

Egyptian workers mount mass strikes against US-backed junta

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Since the beginning of the week, a new wave of strikes and protests has spread over Egypt. Textile workers are on strike in the Nile Delta town of Mahalla al-Kubra, in Alexandria and in the coastal governorate of Daqaliya.

Ceramic workers in the industrial city of Suez, doctors in Marsa Matrouh, university workers in Kafr el-Sheikh, postal workers in Alexandria and Assiut and health workers on the Sinai Peninsula are also on strike. Other protests and strikes have been reported from Cairo, Bani Sueif and Minya.

The renewed strikes and protests reflect growing hostility in the working class to the reactionary policies of the US-backed military junta and its new Islamist figurehead, President Mohamed Mursi.

After Mursi's inauguration as the first president after the revolutionary ouster of dictator Hosni Mubarak last year, the Egyptian ruling elite's main goal is to further privatize the Egyptian economy, cut subsidies, and attract more foreign investment.

The Islamists and the junta generals are currently in discussions about forming a new cabinet, tasked with further attacks on the Egyptian masses. Among the names discussed for the new prime minister are three prominent bankers—Farouk El-Oqda, the current governor of the Central Bank of Egypt (CBE), former CBE governor Mahmoud Abul-Oyoun, and former deputy CBE governor Hesham Ramez.

The strikes are the working class' answer to the continuation of Mubarak-style free-market policies.

On Sunday 25,000 textile workers at the state-owned Mahalla Misr Spinning and Weaving Company in the industrial town of Mahalla al-Kubra went on strike and staged a sit-in at the factory. Workers demand an

increase in their share of the company's annual profits, higher retirement bonuses and the removal of the management.

The workers of Mahalla played a leading role in last year's revolution, and the Egyptian ruling elite is concerned that the mass strike could spark another revolution. On Monday and Tuesday workers of seven other Nile Delta textile factories went on strike, raising the same demands as Mahalla workers.

Members of the Freedom Justice Party (FJP), the political arm of the MB, reportedly tried to convince the Mahalla workers to end their strike, but were chased away.

The Egyptian daily *Al-Masry Al-Youm* published a video of the striking Mahalla workers which gives a picture of the militant mood among workers in Egypt.

In the video, a female worker expresses her disillusionment with the Islamist president who only cares about a tiny wealthy elite. "The first thing he does when he gets his hands on the presidency is to forget about us. He's only thinking about those earning 200,000 or half a million. He doesn't think about the workers who are sweating blood. Where are our rights? We can't even afford a crust of bread. Where is our president now? We want the minimum wage. Not one of our demands has been met."

A male colleague adds: "The revolution didn't bring anything to the workers of Misr Spinning in Mahalla. Back in 2006, we were getting profit-sharing bonuses of four and a half months. Other people are getting more and we're getting less. How can they bring in

someone like Fouad Abd-al-Alim [the new head of the public sector Holding Company for Textiles and Garment Production]? He was the most corrupt one here. He destroyed the factory in Mahalla and is destroying the rest of the public textile factories. The workers here are making the revolution again from the start. The coming revolution will be a workers' revolution.”

Threatened by the specter of a renewed revolution, the junta and the Islamists are seeking to violently repress the strike wave.

In Suez, one of the epicenters of the revolution, security forces fired tear gas at hundreds of factory workers of the Cleopatra Ceramics company on Tuesday. The workers stormed government buildings in the port town, demanding the prosecution of the owner of factory Mohamed Abul Enein, a former member of Mubarak's now-dissolved National Democratic Party (NDP). The workers accuse Enein of not paying wages, illegally firing workers, and being involved in the infamous “Battle of the Camels”—when Mubarak's thugs attacked protesting workers and youth on Tahrir square.

Military units reportedly entered Suez after the clashes between the workers and police forces, in which at least 15 workers were injured and 6 arrested.

In South Sinai, security forces reportedly fired live ammunition to disperse hundreds of health workers staging a sit-in in front of the office of the undersecretary of the Ministry of Health. The workers demanded higher incentives and protested poor health conditions inside the hospitals in South Sinai and the lack of medicines and equipment.

The regime did not dare to attack the Mahalla textile workers yet, however. It aims to rely on its pseudo-left supporters to bring the situation under control. Egypt's Minister of Industry and Commerce, Mahmoud Issa, reportedly plans to visit the Mahalla workers on Wednesday. On Tuesday evening, the secretary general of the Gharbiya governorate who went to the factory was not able to calm down the workers and they said they would continue the strike.

Amongst the negotiators are experienced petty-bourgeois elements, such as Kamal al-Fayoumi, who aim to shut down and sell out the strike. These figures try to present themselves as representatives of the workers but their policies are directly opposed to the interests of the working class and play into the hands of the counterrevolution.

Fayoumi is a member of the misnamed pseudo-left Revolutionary Socialists (RS) group, which is opposed to a second revolution against the junta, and a struggle for workers power and socialism. The RS supported Mursi in the presidential elections and claim that the Islamists can be pressured for social reforms.

While Mursi and the junta are violently cracking down on striking workers, the RS claim in their latest statement that “pressure on Mursi and the Muslim Brotherhood is just what will drive their decision in the right direction, the direction of completing the objectives of the revolution and overthrow the rule of the military and purge the state.”



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