

Mass protests erupt in Egypt against Mursi's antidemocratic decrees

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24 November 2012

Mass protests erupted throughout Egypt on Friday against the country's president, Mohamed Mursi, and the ruling Muslim Brotherhood (MB). The day before, Mursi had issued a new Constitutional Declaration expanding his dictatorial powers, which he initially claimed by taking over the powers of the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) junta in August.

In scenes reminiscent of the early days of the Egyptian Revolution, tens of thousands of protesters gathered in Tahrir Square in Cairo. Angry youth chanted slogans against Mursi and the MB and for the continuation of the revolution. Common chants were: "Down with the regime of the Brotherhood Supreme Guide", "The people want to topple the Brothers" and "The people still want the downfall of the regime."

Demonstrators were attacked by police with tear gas, rubber bullets and armored vehicles in the streets around Tahrir Square. Central Security Forces and army units cordoned off the Cabinet building and Parliament headquarters with barbed wire. Police trucks with anti-riot police were deployed in downtown Cairo.

Heavy clashes took place in Cairo's Mohammad Mahmoud Street, where fighting between protesters and police forces has continued since Monday. Angry youth chanted against the Ministry of Interior while fighting the security forces. Since Monday hundreds of protesters have been injured and over one hundred arrested.

Anti-Brotherhood protests took place in various Egyptian cities. In the coastal city of Alexandria, thousands called for the "Fall of the Supreme Guide" after Friday prayers ended in Al-Qaed Ibrahim Mosque. A pro-Mursi crowd was also reportedly present at the Mosque, and clashes erupted between both sides.

Later in the day, protesters stormed three local headquarters of the Freedom and Justice Party (FJP),

the political arm of the MB. They chanted "Down with the rule of the Supreme Guide." Alexandria's security head, Abdel Meguid Lotfy, ordered security forces to secure the FJP's main headquarters in the city.

Another FJP headquarters was stormed in Port Said. After clashes with Brotherhood members, protesters climbed the building and tore down the FJP's sign. In the industrial city of Mahalla al-Kubra, street fights were reported between protesters and supporters of the Brotherhood. Anti-Brotherhood protests took also place in Ismailia, Assiut, Suez, Minya, Damietta and Aswan.

Mursi denounced protesters as "paid thugs." Speaking before a crowd of supporters in front of the Presidential Palace in Heliopolis, he claimed that protesters "were paid to throw rocks in Mohamed Mahmoud" and vowed not to accept any attack on state institutions.

Mursi appealed to the liberal and pseudo-left forces from the political establishment who were active in the protests. "The Constitutional Declaration does not aim to exact revenge on anyone," he declared, adding: "I stand by you, whoever you are or wherever you are...those who support me and those who oppose me. I would never be biased towards one camp against the other."

As during last year's mass revolutionary protests against President Hosni Mubarak, US imperialism stands firmly behind the Egyptian regime. While Mursi prepared his declaration, US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton told a press conference in Cairo on Wednesday: "Egypt's new government is assuming the responsibility and leadership that has long made this country a cornerstone of regional stability and peace."

Washington has reacted to Mursi's power grab by cynically calling for calm, and for the Egyptian people to engage in "democratic dialogue" with the latest

dictator to function as their stooge in Cairo.

“The decisions and declarations announced on November 22 raise concerns for many Egyptians and for the international community,” said State Department spokeswoman Victoria Nuland. “We call for calm and encourage all parties to work together and call for all Egyptians to resolve their differences over these important issues peacefully and through democratic dialogue.”

The protests reflect rising popular hostility to Mursi and the ruling MB—which is continuing Mubarak’s anti-working class and pro-imperialist policies—as well as rising tensions inside the Egyptian ruling elite.

The protests on Friday were initially called by a coalition of various liberal and pseudo-left parties—including the Socialist Alliance Party, the Revolutionary Socialists (RS), and the Free Egyptians Party of billionaire tycoon Nagib Sawiris—to protest against the Islamists’ control over the drafting of Egypt’s new constitution.

Since Monday, however, which marked the anniversary of last year’s Mohammad Mahmoud protests against the military junta, youth have been fighting Mursi’s security forces in downtown Cairo.

During Israel’s brutal onslaught against Gaza, Mursi proved to be a stooge of Western imperialism. While hundreds of rockets rained down on the defenseless population of Gaza, Mursi collaborated closely with Israel and the US to isolate the Palestinians and put himself forward as the new figurehead of US imperialism in the region.

Inside Egypt itself, moreover, Mursi is preparing huge attacks on the working class. On Tuesday he secured a \$4.8 billion loan from the International Monetary Fund (IMF), based on plans to cut Egypt’s budget deficit and further liberalize its economy. On Wednesday his government approved gasoline subsidy cuts.

The final trigger for the protests was Mursi’s presidential declaration. In Article VI of his statement Mursi claims extraordinary powers, declaring that, “the president is authorized to take any measures he sees fit in order to preserve and safeguard the revolution, national unity or national security.”

The announcement made clear to broad sections of the Egyptian population that Mursi is an enemy of the working class. He is ready to use ruthless, dictatorial

measures to try to crush the population and pursue the same basic policies pursued by Mubarak.

“Mursi said he will deal with protesters firmly, this is exactly what Mubarak said before,” explained Mahmoud El-Banna, who came from the Upper Egyptian city of Beni Suef to Tahrir Square in order to protest against Mursi.

Expecting opposition to his power grab, Mursi called upon MB members to come out and protest to show their support. Even though the MB bussed in their supporters from the countryside, and the Salafist Nur and Asala Parties and the ultra-Islamist Al-Gama’a Al-Islamiyya joined the protests, the crowds in Tahrir Square dwarfed the Islamist protesters.



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