

Protests, strikes continue against military junta in Egypt

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On Friday tens of thousands of workers and youth went to the streets in at least five governorates in Egypt to denounce the politics of the US-backed military junta and its leader, Field Marshal Mohammed Hussein Tantawi.

The protests were called in a response to the violent crackdown of Tuesday night and Wednesday morning, against protestors and families of those killed during the social struggles in Egypt. During the crackdown the military regime and police working with thugs brutally attacked thousands of protestors with tear gas cannons and rubber bullets. Over 1,100 people were wounded and, according to eye-witnesses, some also died in the clashes. (See “Egyptian military carries out bloody crackdown on protests”)

The protest day was named “Friday of Retribution.” Thousands of people went to the streets in Alexandria and met in front of Al Quaed Ibrahim Mosque to demand the immediate prosecution of police officers accused for the killing of about 1,000 protestors since the beginning of the revolution. Some of the protestors also blocked the main Corniche Road to protest against the recent police brutality.

In the industrial city of Suez, one of the epicenters of the revolution, hundreds of protestors came to Arbaeen Square to demand the prosecution of the ousted dictator Hosni Mubarak. Hundreds also gathered for protests and demonstrations in Ismailiya, Beheira and in Qena.

In Cairo thousands were heading to Tahrir Square, where an open ended sit-in is being staged since the clashes on Wednesday. Eyewitnesses speaking to the WSWs compared the massive violence used against them to the methods of ousted dictator Hosni Mubarak.

“July 28 really felt like January 28, when we were fighting the police during the Friday of Anger,” commented one youth named Mohammad.

His friend added, “Actually everything that is happening shows that nothing has really changed. Why this violence against protestors? Why are the trials of murderers like el-Adly [the notorious former Interior Minister] delayed every time? Why isn’t anything changing to the better? We really have the feeling that Mubarak’s regime is still in power.”

Such feelings are common amongst Egyptian workers and youth after nearly five months of military rule. On one tent set up in the middle of the square, one could read the words: “The Military Council is the extension of the regime of Mubarak.”

One female protestor standing next to the tent explained: “The Military Junta is promoting the same politics against the Egyptian people as Mubarak. The emergency law is in place, the Military Council has issued a law banning protests and strikes and it remains an agent of the USA and Israel.”

The chants of the protestors on Tahrir Square have been openly directed against the military rulers. Slogans included: “The people want the downfall of the field marshal”, “Tantawi is Mubarak” and “Down with the military junta and the police”. Protestors also shouted for a “Second Revolution” or a “new Revolution”. Others demanded public trials and the execution of Mubarak, el Adly and Tantawi.

At around 4 o'clock in the afternoon, a march headed from Tahrir towards the Cabinet offices to demand justice for martyrs’ families. Another demonstration went to the Ministry of the Interior, where military police forces tried to provoke protestors, throwing stones and making provocative gestures. The protestors threw the stones back and responded with chants against the police and the army.

Besides such smaller incidents, there have been no police or military forces deployed near the protests. The

junta obviously feels too weak to confront the protestors with renewed violence.

But there cannot be the slightest doubt that the military is preparing to use even more violent means of repression in the coming days and months. The brutal violence Wednesday was another move towards more open repression by the Egyptian ruling elite in order to suppress mounting class struggles.

An ongoing strike of thousands of Suez Canal workers cut off electricity from the Port Tawfik district of Suez of electricity yesterday, as workers announced they would escalate their protests in coming days if their demands were not met. They demand a 40 percent increase in basic salary, 7 percent bonus payments and a hike in their meal allowances. The workers also called for the removal of General Ahmed Fadel, the CEO of the Suez Canal Authority.

The military seems to be preparing a violent crackdown on the strikers. Workers said there have been clashes between the military police and workers on the main bridge to the Suez Canal's guidance premise in Suez. On June 19 the military already used live ammunition to disperse the strikers' sit-in, which is now entering the fourth week.

Another open-ended sit-in is being staged by health-workers in the Quena governorate, in front of the health directorate. The workers are demanding permanent contracts and steady and higher salaries.

With a deepening economic crisis—the Egyptian pound stands at a six-year low—Egyptian workers will be driven into huge struggles in the coming period. The impoverished Egyptian masses are already facing rising unemployment and sky-rocketing food prices.

The fact that most of the official political parties didn't participate in the protests on Friday shows again that none of them stands on the side of the workers and the poor. All the bourgeois parties—be they liberal, islamist or “left”—back the military junta, while making varying amounts of toothless criticisms; they all regard it as a bulwark against a “second revolution,” protecting the bourgeois order against the growing militancy of the working class.

The “left” parties which participated in the protests—the Karama Party, al-Tagammu, the Socialist Alliance Party (SAP), and the Democratic Workers Party (DWP)—only did so in order to disorient the protests. These pseudo-left groups of the “Socialist

Front” have deliberately abstained from calling for a “second revolution” against the military junta and its replacement with a workers' government.

While the Egyptian junta tries to drown the revolution in blood, the pseudo-left groups are spreading the illusion that the regime could be pressured for “more democratic and less oppressive” politics. In the flyers they handed out on Friday's protests, they claim that the security apparatus could be “restructured”. The DWP called for the immediate sacking of the minister of interior General Mansour el-Essawi and his replacement with a “civilian interior minister” and the SAP demanded a “clear plan for the restructuring of the police apparatus”.

Only some days before the military regime attacked the protestors, Hossam el Hamalawy—a well-known blogger and member of the Revolutionary Socialists (also part of the Socialist Front)—told news agency Reuters that he feels that the military junta is “sincere about handing over power to a civilian government.” (See, “Egyptian bourgeoisie and pseudo-left oppose a ‘second revolution’”)



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