

Mursi, army debate imposing martial law as strike wave shakes Egypt

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In advance of a possible bread strike, as workers struggles spread throughout Egypt, Egyptian President Mohamed Mursi is in talks with the army to impose martial law.

Bakers are threatening a strike, protesting a government decision to withhold 400 million Egyptian pounds (\$59 million) in government payments to bakeries that prepare low-cost bread for the poor. The loaves sell for 5 piastres, or less than 1 US cent.

Bakers expect to meet Prime Minister Hesham Qandil of the ruling Muslim Brotherhood this week to discuss terms. Last week the Mursi government threatened bakers with legal action if they strike.

Numerous transport workers have also gone on strike over the last week, with bus drivers in Mahalla, Cairo, Giza, and other cities protesting fuel shortages and rising fuel prices.

Mursi is moving to cut subsidies, above all for fuel and food, which make up approximately 25 percent of the Egyptian budget. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) is demanding deep cuts in these subsidies, on which the Egyptian working class depends, as the precondition for a \$4.8 billion loan to the Mursi government. US Secretary of State John Kerry visited Cairo last month, pressing for Egypt to agree to the IMF loan.

In Tahrir Square, banners protesting Kerry's visit read, "Kerry, member of the Brotherhood," or "Kerry, you are not welcome here."

Strikes and protests have since spread throughout Egypt. Over the last week, an estimated 1,300 factories have closed amid strike action in the Nile Delta industrial center at Mahalla in protest at the Islamist government, according to the state-run daily *Al Ahram*.

School and university students have also protested, demanding the ouster of the regime and of the Muslim

Brotherhood.

Yesterday university students clashed with security forces at Misr International University (MIU) in Cairo. They were joined by students from German University in Cairo, American University in Cairo, the British University in Egypt, and members of the Ultras White Knights, an association of fans of Cairo's Zamalek football team.

Protests against the Brotherhood have spread around Egypt since Port Said erupted in protests on January 26, over death sentences handed down to Port Said football fans accused of participating in a deadly, police-instigated football riot in February 2012 against fans of the Al Ahly football club. (See also: "Deadly clashes erupt across Egypt after Port Said court verdict")

In February the protests spread throughout the Suez Canal region, including to Suez and Ismailia, escalated after the March 9 judgment acquitting seven police officers of involvement in the riot.

The ruling also split the police, with sections of Egyptian police and the notorious Central Security Forces refusing orders to attack protesters, which intensified fears in the ruling class. Earlier this month, the Cairo courts suspended elections scheduled for April 22.

This was in particular demanded by the bourgeois "left" parties, who are terrified of the renewed upsurge in the working class. Former UN diplomat Mohamed ElBaradei of the National Salvation Front (NSF) backed the cancellation of the election, and warned that elections would place Egypt on a "road to total chaos and instability."

On Sunday, Mursi announced that he was considering whether to "impose exceptional measures to restore domestic order," and saying he was "afraid" he might have to do so.

According to *Al Ahram*, Mursi met for a closed-door session on Monday with Defense Minister Abdel-Fattah El-Sisi. Mursi reportedly asked El-Sisi whether he would approve imposing exceptional measures. Apparently, El-Sisi refused to give Mursi his approval.

El-Sisi later stated that “the economic, social, and security challenges that Egypt faces require that all forces of society unite and work together to overcome the current crisis.”

The capitalist parties are desperately trying to reassemble a functioning apparatus of repression against the working class. Far right-wing groups affiliated with the Brotherhood have proposed plans for para-military squads or “security militias” to defend the regime.

Saber Abul Fotouh, the head of the labor committee of the Freedom and Justice Party (FJP), the MB’s political arm, asserted the necessity for developing “alternative methods to maintain security in the country in light of a recent wave of police strike”. “Alternative methods” clearly refers to the mobilization of far-right groups for violent attacks against the Egyptian working class.

Brotherhood members are reportedly forming militias in more rural areas, such as the southern provinces of Upper Egypt.

The NSF and other pro-capitalist opposition parties, meanwhile, have raised the possibility of a coalition government between the secular parties, with an expanded role for the military, to replace the Brotherhood.

The Brotherhood crackdown comes amid signals that US imperialism is looking for more secular forces to wage its proxy war against Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, in particular, and more broadly throughout the region.

Fearful of losing ground to rivals inside the Egyptian political establishment, the Brotherhood is threatening to cut off bourgeois “left” parties’ sources of funding and proceeding with a crackdown against them.

The FJP is pushing strict laws against foreign-funded Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) operating in Egypt. Washington works closely with NGOs, forging ties with petty-bourgeois groups and trade unions, to suppress working class struggles and advance US imperialist interests.

The regime has also issued court summons for five

activists and against 169 additional persons, including party leaders, alleged “thugs” and political figures. These include Egyptian Social Democratic Party leader Mohamed Abul-Ghar, Free Egyptians Party member Mahmoud El-Alaily, and former Revolution Youth Coalition member Khaled Telima. Those summoned for questioning are accused of inciting demonstrations against the Brotherhood on March 22.

“If investigations prove that certain political figures are implicated, the necessary measures will be taken against them, whatever their status,” Mursi said on his Twitter account on Sunday, also carried on state television.

He added, “I am a president after a revolution, meaning that we can sacrifice a few so the country can move forward. It is absolutely no problem.”

At the same time, sections of the military are apparently considering whether to oust Mursi and install the bourgeois and pseudo-left parties in power, calculating that these forces are better able to control the situation than the Brotherhood.

General Mohamed Ali Bilal criticized “the clear inefficiency of the current administration,” attacking the Brotherhood for using “methods similar to those that were adopted by the old regime” of Hosni Mubarak, whom the working class toppled in mass protests in February 2011.



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