

Egyptian military cracks down on peaceful protesters

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Over the weekend, the US-backed military junta in Egypt launched another deadly crackdown on peaceful protesters, killing at least nine and wounding hundreds. The brutal assault on protesters comes amidst ongoing parliamentary elections, highlighting again the fraudulent character of the elections and the entire “democratic transition” being carried out under the junta’s control.

On Friday, the military attacked a sit-in in front of the Cabinet headquarters in downtown Cairo that had been initiated on November 25. Eyewitnesses reported that soldiers and security forces working together with plainclothes policemen and thugs on the roof of the Cabinet building began to throw rocks and Molotov cocktails at the protesters below. Live ammunition was reportedly fired directly at unarmed protesters.

The sit-in’s aim is to prevent newly appointed Prime Minister Kamal El-Ganzouri from entering the Cabinet. The Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) junta replaced his predecessor, Essam Sharaf, with Ganzouri after renewed mass protests on November 24. Like Sharaf, El-Ganzouri is widely hated by Egyptian workers and youth. He was a leading member of the ruling National Democratic Party (NDP) of former president Hosni Mubarak, serving as prime minister in the late 1990s and working closely with the International Monetary Fund to push free-market reforms.

Amongst those killed were Alaa Abd El-Hady, a student of Ain Shams University, and Sheikh Amar Effat of Al-Azhar University. Effat’s funeral turned into a protest against junta leader Field Marshal Mohamed Hussein Tantawi, with people chanting: “Tantawi you coward, Al-Azhar is going back to the Square,” and, “The people demand the execution of the Field Marshal.”

The funeral march was attended by the Maspero Youth Movement, a Coptic Christian youth group. The movement was established after the army brutally massacred 27 Copts on October 9 in front of the state television building.

On Saturday and Sunday, army and police forces also attacked the sit-in on Tahrir Square, burning down tents and attacking protesters with batons. YouTube videos show soldiers and plainclothes policemen beating protesters, including women, and attacking the main field hospital in the square. Soldiers erected barricades in downtown Cairo to block

protesters from returning to the Cabinet headquarters. Clashes between the army and protesters continued on Saturday night and Sunday.

As the crackdown was underway, Ganzouri gave a press conference denying that the police and military had used violence. He claimed that those responsible for the violence are driven by unknown people who “do not want good for this country.” He attacked demonstrators as “not the revolution’s youth,” calling on all political forces to reject their actions. “What is happening is not a revolution,” he said, “but [rather] an assault on the revolution.”

He concluded by cynically claiming that his government is “the revolution’s salvation government.”

Ganzouri’s comments could hardly be more vicious and false. The crackdown is another attempt to bring the renewed mass movement of Egyptian workers and youth to a halt. The sit-in on Tahrir Square started on November 19 and was accompanied by mass protests all over Egypt. It is as an expression of the hostility of the Egyptian masses to military rule and the whole process of “democratic transition” run by the Egyptian army and its backers in Washington.

On December 11, US Senator John Kerry, chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, visited Cairo for talks with Tantawi, Ganzouri and leaders of the Muslim Brotherhood (MB). Commenting on the meeting, Ziad Abdel Tawab, the deputy director of the Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies, said: “You can tell whom the American government thinks is the most important from the people Kerry met with and in this order: Tantawi, Ganzouri, the Muslim Brotherhood.”

Washington views the Egyptian military as its main ally to defend its imperialist interests in the region. It gives \$1.3 billion each year to the Egyptian army, second only to its support for the Israel Defense Forces.

After the ouster of long-time US stooge Mubarak, Washington has come to see the rightwing, pro-capitalist Muslim Brotherhood as a possible political tool in helping contain and crush the revolution. In July, US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton announced that the US had held official talks with the Islamists. During his visit, Kerry stated that he was not surprised by the Brotherhood’s electoral success. The results of the first stage of ongoing elections suggest that the Freedom

and Justice Party, the Muslim Brotherhood's political arm, will come out ahead with around 40 percent of votes cast.

During his talks in Cairo, Kerry made clear what the US expects from the junta, the interim government headed by Ganzouri, or a new government which the Muslim Brotherhood would most likely lead. Kerry stressed that the "the most significant challenge right now is the economic challenge." He continued, "It is very important for Egypt to work with the IMF and undertake to come to an agreement with the IMF for an immediate infusion of money." He added that otherwise, "everything could be lost."

In recent days, the Egyptian press has carried many articles warning of a deepening economic crisis. Egypt's budget deficit increased by about 30 percent to 130 billion Egyptian pounds, according to the latest report by the Ministry of Finance in September. Egypt's foreign reserves are expected to plunge by a third, to \$15 billion, by the end of January 2012, and forecasts of economic growth for the financial year 2011-2012 are below 2 percent. Foreign investment fell by a third in 2011, at about \$2.2 billion compared to \$6.8 billion in 2010.

The junta, economists, the media and politicians alike unanimously denounce workers' strikes and blame the working class—which is demanding better working conditions, the setting of minimum and maximum wages and social equality—for the worsening economic crisis.

For Egyptian workers and youth, who ousted longtime dictator Hosni Mubarak after 18 days of revolutionary mass struggle, little has changed since the SCAF took power on February 11. It is continuing the antisocial and undemocratic policies of the Mubarak regime. Under military rule, over 12,000 civilians have been arrested and put on trial, an anti-strike and anti-protest law has been promulgated, and, since the beginning of October alone, over 80 protesters have been killed and several thousand wounded.

The continuous violence unleashed by the junta is a direct response to the most recent mass strikes and protests. After the end of Ramadan, a strike wave erupted involving up to 750,000 workers, including teachers, doctors, and transportation, telecommunications and textile workers. As before the January 25 Revolution, the Egyptian working class again paved the way for mass sit-ins all over the country on November 22, demanding the downfall of the junta.

Political responsibility for the junta's ability to keep power and continue its counterrevolutionary offensive lies with Egypt's "opposition" parties—be they Islamist, liberal or petty-bourgeois "left." They have all given support to the military, fomenting illusions that it would either defend the revolution or respond to popular demands for more democratic and socially progressive policies.

The response by Egypt's "opposition" parties to the violence unleashed by the junta to suppress working class opposition is deeply hypocritical. They are not demanding the overthrow of the junta on the basis of a socialist struggle against capitalism,

but for the junta to modify its policies and perhaps yield some of its power within the capitalist state to the Brotherhood or other bourgeois forces.

The liberal Free Egyptians Party condemned the violence against protesters in a statement calling on the SCAF itself "to protect the revolution instead of escalating violence and cracking down on freedoms."

Presidential candidates Hamdeen Sabahi, Mohamed ElBaradei and Abdel-Moneim Abol Fotoh took similar positions. Sabahi, a leader of the Nasserite Karama Party, said it is inappropriate for the army to attack peaceful protesters, given its "honored history of protecting the people."

ElBaradei wrote on his Twitter account that "even if the sit-in is illegal, the use of brutal force is not the answer and should be condemned."

All of these politicians and political groups seem to believe that the Egyptian masses are suffering from amnesia about the brutally repressive character of the Egyptian army, which these "oppositionists" fully support. Shortly after the junta took power, ElBaradei summarized the attitude of the Egyptian ruling class and affluent petty-bourgeoisie to the army by describing mutual trust between the people and its army as a "red line" and "vital for national unity."

To try to maintain their influence over revolutionary struggles, sections of the Egyptian bourgeoisie are demanding that the junta include more parties in the government currently led by Ganzouri that serves as a parliamentary fig leaf for military rule. In one such declaration, over 170 politicians and intellectuals—including Revolutionary Socialists (RS) leader Kamal Khalil—signed a statement on Sunday in the name of "The National Front for Culture and Change" calling for a "national salvation" government.



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