

Egyptian military junta carries out deadly crackdown on protesters

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The US-backed military junta in Egypt carried out a violent crackdown on protesters over the weekend, killing several and injuring over 700. The repression was in advance of the November 28 parliamentary elections.

Protesters have been demonstrating against state violence and the refusal of the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) junta to hand over power, ten months after mass protests and strikes forced the resignation of the dictator Hosni Mubarak.

Ahmed Mohamed Ahmed, 23, died in Cairo on Saturday after being shot in the chest by police firing live ammunition. Another protester was shot in the head by snipers in Alexandria. The death toll from the weekend police attacks is now five, but it is expected to rise.

The scenes now unfolding on Tahrir Square and the surrounding streets are reminiscent of January 28, when masses of protesters fought fierce battles with the notorious Amn Al Markazy (Central Security Forces) of Mubarak. The clashes erupted after security forces attacked a peaceful sit-in by a group of approximately 100 demonstrators, who called themselves “the revolution’s injured alliance.” They were protesting against the hated military council and its leader, Field Marshall Mohamed Hussein Tantawi.

After the police began the attack in an attempt to drive the protesters out of the square, thousands more streamed into the streets to defend the sit-in. Security forces and military police continued to attack protesters for hours, using rubber bullets, tear gas canisters and police trucks. Live ammunition was fired, including rubber bullets and grapeshot.

Protesters defended themselves with stones and petrol bombs and hurled tear gas canisters back at the police. They shouted slogans calling for the fall of the military council and Tantawi, and denounced the security forces as thugs. The chant, “The people demand the overthrow of the regime,” made famous during the struggle against Mubarak, echoed across the square.

Scores of protesters and journalists were arrested, often after being robbed and brutally beaten. Among these was the reporter for *Al Ahram Online*, Ahmed Feteaha. “They beat us severely. They didn’t care whether it was women or men,” a 32-year-old accounting professor told AFP.

Ghada Shahbender, a member of the Egyptian Organisation

for Human Rights, told the Associated Press that the police “were shooting rubber bullets directly at the person’s head. I heard an officer ordering his men to aim for the head.”

One prominent protester, Malek Mostafa, lost an eye after being hit by a rubber bullet.

Prime Minister Essam Sharaf called on protesters to leave the square, while Egyptian state TV described the protesters as “rioters” and “thugs.”

Mass protests have now erupted in Alexandria, Suez, Mansoura and Mahalla al Kubra. In Alexandria, Ahmed Abdel-Qader told the Associated Press, “We only managed to bring down the head of the regime [Hosni Mubarak]. The rest of the tree is still standing.”

State TV cited US police actions against Occupy Wall Street protests to justify the repression of protests on Tahrir Square. Tellingly, many of the tear gas canisters used against Egyptian protesters were made in the US.

General Mohsen El-Fangary, a member of SCAF, stated that the police had acted in accordance with a law issued in March criminalising sit-ins and strikes. “The aim of what is going on is to shake the backbone of the state, which is the armed forces,” he declared. He threatened protesters, “If security is not applied, we will implement the rule of law. Anyone who does wrong will pay for it.”

The junta is preparing massive violence to drown the Egyptian revolution in blood. In doing so, it has the full backing of Washington, the main sponsor of the Egyptian military. On November 15, the head of the US Central Command, Gen. James N. Mattis, was in Cairo for talks with Tantawi and Sami Anan, the chief of staff of the Egyptian Armed Forces. Mattis reportedly praised SCAF and discussed ways to bolster US-Egyptian military ties.

The US views the military as the backbone of the Egyptian bourgeois state, defending capitalist rule and the interests of Western imperialism in the Middle East. Ever since the mass uprising that led to the ouster of Mubarak on February 11, the Obama administration has worked closely with SCAF to try to end strikes and protests by Egyptian workers demanding social equality and democratic rights. It has sought at all costs to prevent a second revolution.

This fear of an independent movement of the Egyptian

working class is shared by the entire Egyptian ruling elite. After the fall of Mubarak, all official and semi-official political forces—be they Islamist, liberal or petty-bourgeois “left”—lent support to the military junta and claimed that Mubarak’s generals would organize a “democratic transition.”

The renewed clashes have prompted leading figures of the official opposition to express their concern. Presidential candidates Mohamed ElBaradei and Amr Moussa criticized the use of excessive force by SCAF out of fear that it could ignite broader protests. Moussa warned, “We are in a very dangerous situation. We have to end the use of force, which was not justified. We should engage in dialogue. Dealing with peaceful sit-ins and demonstrations that way [violently] will only worsen the situation.”

Mohamed Badie, supreme guide of the Muslim Brotherhood (MB), called on “all sincere Egyptians to exercise self-control and protect the January 25 revolution.” According to *Al Masry Al Youm*, spokesman Mahmoud Ghozlan called on protesters and the Egyptian authorities to collectively “prevent those who want Egypt to be caught in an endless web of violence and conflicts from achieving their aims.”

Before the clashes erupted Saturday, the Islamists of the Muslim Brotherhood and various Salafist groups organized a mass demonstration on Friday in Tahrir Square to protest against a document laying out “supra-constitutional principles.” This statement was presented by Deputy Prime Minister Ali al-Selmy on November 1. It states that the military stands above the law and has the right to approve any legislation relating to the armed forces and control the drafting of a new constitution.

The document was attacked by the Islamists as a move by the military to prevent them from establishing an Islamist state. The mass turnout of the Islamists on Friday was, after the July 29 rally, the second mass demonstration dominated by the Islamists since the ouster of Mubarak.

The Brotherhood and its political arm, the Freedom and Justice Party (FJP), and the Salafists—mainly organized in the Al-Nur (Light) and Al-Asala (Authenticity) parties—opposed the mass protests on January 25 that eventually led to Mubarak’s fall and boycotted most of the million-man marches following his ouster.

The Islamists have denounced workers’ strikes and are collaborating closely with the junta and its imperialist backers.

Last week, the US government’s special coordinator for Middle East transitions, William Taylor, declared that the US would be “satisfied” with an Islamist government in Egypt. At a forum at the Atlantic Council, a Washington-based think tank, he said, “What we need to do is judge people and parties and movements on what they do, not what they’re called.”

Since the fall of Zine Abedine Ben Ali in Tunisia and Mubarak in Egypt, the US has reinforced its connections with the Islamist Ennahda Party in Tunisia and the Brotherhood in Egypt. In Libya, the US and NATO waged war to oust Muammar Gaddafi and install the National Transitional

Council, consisting of Islamists, ex-Gaddafi ministers and CIA assets.

To take the revolution forward, Egyptian workers and youth need a new political perspective. The experience of recent months has shown that the Egyptian military junta, backed by US imperialism, cannot be pressured through protests and strikes to initiate democratic and social reform. It has to be overthrown and replaced with a workers’ government.

The most determined enemies of such a perspective are the Egyptian petty-bourgeois “left” forces, such as the Revolutionary Socialists (RS) and the Socialist Popular Alliance Party. After SCAF took power in February, these groups declared that the working class should place its trust in reforms instituted by the new regime and its rigged electoral process. Later they opposed the popular demand for a Second Revolution, raised during mass protests on May 27 and July 8.

Given their support for the junta, these parties are politically responsible for the fact that opposition to the junta is currently under the influence of the Islamist right, which played a negligible role in the initial months of revolutionary struggle.

On October 16, the RS announced that it would participate in the elections, giving legitimacy to a process aimed at stabilising and strengthening the military dictatorship. To justify their decision, the RS published an article on October 23 entitled “The Elections and the Mistake of Revolutionary Urgency.” At a time when the Egyptian working class is confronted with a military junta employing large scale violence against protesters and strikers, the RS told workers they should stay away from revolutionary politics and concentrate instead on the elections.



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