

Protests erupt against presidential elections in Egypt

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Protests broke out in various Egyptian cities after the Supreme Presidential Electoral Commission (SPEC) announced the official results of the initial round of the presidential elections. According to SPEC, Ahmed Shafiq, the last prime minister under ousted dictator Hosni Mubarak, and Mohamed Mursi, the candidate of the Islamist Muslim Brotherhood (MB), will face each other in the run-off election scheduled for June 16-17.

The final results put Mursi in first place with 24.78 percent of the vote, followed by Shafiq, with 23.66 percent. In third place was the Nasserite candidate Hamdeen Sabahi who received 20.72 percent. The moderate Islamist candidate Abdel-Moneim Abul-Fotouh came in fourth place with 17.47 percent, and Amr Moussa, the former head of the Arab League and a minister under Mubarak, came in fifth, with 11.13 percent. The official voter turnout was low, with only 46.42 percent of eligible voters casting ballots.

The protests were directed alike against Shafiq, considered to be the preferred candidate of the military, and the Islamist Mursi. In Cairo, thousands of protesters blocked traffic on Tahrir Square, the iconic epicentre of the Egyptian revolution, shouting: “Down With Military Rule! Down With the Supreme Guide [of the Brotherhood] Rule!”

In the early evening, some 400 protesters, chanting against *feloul* (remnants of the former regime) stormed Shafiq’s campaign office and burnt it down. Security forces intervened, arresting protesters, and fire trucks arrived to bring the blaze under control.

Throughout the night demonstrators continued marching in downtown Cairo, shouting, “Smash Shafiq on His Head,” and holding his campaign posters upside down. Others chanted, “Down With the Dogs of the Military Regime.”

Ali, a 24-year-old pharmacist who worked in

makeshift field hospitals on Tahrir Square during clashes with the military and security forces, stated: “We are sending a message to the Supreme Council of Armed Forces (SCAF) that we will never accept Ahmed Shafiq as our next president. He is the second Mubarak and was even in the Air Force, like the ousted leader.”

In the coastal city of Alexandria, thousands of protesters marched and tore down posters of Shafiq and Mursi. Protests also were staged in the Delta city of Daqahlia, where demonstrators chanted: “Against Mubarak, Father and Son! Against the Shoe and the Spare!” (“Spare” is a reference to Mursi, who was dubbed the “spare tire” after the junta disqualified the first candidate of the Brotherhood, Kheirat al-Shater, and Mursi was inserted as al-Shater’s replacement). Protesters also questioned the validity of the results, chanting: “Oh Bagato [the secretary general of SPEC], Tell the Truth! Was the Election Fraudulent or Not?”

Numerous violations were reported during the election process and there is a widespread feeling amongst Egyptian workers and youth that the whole framework of the elections is illegitimate. “The elections were clearly controlled by the state,” Alaa Shafani, a ceramic worker from Mansoura, told the Egyptian newspaper *Al Ahram Online*. His son lost his leg during clashes with the police last year. “I boycotted the elections in the first place because they are illegal,” he added. “How can you have presidential elections without a constitution?”

The elections were held under the dictatorial auspices of the US-backed SCAF, with emergency laws but no constitution in place. The army was deployed all across the country and armed soldiers controlled the polling stations. Various cases of voters who tried to document electoral violations being arrested have been reported.

All the candidates were handpicked by the military junta and are strong defenders of the Egyptian bourgeois state and the predominance of capitalist and imperialist rule in Egypt and throughout the region.

The renewed protests immediately after the first round of the elections are a blow to the US-backed “transition to democracy” organized by the Egyptian ruling elite and supported by all official political forces in Egypt—be they Islamist, liberal, or petty-bourgeois pseudo-left. All of these forces fear another eruption of the militant strikes and protests that brought down Mubarak in February of 2011. They are anxious to devise new political mechanisms to control the working class and intensify the counterrevolution.

On Monday, various liberal and “left” political parties—including the Egyptian Social Democratic Party, the Tagammu Party, the Popular Socialist Alliance, El-Adl, the Arab Nasserite Party and the Democratic Front—met to discuss the formation of a so-called “united front.” The meeting was attended by presidential candidate Amr Moussa. Sabahi had also been invited. The participants claimed their aim was to “protect the revolution and the civil state” and not to support either of the candidates in the second round.

In fact, the meeting made perfectly clear that the aim of the proposed front is the precise opposite. It drafted a document to be presented to both Shafiq and Mursi and a representative announced that the group could support one of the candidates if he endorsed the document. The main demand is the formation of a constituent assembly consisting of “all forces of society” and tasked with drafting a new constitution.

The Revolutionary Socialists (RS) issued a statement openly embracing the Muslim Brotherhood and calling for a vote for Mursi. As with the parties of the “united front,” the RS called on the Brotherhood to pledge to form a government of national unity including Sabahi and Fotouh.

Mursi has already sent signals that he is willing to cooperate with liberal and petty-bourgeois “left” forces. In a statement Tuesday he pledged to form a “coalition government” if elected. “This government would consist of politicians from a variety of groups, not just Islamists or Brotherhood members... and the prime minister will not be from the Brotherhood or the Freedom and Justice Party,” he said.

In the same statement, Mursi made clear that such a

government would intensify the counterrevolutionary offensive against the working class in collaboration with the military and the police. He praised the police and the army for securing the presidential elections, adding that “the status of policemen and officers will remain the same.”



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