

# Protests spread throughout Egypt against Islamist dictatorship

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Mass protests against the ruling Islamist Muslim Brotherhood (MB) and US-backed President Mohamed Mursi's assertion of dictatorial powers spread throughout Egypt yesterday.

Hundreds of thousands of workers and youth defied a protest ban in the Egyptian capital, Cairo, and marched to the Ittihadeya Presidential Palace. Protesters broke through barbed wire barricades and concrete walls erected by the army in the streets leading to the palace. They chanted "Oh army, oh army, you are the right hand of the Brotherhood, you are cowards", "Down with military rule", and "Down, down Mohamed Mursi."

Thwarting Mursi's attempt to crush further protests at his palace, protesters passed through rows of soldiers and tanks stationed around the building. They surrounded the palace, chanting: "Revolution is back again." In scenes recalling the early days of the Egyptian Revolution and the initial working-class uprising against President Hosni Mubarak, demonstrators climbed on tanks and sprayed slogans on armored vehicles.

Hundreds of protesters marched to the Heliopolis Court, demanding the release of workers and youth detained since the brutal crackdown on Wednesday night, when the MB's Islamist militias arrested and tortured protesters in collaboration with the police.

As protests swelled in Heliopolis, hundreds of thousands also gathered on Tahrir Square, the iconic center of the Egyptian revolution in downtown Cairo. Chanting slogans against Mursi and the MB, workers and youth shut down traffic in and out of the square and erected barricades at its entrances.

Protests took place in all major cities and regions throughout the country.

In the coastal metropolis of Alexandria, thousands

marched from al-Qaed Ibrahim Mosque on the corniche towards Sidi Gaber in the north of the city, where the headquarters of the Northern Military Region of the Egyptian Army is located. Responding to the violent crackdown in Cairo, protesters chanted: "The regime has lost its legitimacy, they killed our brothers and sisters at the presidential palace."

Later in the evening, *Al-Ahram's* Arabic web site reported that hundreds of demonstrators stormed the MB's governorate headquarters, angry at the killing of other protesters by what they called "armed militias affiliated to the Muslim Brotherhood."

In Zagazig, Mursi's hometown in the east of the Nile Delta, protesters gathered in front of Mursi's house, throwing rocks at the building. Security forces fired tear gas canisters into the crowd. Protesters also attacked the headquarters of the Freedom and Justice Party (FJP), the political arm of the MB.

In upper Egypt, thousands of protesters marched in the streets of Assiut, chanting slogans against the MB and Mursi.

Anti-MB protests across the country dwarfed a pro-MB gathering at the Al-Azhar Mosque in Cairo, which was attended by around 50,000 people.

The MB responded with more threats of violence. Friday night the Arabic web site of the state-owned *Al-Ahram* daily reported, "President Mohamed Mursi will issue a decree and task the armed forces to maintain security and protect vital installations of the state" until a constitution is adopted and elections are held. Article III of the new decree reportedly reestablishes the military's power to arrest civilians and try them in military courts.

With the decree, which is to be published in the official *Gazette* and take effect the day following its publication, Mursi and the Egyptian military are

declaring emergency law and preparing for mass repression after two weeks of nationwide protests and strikes.

As the Egyptian masses' hatred of Mursi explodes, the working class is moving more and more to the forefront of the movement.

In the industrial city of Mahalla al-Kubra in the Nile Delta, thousands of workers and youth cut railways and blocked the entrances of the city. According to media reports, protesters stormed the city council and declared the city "independent" from the "Muslim Brotherhood state." They announced plans to elect a "revolutionary council" to organize the city's affairs.

The home of one of the biggest textile mills in the Middle East, Mahalla has a long history of militant working-class struggles. In 2006, a mass strike by the textile workers triggered a wave of strikes against free-market reforms and for better wages and living conditions. In April 2008, rising food prices sparked an uprising in Mahalla in which workers demanded the downfall of dictator Hosni Mubarak. In 2011, Mahalla workers played an important role in the mass strike wave that brought down Mubarak on February 11.

The renewed explosion of mass struggles came one day after Mursi gave a defiant speech on state TV. Recalling the speeches of Mubarak before he was ousted, Mursi denounced protesters as "infiltrators" who "will not escape punishment." He also vowed to maintain the November 22 presidential decree by which he claimed all legislative, judicial, constitutional and executive powers.

As during last year's uprising against Mubarak, Washington is backing its Egyptian stooge regime. The White House issued a statement saying that President Barack Obama "welcomed President Mursi's call for a dialogue with the opposition, but stressed that such a dialogue should occur without preconditions." The statement continued: "The president noted that the United States has also urged opposition leaders to join in this dialogue without preconditions."

Protesters mocked Mursi as a tool of US imperialism. The British *Guardian* reported that one protester carried a placard reading: "Obama, your bitch is our dictator."

Mohamed ElBaradei, the leader of the National Salvation Front (NSF), the main umbrella group of the Egyptian bourgeois opposition, consisting of various

liberal and pseudo-left parties, gave an interview on the private satellite channel ON TV in which he asked workers and youth to stop their protests. He stressed the importance of finding a way "for all to live together" through a "representative constitution and parliament," and said this could not happen if protests continued.

Shortly after ElBaradei's speech, Egyptian Vice-President Mahmoud Mekki read a presidential statement announcing that Mursi would consider postponing the referendum on the constitution drafted last week by the Islamist-dominated constituent assembly. Mursi had set the referendum for December 15.



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