

Court suspends Egyptian parliamentary elections before explosive Port Said verdict

Johannes Stern
9 March 2013

Amid a deepening political and economic crisis in Egypt, the Cairo Administrative Court (CAC) has suspended parliamentary elections in Egypt scheduled to begin on April 22.

The decision reflects deepening concern in the Egyptian ruling class over the rising opposition of Egyptian workers and youth to Islamist President Mohamed Mursi and the ruling Muslim Brotherhood (MB). Renewed protests and strikes have gripped the country since the second anniversary of the Egyptian Revolution on January 25.

Mass discontent over the anti-working class policies pursued by the Egyptian ruling elite threatens to explode over the “Port Saïd verdict” scheduled for Saturday morning. Since the initial court ruling on January 26, which sentenced 21 fans of Port Saïd’s Al-Masry Football Club to death, the Suez Canal city is in a state of insurrection which threatens to spread through other cities.

Today’s ruling will decide the fate of the 52 remaining defendants, including 9 police officers. They are accused of attacking fans of Cairo’s Al-Ahly club in a soccer game against El-Masry on February 1 last year in which some 73 Ahly fans were killed and roughly 1,000 wounded. (See: “Mass protests in Egypt against pro-junta football riot”)

Fan groups of both teams have repeatedly clashed with police forces in recent days. Al-Ahly fans, who played a major role in street fighting against Mubarak’s thugs in the initial months of the revolution, believe that the massacre was plotted by security forces to take revenge. The fans of rival football club El-Masry, the Ultras Green Eagles, are demanding the release of their comrades saying that Mursi and the MB are using them as political scapegoats.

Both sides vowed to increase their campaigns of

“civil disobedience” if no justice is done. *Ahram Online* described the critical situation hours before the verdict: “The 9 March verdict could not have come at a worse time for Egypt’s beleaguered President Mursi, who is already struggling to control an outpouring of anger in several cities including the canal cities of Suez and Ismailia and the Nile Delta cities of Tanta, Mahalla and Mansoura.”

The court ruling on Wednesday to halt the elections came after the oppositional National Salvation Front (NSF), an umbrella group of bourgeois liberal and “left” parties, announced a boycott of the elections. NSF leader and former UN diplomat Mohamed ElBaradei warned last week that elections risked setting Egypt on a “road to total chaos and instability,” as society was “completely polarized.”

The CAC accused Mursi of violating Article 141 of the new constitution and unilaterally calling for elections without consulting with the cabinet. Mursi called for elections by decree on February 21. The court also stated that Mursi and the MB had violated Article 177, which holds that the Supreme Constitutional Court (SCC) must examine political laws before they are ratified by the president. It returned the election law to the SCC to decide over its constitutionality.

The decision was welcomed by both the opposition and the Muslim Brotherhood.

Amr Moussa, leader of the Conference Party and long-time foreign minister under ousted dictator Hosni Mubarak, celebrated the ruling against the elections as a “gift from the sky.” He told the state MENA news agency: “Let’s think without being stubborn. ... Halting the elections is beneficial for everyone. The time we will be given by the decision to halt it will open the door to many possibilities, a lot of them positive and hopeful.”

Essam El-Erian, the Vice-Chairman of the Freedom and Justice Party (FJP), the political arm of the MB, declared: “We will abide by this decision. We affirm our respect for all judicial ruling”. He stressed the “importance of positive participation” in coming elections and invited the Shura Council, the upper house of Egypt’s parliament, “to consider the verdict” and “to discuss the merits of the ruling and how to deal with it.”

Amid rising discontent from below, both sections of the Egyptian ruling elite regard the decision to cancel the elections as a chance to overcome their differences in order to “bring back security”, suppress protests and strikes, and regroup to prepare new attacks against the working class.

The ruling came only a few days after US Secretary of State John Kerry’s visit to Cairo last weekend for talks with Mursi, Defense Minister General Abdel-Fattah el-Sissi, and representatives of the NSF. A key purpose of Kerry’s visit was to pressure the Egyptian ruling elite to “come together around the economic choices and to find some common ground.”

Two years after the ouster of long-time dictator and US-stooge Hosni Mubarak in mass revolutionary struggles, US imperialism seeks to re-stabilize Egyptian capitalism—one of the main pillars of its strategic and economic position in the Middle East.

In a comment published two days ago, Hicham Mourad, editor-in-chief of the Egyptian French-language weekly *Al-Ahram Hebdo*, laid out the considerations guiding US imperialism.

He wrote, “The US seeks to maintain Egypt’s stability. And this was the actual content of the message delivered by Kerry. The US wants the continuation and success of Egypt’s democratic transition and aspires to create the conditions for political stability necessary to the preservation of US interests in the Middle East.”

Washington wants Egypt not only to secure the planned \$4.8 billion loan with the IMF and carry through related austerity measures against the workers. It also regards a politically stable Egyptian ally as critical to its plans to intensify its proxy war in Syria and prepare for war against Iran.

Now, the Egyptian ruling elite is desperately trying to seize upon the court ruling to regain its control over Port Said, and end strikes and protests by workers and

youth all over the country.

On Monday, security forces broke up a sit-in by temporary railway sanitation workers in Luxor who were blocking trains between Aswan and Cairo and Alexandria. On Wednesday police arrested 160 protesters on Tahrir Square in Cairo. Amongst those arrested were eight minors who set fire to an armored vehicle of the Central Security Forces (CSF).

On Friday evening, the Egyptian military was reinforced in Port Said and completely took over the city after police forces withdrew. In the past week, there were continuing heavy clashes between protesters and police, mainly around government buildings and the police headquarters, which were partially burned down. At least five protesters were shot by police.

The unrest of the recent weeks and days is straining police and security forces. In the industrial center of Mahalla, the Interior Ministry is relying on forces of the nearby Menoufiya governorate to fight protesters, demanding the fall of Mursi and the MB Friday night. After renewed clashes in Cairo, CSF forces tasked with guarding MB headquarters in the Moqattam district reportedly withdrew from their positions.



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