

Egyptian junta intensifies crackdown on Muslim Brotherhood

Johannes Stern
28 December 2013

In the aftermath of Tuesday's bomb blast in front of the Daqahliya Security Directorate in the Nile Delta city of Mansoura—in which at least 16 were killed and 134 wounded—Egypt's military junta is widening its crackdown on the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) and, ultimately, on all opposition to its dictatorial regime.

On Friday, security forces arrested 265 MB members and crushed protests called by the MB-led National Alliance for Legitimacy in Cairo, Alexandria, Port Said, Sohag, Fayoum, Bani Souef, Damietta, Behaira and other parts of the country. At least three people were reported killed.

In the Upper Egyptian city of Luxor, police dispersed protesters with teargas. In Cairo's Zeitoun district, security forces prevented protesters from marching to the Al-Qoba presidential palace. At Al-Azhar University's Nasr City campus, police attacked university students protesting outside their hostels in solidarity with a classmate killed the day before.

On Thursday, scores of MB members were arrested. Fifteen were detained in Alexandria, sixteen in the Nile Delta governorate of Sharqiya, and eleven in Zagazig on charges of belonging to a "terrorist organization" and "inciting violence against the army and the police". The same day, the junta blocked the MB's Freedom and Justice Newspaper from publication. It also froze the MB's funds and those of social and charitable organizations it accused of having MB ties.

Immediately after the bombing, the regime and media blamed the MB for the attack. Speaking at the scene, Interior Minister Mohamed Ibrahim claimed that the MB was retaliating for massacres at two Islamist protest camps on August 14, when security forces shot hundreds of Islamist opponents of the July 3 military coup that toppled MB President Mohamed Mursi.

The MB—Egypt's largest Islamist organization, which

has faced a massive crackdown since the coup, including the killing of thousands of members and the arrest of its top leadership—denied any connection to the attack. Issuing a statement from its London office, the MB condemned the blast as "a direct attack on the unity of the Egyptian people." It demanded an "inquiry so that the perpetrators of this crime may be brought to justice."

An Egyptian Islamist militant group, Ansar Beit Al-Maqdis, claimed responsibility for the bombings. A statement published Wednesday boasted that the attack had been carried out by a suicide bomber named "Abu Maryam".

Under the cover of its so-called "fight against terrorism," the junta is seeking to annihilate the MB and restore the military-police state as it existed prior to the mass uprising that overthrew former dictator Hosni Mubarak in early 2011. In the past weeks the junta issued an anti-protest law and drafted a new constitution effectively enshrining military dictatorship.

On Wednesday, Hossam Eisa, deputy prime minister and minister of higher education, announced at a news conference "Egypt's cabinet has decided to declare the Muslim Brotherhood a terrorist organization subject to Article 86 of the penal law."

Eisa said, "Punishments of terrorism acts stated by the law would be applied to anyone participating in the activities of the Muslim Brotherhood group or organization, anyone promoting it verbally or by writing, and everyone financing it. Punishments would be applied to anyone who joins the Muslim Brotherhood group or organization, or continues to be a member of both since the declaration."

Interior Ministry spokesman Hany Abdel Latif threatened on state television that from now on, anyone taking part in MB-protests will be jailed for five years.

Jail terms for those accused of belonging to a terrorist organization could stretch up to life imprisonment. “The sentence could be death for those who lead this organization,” he added.

Speaking at an army graduation ceremony on Thursday, coup leader and *de facto* dictator General Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi vowed to intensify the crackdown. He declared that “freedom and stability” will not come easily and demanded that Egyptians “put their trust in God, the army and the police.” He threatened that the “Egyptian army will sacrifice itself for Egypt and Egyptians, and those who harm you will vanish from the face of the earth.”

The junta is trying to impose an atmosphere of fear and terror to pre-empt a new eruption of mass protests in the working class, the main force behind the revolution. Recent months have seen several significant industrial actions, including October’s strike by Mahalla textile workers and this month’s protests by temp gold miners at the Sukhari mine, demanding permanent contracts. The miners were attacked and dispersed by police on December 15.

The junta is also launching a reactionary crackdown on students, youth movements, and pseudo-left parties—the April 6 Youth, the Revolutionary Socialists (RS), and various NGOs and human rights groups linked to them.

On Friday the High Council of Universities banned all student protests during midterm exams and said police would be deployed on campuses to enforce the ban. Anti-government protests have swept across Egyptian universities this semester, often organized by pro-MB students. Many students have been killed by the security forces.

Last Sunday a misdemeanor court sentenced the founders of the April 6 Youth Movement Ahmed Maher, Mohamed Adel and Ahmed Douma to three years in jail for violating the anti-protest law and allegedly assaulting police officers. This followed Adel’s detention December 18, when heavily-armed security forces stormed the offices of the Egyptian Center for Economic and Social Rights.

Arrest warrants were reportedly also issued earlier this month for RS member Haitham Mohamadein and Sharif al-Roubi, a leader of the 6 April Democratic Front group.

These arrests are an indictment of the bankrupt,

counterrevolutionary politics of the April 6 Youth and the RS. They worked with the Tamarod (“Rebel”) political coalition that backed the July 3 coup—supporting the installation of the junta that is now moving against them—in order to channel mass anger in the working class with Mursi and the MB behind the army.

They are now assembling a so-called Revolutionary Path Front, together with the Islamist Strong Egypt Party, promoting a reactionary perspective of reconciliation between the junta and the MB. The aim of this maneuver is to build a better mechanism to suppress an independent movement of the working class.

Strong Egypt Party spokesman Ahmed Imam warned that labeling the MB as terrorist “leaves the Muslim Brotherhood and its supporters only one choice, which is violence.” He complained that both sides are showing “a great deal of stupidity”. While blaming the MB for failing to strongly distance itself from violence, he blamed the government for closing the doors to reconciliation.

The reactionary character of the affluent middle class milieu in Egypt is most openly expressed by the liberal and “left” organizations that are applauding the junta’s steps to tighten its grip over the country.

The Tamarod movement praised the junta’s labeling the MB a terrorist organization, saying it was “better late than never”.

The liberal Free Egyptians Party funded by billionaire tycoon Naguib Sawiris welcomed the “historic decision” that puts an end to “one of the most horrible fascist and racist groups.”

Former presidential candidate and Nasserite leader Hamdeen Sabahi cynically described “the blood of the Mansoura martyrs” as an invitation “to unite on a comprehensive strategy to uproot terrorism.”



To contact the WSWs and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact