

Egyptian junta stages coup against parliament

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The US-backed Egyptian military junta dissolved the Islamist-dominated parliament yesterday in a military coup. This came only two days before the run-offs in Egypt's presidential elections—the first since the ouster of dictator Hosni Mubarak amid mass working class protests last year.

The decision by the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) junta to dissolve parliament was preceded by a ruling of the Supreme Constitutional Court (SCC). It suddenly declared the electoral law under which the parliament was elected in November-January unconstitutional.

The SCC, a court composed of judges appointed by Mubarak, ruled that one third of the seats in parliament were invalid because candidates of political parties were elected for seats exclusively reserved for independents.

The junta's preparations for the ruling made clear that its main political target is the Egyptian working class, and that its main fear is the renewal of the working class struggles that brought down Mubarak last year. Before the court ruling, the junta tightened security in Cairo. Tanks were deployed in front of the heavily guarded courthouse.

The Corniche, a road along the banks of the Nile close to the court, was barricaded with barbed wire, with rows of soldiers behind it to cordon off protesters who shouted against the SCAF junta and demanded the cleansing of the judiciary. Angry youths set posters of Shafiq on fire and others waved their shoes in the air as a sign of contempt.

In the same court session, the SCC also approved the presidential candidacy of Ahmed Shafiq, the last prime minister under Mubarak. The first round of the elections had produced a run-off between Mohamed Mursi, the candidate of the Islamist Muslim Brotherhood (MB), and Shafiq, the military's preferred candidate.

Shafiq's candidacy was threatened by the so-called political isolation law, passed by the parliament earlier this year, which bars high-ranking officials of the Mubarak regime from running for office.

To secure Shafiq's position in the run-offs, the SCC declared the political isolation law unconstitutional as well. It cynically declared that the political isolation law directed against officials of the Mubarak dictatorship violates the right of equality before the law.

A military source quoted in the *Egyptian Independent* stated that the junta will also dissolve the constituent assembly elected by parliament on Tuesday and tasked with beginning the preparation of a new Egyptian constitution. Instead, "a constitutional declaration is scheduled to be issued by the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces, which includes the formation of the Constituent Assembly," the source said.

The court rulings and the junta's decisions have exposed the "democratic transition" promoted by the Egyptian ruling elite and its imperialist allies in the US and Europe as a fraud.

By dissolving the parliament and the constituent assembly, the SCAF is seizing all legislative authority it handed over to the parliament in January and taking back control of drafting the country's constitution.

The composition of the constituent assembly was one of the major points of conflict between SCAF and the Islamist-dominated parliament in recent months. By moving to control the drafting of the constitution, the junta is making clear it intends to completely control Egypt's political future. In particular, it can decide which powers the president will have or not have. Under these conditions, the presidential elections themselves have little real significance.

The immediate target of the military coup inside the Egyptian state machine is the Islamist MB. After the SCAF junta and the MB cooperated closely to suppress

the working class in the initial months of the revolution, divisions between them grew after the parliamentary elections won by the Islamists. Both the military and the MB control vast portions of the Egyptian economy and represent the economic and political interests of competing factions of the Egyptian ruling elite.

Immediately after Mubarak's judges had given a green light to Shafiq's campaign, he gave a televised press conference which had the air of a victory speech. He praised SCAF and the police and declared that he "will confront chaos and restore stability in the country."

In a blunt threat to his political rivals, he stated that "the era of settling accounts, writing laws that target specific people and using state institutions to achieve private goals is over."

After the court rulings were announced, the MB and its political arm, the Freedom and Justice Party (FJP), met for an emergency meeting. Mursi declared they would respect the SCC's ruling and that he would stay in the race. He said, "We'll go as far as we can, and if the former regime tries to rise, the revolution will be more severe this time."

Mursi made clear, however, that the goal of the MB is to reach a deal with the junta. He stressed that there is no option but "the revolution at the ballot boxes" demanding "the handover of power and an end to the transitional period."

US State Department spokeswoman Victoria Nuland made clear that Washington is tacitly backing the coup. She cynically declared that the US wants "to see the Egyptian people have what they fought for, which is a free, fair, democratic, transparent system of government—governance that represents the will of the people, a parliament so elected, a president so elected."

Nuland's comments are a cynical evasion. By voicing no objections to the coup, the US is supporting the SCAF's counterrevolutionary measures just as firmly as they backed their long-time stooge Mubarak last year as he unleashed deadly violence against mass working class protests.

With their counterrevolutionary offensive, Mubarak's generals are signaling that they are not only willing to fully reinstate the Mubarak regime, but are preparing to eliminate all potential centers of opposition inside the state machine and official politics.

The ultimate target of any such crackdown, however, will be the working class—which led the revolutionary struggles that brought down Mubarak and have repeatedly shaken the SCAF regime. The coup sets the stage for a violent confrontation between the junta and the working masses.

The day before the court rulings, the Ministry of Justice issued a decree allowing police, military police and state intelligence officers to arrest civilians. The decree was, in fact, a reintroduction of a stricter version of the emergency law that officially expired two weeks ago.

It allows the junta to detain anyone who is "harmful to the government," "destroys property," "resists orders" or "obstructs traffic."



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