemployment can be seen as a potential national security threat.



Victor Ehikhamenor (Nigeria), *We The People and Other Dreamers*, 2019.

The economy was the focal point in this year's national elections, as the country grapples with its worst economic crisis since the 1980s. Ghana **defaulted** on its \$30 billion sovereign debt in 2022, throwing the economy in double jeopardy. Inflation rose and the cedi currency depreciated dramatically against the dollar. The government began spending the majority of national revenue on three-line items: debt, the interest on debt, and public sector salaries, leaving the country completely bankrupt and with no significant resources for capital expenditure and social services. The government, which campaigned vigorously on the platform of not returning to the IMF owing to its waning popularity in the country, ran back to the IMF for a \$3 billion extended facility loan. As part of the bailout conditions, the government implemented a debt restructuring in the form of unprecedented 'hair cut' on local and international bondholders, triggering protests from pensioners. While inflation has since slowed to a little above 20%, the cost of living continues to bite.

There is a popular narrative that the only thread holding our democratic experiment together is the recently held general election. John Mahama who was president from 2012–2017, **won** for the second time in 2024 with 56.55% of the vote. Many Ghanaians have reiterated that the new administration dare not to fail, and they will accept nothing less than material improvements: better education, affordable housing, better healthcare access, food security, safe drinking water, and more jobs for the youth. Anything short of this will result in a complete rejection not just of the new Mahama regime but bourgeois multi-party democracy as a whole. At the presidential **inauguration**, Ibrahim Traoré, the military leader of Burkina Faso, was received with resounding applause from the Ghanaian people – an indication of our peoples' appetite for radical confrontation with the existing neocolonial structures. We hope the new government took note of this.



Toyin Ojih Odutola (Nigeria), *Industry (Husband and Wife)*, 2017.

Many concerns lie on the horizon. The IMF and the World Bank have proclaimed loudly how Ghana has once again demonstrated our democratic credentials; they were the first to pay a courtesy call to the new president to ‘assist’ him with dealing with the economic crisis. Naturally, their proposal has been to privatise the state-owned Electricity Company of Ghana (ECG). According to the IMF, selling off the debt-burdened ECG which is on the verge of plunging Ghana into another power crisis, would be the panacea to our dire economic conditions. Indicating no major shift from the dominant thinking that underpins bourgeois democracy, Mahama seems to **agree** with the IMF prognosis. Has he forgotten that the people of Ghana have been fighting the sale of ECG for well over two decades? The public is firmly against the sale of ECG which would mean higher electricity costs for working-class households and SMEs (small and medium enterprises) – the core of Mahama’s voter base.

Despite Ghana **signing** IMF agreements seventeen times before with poor results, early signals from the new government suggest that they have not internalised any meaningful lessons from past experiences. If they continue along an IMF-guided trajectory, there will be no easing our troubles. The IMF economic policy **framework** relies on austerity measures that dehumanise people and rob them of essential services. It favours imposing nuisance taxes to service debt and, ultimately, international finance capital.



Lebohang Kganye (Ghana), *You Couldn't Stop the Train in Time*, 2018.

As the Socialist Movement of Ghana (SMG), we witnessed the huge interest from ordinary Ghanaians in the elections. Our movements, the trade unions, youth groups, and women's formations played a key role in the conversations about Ghana's future. We launched an alternative platform, strongly advocating for Ghana's escape from the neoliberal framework that has locked us into a disastrous cycle. Our major demand, which is echoed by the communities we serve, is a return to the **Nkrumahist** developmental model centered on state-driven, large-scale **industrial development**, with an economy guided by political goals. We have been organising around the rebuilding of the Pan African project that was birthed in Ghana decades ago and Mahama should endeavour to revive it today (particularly in the face of recent **events** with the formation of the Alliance of Sahel States). As has always been SMG's commitment, we have called for greater support for the Palestinian liberation struggle and the new government must take immediate steps to recognise the legitimate rights of the Palestinians under international law, which would be a departure from the silence of governments past.



Malala Andrialavidrazana (Madagascar), *Figures 1889, Planisferio*, 2015.

We are watching and we are open to dialogue. We wish the government all the best while we continue the struggle to guarantee the best interests of our people. Ghanaians have demonstrated once again that they are not oblivious to their own needs and aspirations. We are building a new free and socialist Global South in West Africa, bit by bit, country by country, comrade by comrade, under the constant watch of the weapons of the West. But we are not fearful. We are energised by Niger, Mali, and Burkina Faso's pursuit of sovereignty and continue the battle that we believe will determine the fate of humankind in this century.

Warmly,

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