Mass protests erupt against US-backed Mursi regime in Egypt

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Egypt is witnessing a renewed upsurge of mass working class struggles. On the first anniversary of Islamist president Mohamed Mursi's inauguration, millions poured into the country's streets and squares to demand his ouster and that of Mursi's Muslim Brotherhood (MB).

In scenes reminiscent of the struggles which led to the ouster of Egypt's long-time dictator nearly two and a half years ago, workers and youth gathered in the iconic places of the Egyptian Revolution, chanting: "Get out" and "The people want the fall of the regime."

In Cairo several marches converged in Tahrir Square. Crowds swelled to up to an estimated one million in the early evening hours, vowing to stay until Mursi leaves office. Another mass protest in the capital took place in front of the heavily-guarded presidential palace in Ittihadia, where hundreds of thousands came together.

Massive protests took place in all major cities throughout the country's 27 governorates. In the Mediterranean port city of Alexandria, hundreds of thousands filled Sidi Gaber Square, determined to oust Mursi.

In the industrial city of Mahalla, one of the centers of the Egyptian revolution, tens of thousands gathered in Al-Shoun Square, chanting revolutionary slogans against Mursi. Reportedly 90 percent of workers at the state-owned Mahalla Misr Spinning and Weaving company—Egypt's largest factory, employing over 25,000 workers—went on strike to join the protests.

Other mass protests took place in Mansoura, Damanhour, Minya, Tanta, Sharqia and the Suez Canal cities of Port Said, Suez and Ismailia. A military source quoted by the Egyptian daily *Al-Shorouk* said that 17 million people took to the streets in one of the largest protests since the beginning of the revolution.

"The scenes of protests are unprecedented in size and scope, and seemingly surpass those during the 18-day uprising that toppled Mubarak," Michael Hanna, a fellow at the Century Foundation and Egypt analyst told the British *Guardian*.

In some locations, protests took an insurrectionary character, and violent clashes between anti-government protesters and Mursi supporters erupted. In Cairo protesters attacked the national headquarters of the MB with Molotov cocktails, while Islamist militants defended themselves with shotguns from inside the building.

In the Upper Egyptian town of Assiut, assailants killed three protesters as thousands of anti-Mursi protesters marched towards the local FJP headquarters.

As in 2011, the mass protests are driven by Egypt's staggering social inequality—which has increased under the rule of the military junta and the Muslim Brotherhood—and the repressive character of the US-backed Egyptian state apparatus.

Mohamed Ramadan Badawy, a protester from the Southern governorate of Qena who joined a delegation from Upper Egypt travelling to Cairo to join protests on Tahrir Square, told *Ahram Online*: "Egyptians don't have their basic needs, we have a massive problem of unemployment particularly within the youth, killing continues under [Mursi's] rule, then there is the breakdown of the state, like train accidents and electricity outages. Egyptian poverty is on the rise, to the point where people are eating from the rubbish."

As in 2011, mass anger is again directed against the United States, the main imperialist power backing Mursi's repressive Islamist regime. After the revolutionary ouster of its long-time stooge, Mubarak, Washington first backed a military junta and then threw its support behind the MB to defend its economic and

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strategic interests throughout the Middle East. Mursi has aligned himself on the ongoing US-led war in Syria to oust President Bashar al-Assad, pledging to "materially and morally" support Western-backed Islamist opposition militias.

Only a few days ago, US Ambassador to Egypt Anne Patterson denounced protests against Mursi, effectively issuing a blank check to the Islamists to violently suppress the protests.

"Some say that street action will produce better results than elections. To be honest, my government and I are deeply skeptical", she said, adding: "Egypt needs stability to get its economic house in order, and more violence on the streets will do little more than add new names to the lists of martyrs."

Reflecting the widespread hatred against US imperialism in Egypt, protesters carried pictures of Patterson and Mursi crossed out with an "X". One anti-Patterson banner read "Old hag, go home."

The presidential palace, government buildings and other key locations throughout the country were guarded by the US-sponsored Egyptian army. Tanks and soldiers were especially stationed in cities on the strategic Suez Canal, where anti-Mursi protests already took an insurrectionary character after the second anniversary of the Egyptian Revolution on January 25 of this year.

As in the first days of the revolution, army helicopters flew over Cairo monitoring the crowds in Tahrir Square and before the presidential palace. According to military sources, Defence Minister and Commander in Chief of the Egyptian Armed Forces General Abdul Fatah Khalil Al-Sisi monitored the protests from a special operations room.

Al-Sisi had threatened in a speech last Sunday that if political parties fail to reach a consensus and the situation gets out of their control, the military would intervene. *Spiegel Online* reported that thousands of Islamists staging a sit-in in Nasr City in Cairo formed armed brigades. The MB and other Islamist groups, such as Gamaa Islamiyya and various Salafist organizations, have repeatedly vowed to defend Mursi's "legitimacy."

Essam al-Erian, the vice chairman of the Freedom and Justice Party (FJP)—the political arm of the MB—denounced anti-Mursi protests as a "coup attempt". He accused the opposition of "simply massing people in violent demonstrations, thuggery or shedding the precious blood of Egyptians."

The lessons of the past two years of revolutionary struggle are critical, as the working class once again enters into struggle. The fight for workers' democratic and social rights cannot be entrusted to any faction of the Egyptian bourgeoisie—be it the army, Islamists, or secular-leaning opposition forces—but requires an independent revolutionary struggle for power based on a socialist perspective.

The program advanced by the "Tamarod" ("rebel") campaign that called the protests—backed by the National Salvation Front (NSF) and pseudo-left groups such as the Revolutionary Socialists (RS)—is another attempt by the Egyptian bourgeoisie to reshape its rule, defuse mass working class anger, and forcibly defend the power and wealth of the ruling elite.

At a press conference Wednesday, Tamarod laid out its political program. Its co-founder Mohamed Abdel Aziz called for an "independent prime minister" to "head a technocratic government whose main mission is to put together an urgent economic plan to save the Egyptian economy". His comments made clear that this would be an unelected dictatorship serving the interests of international finance capital and imposing austerity policies demanded by the International Monetary Fund.

He said that "the head of the High Constitutional Court would be assigned the duties of the president according to protocol when all executive powers are assigned to the prime minister in a six-month transitional period that ends by presidential elections judicially supervised and monitored internationally, followed by parliamentary elections."

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