

# Mass anti-Mursi protests, clashes with police in Cairo

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Protests Tuesday against the dictatorial powers assumed by Egyptian President Mohamed Mursi on November 22 and his efforts to ram through a new constitution via a referendum scheduled for December 15 culminated in a massive march on the presidential palace.

Outside the presidential palace protesters cut through a barbed wire and police fired tear gas in response. Mursi quit the palace amid fighting between protesters and hundreds of police.

The march began from several mosques and converged towards the Itihadiya palace in Heliopolis. “Freedom or we die,” chanted protesters. Others chanted, “Mohammed Morsi! Illegitimate! Brotherhood! Illegitimate!” Still others shouted, “Down with the sons of dogs. We are the power and we are the people,” and “The people want the downfall of the regime.”

Large numbers also gathered in Tahrir Square and a major protest was held in Egypt’s second city Alexandria.

Earlier protests had mobilised over 200,000 on Tahrir Square on November 27 and November 30. In addition, thousands of workers from Misr Spinning in Mahalla al-Kubra protested last week along with local residents in a 5,000-strong demonstration that ended in pitched battles with supporters of the Muslim Brotherhood.

The Brotherhood responded with a national mobilisation on December 1, followed by a siege of the Supreme Constitutional Court December 2. That body, dominated by Mubarak-era loyalists, was expected to declare the constitutional assembly that passed the pro-Islamic draft charter illegitimate and disband the Shura Council, parliament’s upper house. The judges responded by declaring a strike.

Mursi’s November 22 decree placed his decisions

beyond judicial oversight and barred any judicial body from dissolving the Islamist-dominated body that drafted and approved the new constitution.

On Monday, a rift emerged within the judiciary when top judges on the Supreme Judicial Council said they would ensure judicial supervision of the referendum. This was against demands for a boycott by a thousand judges, members of the Egyptian Judges Club, who had declared a boycott of the referendum Sunday. Al Zind from the Judges Club countered claims that the statement of the Supreme Judicial Council was proof of acceptance of Mursi’s move by insisting that 90 percent of judges were refusing to participate “but there are also Muslim Brotherhood judges.”

The Egyptian and world media also reported as a significant breakthrough for Mursi a meeting Sunday of the electoral commission, also led by senior judges. But Yousseri Abdel-Karim, a former spokesman of the electoral commission, said the meeting had to take place for legal reasons and did not mean that judges would oversee the referendum. “Judges don’t retreat and we fear nothing, and we will not change our position,” he said.

Protests were also mounted involving the refusal of at least 12 major independent newspapers and four television stations to publish or broadcast Tuesday and/or today. Article 48 of the draft constitution supports freedom of the press, but adds the caveat that “there may be an exception in times of war or national mobilization.”

The protest also spread to state-controlled media, with staff of the Internet edition of *al-Ahram* marching Monday to the journalists’ union in central Cairo. On Sunday, state television presenter Hala Fahmy carried a white shroud while hosting a current affairs program and was taken off the air. She told viewers, “We have

to tell the truth whatever the price is.”

Despite the scale of popular opposition, Mursi has been emboldened by calculations that his liberal and secular opponents are unwilling to risk escalating a conflict that could get out of their control and threaten the interests of the entire Egyptian bourgeoisie. The eruption of an insurgent movement of the working class of the type that brought down Hosni Mubarak in 2011 is anathema to both sides of the bitter factional conflict that has erupted within ruling circles.

In a piece written for the *Financial Times*, Mohamed ElBaradei, the coordinator of the opposition National Salvation Front, insisted that Mursi had to rescind his decree, drop plans for the referendum and agree on a new, more representative constituent assembly to draft a democratic constitution. But ElBaradei added a warning: “If they [the Muslim Brotherhood] continue to try, they risk an eruption into violence and chaos that will destroy the fabric of Egyptian society.”

The National Salvation Front was formed by ElBaradei along with the Nasserist Dignity Party leader and presidential candidate Hamdeen Sabbahi and the former Mubarak-regime stalwart Amr Moussa.

Emad Gad, a leader of the Social Democratic Party, spoke of plans for “a permanent coalition” of opposition groups, but added, “I’m afraid of a confrontation. I do not want to use the term civil war.”

The opposition’s official statement on yesterday’s marches stressed that their aim was confined to sending “a message to President Mohammad Mursi that he has to listen to the national opposition, who is keen to fulfil the objectives of the revolution.”

The Islamists ultimately base themselves on the tacit backing of the United States and other imperialist powers, who view the Brotherhood as a vital regional ally in Tunisia, Libya, Syria and elsewhere, as well as in Egypt, where they expect it to safeguard their substantial investments from any threat from below. To this end they all want Mursi’s constitution, with its measures safeguarding military rule and allowing for repression, to be passed, whatever their pro-forma concerns about sharia law, women’s rights, separation of powers and the like.

Even as the Supreme Court was being surrounded by protesters Sunday, Prime Minister Hisham Qandeel was announcing his policies to enhance “the business environment in the coming period and its commitment

to all international agreements in all areas... thus making Egypt an ideal destination for foreign direct investments.”

He spoke by video to the National United States-Arab Chamber of Commerce, insisting that trade with the US “will be crucial for all world countries in the coming period.” He boasted that the trade exchange between Egypt and the US reached \$8.2 billion in 2011 and US investments in Egypt reached \$14.5 billion.

The Cairo stock market made gains on news that the referendum would go ahead despite what Mohamed Radwan at Pharos Securities derided as “all the noise and demonstrations that might take place until then.”

For its part, the mouthpiece of the British liberal bourgeoisie, the *Guardian*, urged the opposition parties to act in accordance with the essential requirement to return Egypt to political stability so that social unrest can be quelled and profits restored.

It called on Mursi’s opponents, “secular, liberal and Christian,” to recognise that, for all its faults, the draft constitution was “a mixed bag” that did not merit “walkouts, months of paralysis.” The commentary continued: “Both sides have forgotten what happened 22 months ago when Egyptians put aside their sectarian identities on entering Tahrir Square and waved the national flag instead. In the name of that flag, those who claim to be democrats need to rediscover the long forgotten art of compromise.”

Compromise is not what motivates the hundreds of thousands of working people who took to the streets of Cairo yesterday. Still less does it motivate Mursi and his supporters. What is urgently required is a socialist political leadership that articulates the independent interests of workers and youth rather than those of rival factions of the capitalist class, all of which seek to exploit the workers and hide their own aims behind hollow democratic and nationalist rhetoric.



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