

Maliens protest to demand departure of French occupation troops

By Alex Lantier
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More than a thousand Malians demonstrated on Monday in Independence Square in the capital, Bamako, to demand the withdrawal of French troops who have occupied Mali since 2013. Anger is exploding against the carnage produced by French intervention and against the official lie that served to justify it: that France would wage a global war against jihadist terrorist networks that threaten to conquer Mali.

As a mass strike breaks out against President Emmanuel Macron and anti-war sentiment rises among the ‘yellow vests’ in France, and protests continue against the Algerian military dictatorship, objective conditions are emerging for an international workers’ struggle against the neocolonial wars waged by France and its imperialist allies across Africa.

Demonstrators in Bamako brandished posters “France Get Out,” and chanted slogans like “France out”, “Down with France” and “The Barkhane Forces must leave.” Operation Barkhane is the official name of the French military intervention in Mali.

Many demonstrators stressed that their anger was not directed against the French but against the foreign policy of French imperialism. “We are not angry with the French people, but against the policies of their state,” one demonstrator told *Le Monde*.

Likewise, a woman protesting in Bamako said, “France must withdraw its army from our lands. That’s why the Malian people are here, that’s why the Amazon that I am, is here.”

Another demand was to overcome the rivalries between Tuaregs, Dogons, Fulani and other ethnic groups that the French occupying forces and their German auxiliaries are playing on. One protester called for a march on Kidal, a northern Tuareg town at the centre of French military operations: “Soon, we must

march on Kidal, in the coming days. If there is no improvement, there will be no change. We will march on Kidal. Even if everyone, all of Mali, dies, we will march on Kidal.”

Another demonstrator pointed to the complicity between Paris and the Islamist or ethnic militias active in Mali: “Despite the massive presence of the world’s largest armies, the terrorist groups continue to operate and are even growing in strength. We must therefore beware of these nocturnal arsonists who suddenly turn into firemen at dawn. These foreign powers use terrorism to control the immense wealth of the region.”

Vast anger is rising in Mali against the French occupation, following NATO’s war in Libya, where Paris destroyed Moammar Gaddafi’s government with the help of jihadist militias. France then invaded Mali in 2013, supposedly to protect Malians from jihadist militias coming from Libya. In 2020, 80 percent of Malians are critical of the French presence, according to a poll for Maliweb.

The protest in Bamako follows a number of strikes and demonstrations against France and its neo-colonial puppet, President Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta. Malian teachers and railway workers went on strike in 2019 because Paris and Keïta, who are spending hundreds of millions of euros on the war, refused to pay their salaries. And after several protests in Bamako and elsewhere in 2019, another demonstration against French interference took place on January 3 near Bandiagara in central Mali.

These demonstrations defied the slanderous statements of Macron and Keita, who accuse opponents of the French occupation of Mali, that is, the vast majority of the Malian population, of playing into the hands of Al Qaeda and Islamic State militias.

On December 31, in presenting his New Year’s

greetings, Keïta said he was “convinced” that most Malians felt a “sense of gratitude” towards the French occupation troops, adding: “This should not be confused with a minority of activists, snipers or centrifugal forces who are trying to play the game of terrorists.”

This slander only reinforces the contempt Malians feel for Keïta and the regime in Bamako. A demonstrator in Bamako told the French press: “The president cannot make himself clear. All African presidents are chosen by France. They are under its domination.”

Even as anger mounts against his presidency and repeated attacks by the police on strikers in France, Macron denounced opposition to the war in Mali, which he called “anti-French.” He declared, “I cannot and will not have French soldiers in the Sahel, as long as ambiguity persists regarding anti-French movements, that are sometimes led by politicians.”

Meanwhile, Macron has intensified the war in Mali in defiance of public opinion in both Mali and France. On Monday, he held a summit with the “G5 Sahel” countries--Niger, Chad, Mauritania, Burkina Faso, Mali—to announce the deployment of 220 more French troops to Africa. *Le Monde* wrote that Paris had convened this conference “to obtain a 'clarification' from the countries of the region after accusations of interference and neocolonialist aims.”

Convened in Pau, the five governments of the Sahel signed a shameful statement defending the French intervention opposed by the workers and oppressed masses of the region. In this statement, they “expressed the wish for the continuation of France’s military engagement in the Sahel.” They also “expressed their gratitude for the crucial support provided by the United States and expressed the wish for its continuation.”

Many political questions remain to be clarified in order to build a real fight against the neo-colonial wars in Africa. African Solidarity for Democracy and Independence, a party linked to the petty-bourgeois New Anti-Capitalist Party (NPA) in France and which has welcomed French interference in 2013, joined the demonstration on Monday as well as Keita’s Rally for Mali (RPM). The Group of Patriots of Mali (GPM), whose members are calling for Russian military intervention in Mali, organized the rally.

It is impossible, however, to fight against imperialism

and war by calling on one or another capitalist regime.

The best allies of Malian and African workers in the struggle against oppression by France, or other imperialist powers, are the European and American working class fighting against wars and the reactionary policies of their own governments. A broad opposition is developing among these workers to the neo-colonial wars which the imperialist powers have been waging for decades in Africa and the Middle East.

“It is always the same ones who rule everywhere, and it is the same ones who do the same damage everywhere. When you talk to a Malian who tells you about Total and Bolloré, you realize that we all have the same enemy, the same parasites, the same people who are trying to destroy all nations,” a worker who was demonstrating against Macron this weekend in Paris told the WSWS.

Such comments underscore the need to consciously build an anti-war movement among the international working class to end the wars in Mali and throughout Africa and the Middle East.

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