

Military junta puts Egypt in lockdown amid Friday protests

Alex Lantier
24 August 2013

Heavy police and army deployments put Egypt in lockdown yesterday, as the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) of deposed President Mohamed Mursi called “Friday of Martyrs” protests against the army’s July 3 coup and the repeated massacres of pro-MB protesters in recent weeks.

Protests took place in many cities—including Cairo, Giza, Alexandria, Ismailia, Rafah, Minya, Fayoum, Tanta, Mansoura, Assiut and several smaller towns. However, in a climate of fear, turnout was low, with hundreds or thousands attending.

Anti-Mursi and pro-Mursi supporters clashed amid a heavy police presence in several Nile Delta cities, including Tanta and Mansoura. One protester, Mohamed Abdullah, was killed in Tanta, where 25 protesters were also injured.

Egypt’s largest cities—including Cairo, Giza and Alexandria—were all under a state-imposed curfew, running daily from 7 p.m. to 6 a.m. in 14 of Egypt’s 27 governorates, as part of the emergency rule re-imposed amid the bloody army crackdown last week.

Tanks were on the streets of downtown Cairo, as the army seized control of all the major protest sites. Tahrir Square was closed off, with every entrance to the square guarded by tanks and barbed wire. Security forces guarded and closed off the Ittihadeya presidential palace, the Mostafa Mahmoud Mosque and the Rabaa al-Adawiya Mosque—the site of the bloodiest crackdown last Wednesday, in which well over 600 pro-Mursi protesters were killed and thousands wounded.

One protestor in Cairo remarked: “It is like an occupation. People want to go to the streets to defend their freedom, but they are afraid. They are killing us.”

Passers-by also bitterly complained about the curfew. One complained of intense crowds as people rushed to pack Cairo’s round-the-clock schedules into 13 hours.

Junta leader General Abdel Fattah “El-Sisi is treating us as if we were not human,” she said. “They are packing us into subway cars as if we were chickens and making all the people sleep at 7 p.m.”

The atmosphere of fear and military intimidation is the product of weeks of crackdowns on MB protesters. These culminated on Thursday with the junta’s release from prison of former dictator General Hosni Mubarak, who was overthrown by mass working class protests in 2011.

Though Mubarak is widely hated, there were no significant organized protests against his release, as Egypt’s bourgeois “left” parties backed both the July 3 coup and the formation of the junta.

The April 6 Youth Movement, a liberal group that worked in the Tamarod (“Rebel”) coalition that helped organize the July 3 coup, had initially called protests against Mubarak’s release for yesterday. It called them off at the last minute, however, stating that it did not want to hold protests because they could be joined by Mursi supporters “who may take advantage of our mobilization for their own interests.”

Some members of the Revolutionary Socialists (RS), which also supported the Tamarod coalition, tried to cover up their role in facilitating the coup and the release of Mubarak. They attended a brief protest by a few dozen people in front of the Cairo court, a long-time stronghold of support for Mubarak. (See also: “How Egypt’s Revolutionary Socialists helped pave the way for military repression”)

The army is also continuing its campaign to arrest and jail the MB leadership. A week ago, the army reported that it had arrested 1,004 MB members.

Nineteen MB officials were arrested on Thursday in cities across Egypt, including former parliamentarian Ahmed Abu-Baraka, former Egyptian subway authority

chief Abdel-Moneim Mohamed Amin, and former deputy governor of Alexandria Hassan El-Prince.

While the arrests continue, the junta is moving to prosecute the MB's top leader. The trial of MB Supreme Guide Mohamed Badie, who was arrested Tuesday, and his deputy, billionaire Khairat al-Shater, will begin on Sunday. They are charged with inciting violence against protesters attacking MB premises, and possession of explosives, firearms and automatic rifles.

In an Orwellian initiative to present itself as a democratic regime, the civilian government set up by the junta has announced a "proposition" to ensure democratic rights and a peaceful resolution to political conflict in Egypt.

Fresh from the massacre of thousands of unarmed protesters on the streets, the junta's Deputy Prime Minister Ziad Bahaa El-Din issued a statement in *Al Shourouk* Wednesday, calling for the adoption of the junta's "road map" while respecting freedom of expression, of the press, and of peaceful protest.

Various liberal and pseudo-left parties who support the junta praised El-Din's initiative. The Strong Egypt Party called for "serious mechanisms to adopt the freedoms and rights mentioned in the initiative," proposing that the junta organize investigations into the killings during the dispersals of pro-Mursi protests.

In a statement on El-Din's document, the Socialist Popular Alliance Party enthused: "Fighting terrorism does not need exceptional laws as much as it needs a complete vision like the one presented by the vice prime minister's initiative that ensures social justice."

The Salafist Nour ("Light") Party, which has worked with the junta, called on the MB to consider the initiative as a "realistic option" and a basis for talks.



To contact the WSWs and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact