

It is the Kenyan people who have lost the election

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Kenya is entering a protracted crisis. No one really knows who actually won the presidential elections. Given the overwhelming number of parliamentary seats won by the ODM and the dismissal of some 20 former ministers who lost their seats, it seems likely that the presidential results probably followed suit. But it is no longer really a matter of who won or lost. For one thing is certain: it is the Kenyan people who have lost in these elections.

That the elections results were rigged - of that there is little doubt. The hasty inauguration, the blanket banning on the broadcast media, the dispersal of security forces to deal with expected protests - all these have given the post election period the flavour of a coup d'état. What was not expected was the speed with which the whole thing would unravel. The declaration of the members of the Electoral Commission that the results were indeed rigged only added to the growing realisation that a coup had indeed taken place.

People across the country took to the streets to protest and were met with disproportionate use of force by the police and GSU. Emotions ran high. And there is evidence that politicians from all sides used the occasion to instigate violent attacks against their opponents constituencies. There have been rapes, forced circumcision and forced female genital mutilation. The western media has been quick to describe these as 'ethnic clashes' - but then they appear only to be able to see tribes whenever there are conflicts in Africa. What is ignored by them is that the security forces have been responsible for the majority of killings.

What we have in Kenya is a political crisis that could, descend into civil war if the political crisis is not resolved soon. And therein lies the problem.

There is no coherent political direction from the ODM. First Raila Odinga declares he's the 'people's president' (shades of Blair's 'people's princess' speech - the first time as tragedy, the second time as farce, some might say - and says he is going to arrange to be inaugurated. What happened?

Then he says that he is not willing to meet with Kibaki, then says he will meet provided there is an international mediator. He says he will form his own government, and then takes that no further.

Then he calls for a million person march into Nairobi, and when faced with a banning order and massive police attacks, backs down and calls for another demonstration the following day.

But what is this demonstration seeking to achieve? Such events are usually a means of showing the size of popular support: but ODM has already demonstrated its popular support in the stolen elections. There are no coherent political demands for this event that would bring the support of the many who, though they may not have voted for ODM, would feel that they would nevertheless want to express their support. There is no real strategy for enabling PNU's own political base to be won over.

The election results were rigged, sure. But the failure to demand that an independent judicial

inquiry be established to investigate only leads to suspicions that even the ODM were not keen to have the results investigated. It is now probably too late to conduct a satisfactory investigation since original records may have been tampered with - which might explain the Attorney General's sudden willingness announced today to allow the ECK records to be inspected without recourse to use of the courts.

The mass demonstrations could have been used to call for such an investigation and to protest against the media ban imposed by Kibaki and to challenge constitutionality of the ban. Instead, it served no purpose other than what some see as an infantile response to the theft of the elections.

Why has there been no public appeal to the armed forces and police - whose families have no doubt suffered in the violent upheavals - to refuse to fire on citizens, or to defend and protect citizens from the violence that has been unleashed?. Kibaki can retain power only through the use of force - and so long as the armed forces and the police remain loyal, he will be able to retain his hold on power.

ODM has failed to challenge the existing government by encouraging all sections of society to create a viable alternative to the present government.

But the real tragedy of Kenya is that the political conflict is not about alternative political programmes that could address the long standing grievances of the majority over landlessness, low wages, unemployment, lack of shelter, inadequate incomes, homelessness, etc. It is not about such heady aspirations.

No, it boils down to a fight over who has access to the honey pot that is the state. For those in control of the state machinery are free to fill their pockets. So the battle lines are reduced to which group of people are going to be chosen to fill their pockets - and citizens are left to decide perhaps that a few crumbs might fall off the table in their direction.

And the electorate - the mass of citizens who have borne the brunt of the recent violence and decades of prolonged disenfranchisement from accessing the fruits of independence - are reduced to being just being fodder for the pigs fighting over the trough.

The Kibaki regime seems unlikely to concede any space - for to do so would confirm the suspicions of election theft. And the longer that the current impasse continues, the more likely it is that people will seek to vent their anger and frustration in senseless violence - energy that could so easily be turned towards organising to building a new world.

So what is going to be the way forward? Will there be an independent inquiry into the election results? Into the violence that has taken place? Will the contending parties agree to the formation of an interim government that would oversee the re-run of the elections?

Whatever happens, the present crisis has demonstrated that there is a serious lack of any formations that can articulate a coherent political programme for social transformation. Politics will remain forever about who gets access to the trough so long as there is no alternative.

This issue of Pambazuka News is dedicated to those who have paid with their lives in this period of crisis.

P.S.

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