

Repression against opposition intensifies in Egypt

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22 November 2010

The Egyptian government of Hosni Mubarak has stepped up its repression of opposition forces and media outlets two weeks before the first round of parliamentary elections due to take place on November 28.

Last Sunday, the government arrested 58 members of the Muslim Brotherhood on the claim that they had commenced their election campaign before the official start. This accusation was rejected by the lawyer of the Muslim Brotherhood, Moneim Abdel Maqsood. In the independent daily paper *Al Masry Al Youm*, Maqsood called the arrests a “political act without any legal basis”.

The Muslim Brotherhood is the largest opposition party in Egypt. It is officially banned and must send its candidates into the election as “independents.” Following the last parliamentary elections in 2005, which were characterized by fraud and violence, the Muslim Brotherhood won 20 percent of the vote, or 88 seats. In the middle of October, the Brotherhood rejected the call for a boycott of the election made by the most well-known Egyptian opposition politician, Mohamed el Baradei.

According to the daily paper *Al Shorouk*, 487 members of the Muslim Brotherhood have been arrested since the election was officially announced. Nearly 300 are still in detention, and 89 have been turned over to the criminal courts.

Al Dostour has reported that security forces opened fire on supporters of Muslim Brotherhood candidate Mahmoud Attiya as they were hanging up election posters in Alexandria. Three of the police involved were arrested, according to a report confirmed by the state-controlled daily paper, *Rose Al Youssef*.

Al Wafd, the daily paper published by the party with the same name, reported that the electoral committee

had struck off the names of 50 candidates of the Muslim Brotherhood in Alexandria.

The press has reported that two candidates of the Al Ghad Party in Ismailia have also been arrested. They too were accused of beginning their election campaign early. The deputy secretary of the party, Osama Al Allaf, accused the government of double standards. Election posters of candidates from the governing National Democratic Party are being hung everywhere, he said.

On the same day that police commenced their latest wave arrests of members of the opposition, an independent coalition for the election issued a press release on the first phase of the parliamentary elections. The report thoroughly disproves the cynical statement made by Mubarak who one week ago promised “fair and transparent elections”.

The press release, drawn up by three Egyptian human rights organizations, reads: “The facts show the absence of the Egyptian government’s political will to run free and fair elections and create the necessary political environment for it.” The report speaks of a “continually escalating campaign” by the government to restrict civil rights, including the right to free speech, the rights of assembly, to protest, and to strike, and the right to take part in the political process.

No less than twelve television channels have been closed down recently, with a ban imposed on their political programs. In addition, Ibrahim Eissa, the editor-in-chief of the opposition daily paper *Al Dostour* was relieved of his post. Bahieddine Hassan, the director of the Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies (CIHRS) said that a climate of “terror” now predominates in the media.

The groups also complain in their press release that the Egyptian security forces are increasing their use of

violence against demonstrators and strikers. Excessive force has been used particularly against students protesting falsified university elections and the presence of security forces on the campuses.

The reasons for the brutal actions of the Mubarak government against the opposition are clear. The ruling regime in Egypt is in deep crisis. There are fierce factional struggles inside the NDP over a successor to the ailing Mubarak, who has governed on the basis of emergency laws since 1981. Just two weeks ago, an editorial in *Al Masry Al Youm* warned that the faction struggle within the NDP could be “more violent and bloody” than expected.

The social crisis in Egypt, where nearly half of the population lives on less than two dollars a day, has intensified in the past months. According to the government statistics agency CAPMAS, in September prices for vegetables rose by 51 percent and for poultry and meat by 29 percent. An article in *Al Masry Al Youm* dealing with the rapid price rises carried the headline: “Vegetable crisis in Egypt—this is how revolutions begin.” The article then cited protesters using the slogan “increase the prices any more and see the country go up in flames.”

Against this background, the regime is reacting in an increasingly nervous manner and responds with violence to the slightest criticism. The increasing repression against the opposition in Egypt is therefore also in preparation for future social protests.

Concern over social upheavals is also shared by the Muslim Brotherhood, although it is currently the main target of the government’s repressive measures. At a press conference in Cairo last Thursday the leader of the Muslim Brotherhood, Mohamed Badie, warned of widespread popular anger should the election result be falsified. “The government should beware of the people if they are angered.”

The anti-democratic measures taken by the Egyptian regime have been met with complete silence from western governments. Those governments that complain loudest about human right violations by states that refuse to comply with the diktats of US imperialism have nothing to say about the repression in a country that is one of America’s most important allies in the Middle East.

Just a week ago, the Egyptian Foreign Minister Ahmed Aboul Gheit was a guest of the US state

department, where Secretary of State Hillary Clinton did not mention the repression in Egypt. Even the *Washington Post* felt obliged to publish a critical editorial titled: “Clinton’s silence over Egyptian democracy”.



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