

New Egyptian government sworn in by Islamist president Mursi

Johannes Stern
3 August 2012

On Thursday, the Egyptian cabinet was sworn in by Mohamed Mursi, the Islamist president of Egypt. The new government brings together figures of the Egyptian financial elite with representatives from the Egyptian military, the Islamist Muslim Brotherhood (MB), former ministers of the interim government of Prime Minister Kamal Ganzouri, and various technocrats.

The new government marks a seamless transition from the Mubarak dictatorship to Mursi. Most of the new ministers are either senior level bureaucrats of the Mubarak era or were amongst his closest allies.

Field Marshall Mohamed Hussein Tantawi, the head of the ruling Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) and de facto dictator of Egypt, keeps his post as defense minister. A close ally of the US, he was Mubarak's defense minister for two decades and had served as defense minister in seven governments before.

His appointment reflects the military's continued domination of all aspects of political life in Egypt. In a military coup shortly before the run-offs of the presidential elections, SCAF dissolved the parliament and took over all legislative and budgetary powers.

The military refuses to give up its political and economic privileges, and the inclusion of Mubarak-era bureaucrats into the government highlights that Mursi merely acts as a pliant figurehead for its rule.

Egypt's new Prime Minister, Hisham Qandil, who was already appointed by Mursi one week ago, made clear at a press conference that his government aims to continue all the pro-imperialist and anti-worker policies of the past. "Do we start from zero?" he asked, answering: "For sure, no. There has been serious and dedicated work in the past period by previous governments that we must build on."

Qandil himself headed the office of Mubarak-era

Irrigation and Water Resources Minister Mahmoud Abou Zeid from 1999 to 2005. Later he worked for the African Development Bank in Tunisia, before taking over the Irrigation Ministry in the post-Mubarak interim governments of Essam Sharaf and Kamal El-Ganzouri. Qandil is a technocrat considered to be close to the MB. Like Mursi, Qandil is an US-trained scientist, having received his PhD at North Carolina State University.

The new interior minister is Police General Ahmed Gamal Eddin. Eddin personifies the repressive police apparatus of the Egyptian state. As deputy interior minister under Ganzouri, he regularly ordered brutal crackdowns against peaceful protesters and strikers. He has close family ties to former stalwarts of Mubarak's now-dissolved National Democratic Party (NDP) and is the nephew of Abdel Ahad Gamal Eddin, the leader of the NDP's last parliamentary bloc.

Six ministers of Ganzouri's interim cabinet retained their positions—including Foreign Minister Mohammed Kamel Amr, Finance Minister Mumtaz al-Saeed, Minister of Insurance and Social Affairs Nagwa Khalil, and Scientific Research Minister Nadia Zakhary.

The Muslim Brotherhood and its political arm, the Freedom and Justice Party (FJP), are taking over four ministries—housing, youth, information and manpower. The handing over of the information and manpower ministries to the MB is significant, as the MB is notorious for its hostility to strikes and its anti-working class propaganda.

After the revolutionary ouster of Mubarak on February 11 last year, the MB supported the anti-strike and protest law issued by SCAF. During the latest wave of strikes, leading FJP members denounced strikers as "remnants of the old regime" aiming to destabilize Mursi's presidency.

The new Minister of Manpower, Khaled El-Azhary, is also a member of the board of the state-controlled Egyptian Trade Union Federation (ETUF), the official federation of yellow unions that acts as a police force in the factories to control the workers. Former ETUF leader Hussein Megawer currently faces charges for helping organize the infamous “Battle of the Camels,” when government thugs attacked protesting workers and youth on Tahrir Square on February 2, 2011.

The new government has already vowed to continue and even intensify the neo-liberal economic policies which sparked the mass working class uprisings last year.

All major economic portfolios were given to bureaucrats or businessmen dedicated to the economic policies of the Mubarak-regime. The Ministry of Investment was handed to Osama Saleh, the chairman of Egypt's General Authority for Free Zones and Investment. The new minister of Trade and Industry is Hatem Saleh, the CEO of Gozour Food Industry Group, a subsidiary of Citadel Capital.

Citadel Capital is the leading private equity firm in the Middle East and Africa, headed by Egyptian tycoon Ahmed Heikal.

According to reports on Egyptian state television, Mursi has appointed former interim Prime Minister Ganzouri as his personal advisor. Ganzouri is a former Mubarak official who had already served a first term as prime minister in 1996-1999. He is a strong advocate of free-market policies and has close ties to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank.

The inauguration of the new Egyptian government was a show of political cynicism. Only shortly before the cabinet was sworn in Qandil praised it as a “people's government.” Minutes later he announced that members of his cabinet will hold a meeting on Saturday to discuss “our next steps” in order to receive a new IMF loan.

He declared that an agreement with the IMF would help to balance the budget, pursue economic reforms and restore the confidence of foreign investment. On Wednesday, Qandil already announced that Egypt had agreed to a loan of US\$200 million from the World Bank.

While the Egyptian ruling elite is preparing deep attacks on the working class, social discontent is

growing and heading towards another explosion. On the same day the government was sworn in hundreds of urban poor stormed a luxury tower on the Nile in downtown Cairo. Security forces fired at the crowd with tear gas and live ammunition, killing at least one person. Witnesses reported that the violence broke out when one worker doing temporary security work at the tower was refused payment.

Witnesses told the *Egyptian Independent* that security guards opened fire at the worker when he demanded his salary.

Media also reported seventeen strikes and sit-ins blocking railways all over Egypt Thursday. The protesters demonstrated against water and power cuts, bad working conditions and low wages. Hany Hegab, head of the Egyptian National Railways Authority, complained that Egypt's railroads have witnessed 870 protests and strikes since the outbreak of the Egyptian revolution on January 25 of last year. He called upon the new government to introduce and enforce laws against blocking trains.



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