

Egyptian cabinet resigns as strike wave grows

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Egypt's military-backed interim government has resigned amid a growing nationwide wave of strikes by public sector workers. The resignation paves the way for the installation of coup leader Field Marshal Abdel-Fattah al-Sisi as president and a confrontation with the working class, the main force behind the Egyptian Revolution.

Interim Prime Minister Hazem al-Beblawi announced the resignation in a live TV broadcast Monday. Beblawi's speech was a vile attempt to both justify and downplay the monstrous crimes of his cabinet. He claimed that "the cabinet has in the last six or seven months responsibly and dutifully shouldered a very difficult burden," and "in most cases it has achieved good results."

In fact, a campaign of terror and repression followed Sisi's July 3 military coup against Islamist President Mohamed Mursi. Since its installation on July 16, the interim government has functioned as a pseudo-democratic cover for a de facto military dictatorship which aims to restore the repressive apparatus that existed before a mass working class uprising toppled long-time dictator Hosni Mubarak in February 2011.

The Beblawi government has overseen the killing and jailing of thousands of Mursi supporters and other opponents of the military coup by security forces, the banning of the Islamist Muslim Brotherhood (MB), and the imposition of an anti-protest law.

At the same time, it postponed a major confrontation with the working class. To prevent a renewed explosion of working class struggles, it delayed planned social attacks, such as the elimination of food and fuel subsidies, and even promised a minimum monthly wage of 1200 Egyptian pounds (US \$172) for public sector workers from January on.

In the past weeks, however, it has become increasingly difficult for the junta and the government to pacify rising social anger. Currently, thousands of

public sector workers are on strike to demand the promised minimum wage and better working conditions, in defiance of the anti-protest law and the atmosphere of terror and intimidation created by the junta.

The strike wave was sparked by more than 20,000 textile workers in Mahalla, who went on strike on February 10 and were soon joined by thousands of textile workers in 16 affiliated companies in the major industrial center of the Nile Delta.

On Saturday, public transport workers went on strike. Minister of Manpower Kamal Abu Eita desperately called upon workers to negotiate their demands instead of striking, but by Sunday all 28 garages in Cairo and Giza were shut down. Also on Sunday, workers from the Postal Authority began a gradual strike in dozens of post offices throughout Egypt. Employees of the Notary Authority have already been on strike for one week.

On Friday, striking doctors had demanded the dismissal of Health Minister Maha Rabat at a general assembly of the doctor's union and reaffirmed their demands for higher salaries and a reform of Egypt's crumbling health-care system. Doctors have been staging strikes and protests on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays since the beginning of the year to force the government to respond to their demands.

Beblawi's TV appearance made clear that the resignation of his cabinet is bound up with plans by the Egyptian ruling elite to prepare a direct confrontation with the working class. Commenting on the strikes and demands put forward by the workers, Beblawi warned that it is "not the time for personal interests or categorical demands."

After his speech, the cabinet issued a statement ascribing its resignation to "current circumstances the country is experiencing" and a "response to the requirements of the current stage."

Media reports indicated that the resignation of the government has been closely coordinated with the military. The state-controlled daily *Al-Ahram* reported that the decision was made after a 15-minute cabinet meeting in which coup leader al-Sisi took part as minister of defence. An Egyptian official told Reuters that the resignation “was done as a step that was needed ahead of Sisi's announcement that he will run for president.”

It is expected that al-Sisi, after stepping down as defence minister, will soon announce his candidacy in the upcoming presidential elections.

At the end of January, al-Sisi had received authorization from the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) junta in an emergency meeting to run for president. A statement broadcast on state TV said that SCAF considers his run for presidency “a mandate and an obligation.” The statement further declared that al-Sisi thanked the military council for giving him the “right to respond to the call of duty.”

Before the meeting, interim president Adly Mansour promoted al-Sisi from the rank of general to field marshal by decree.

Preparations to install al-Sisi as president are directly bound up with the plans of the Egyptian ruling class to intensify repression against the working class and impose fresh social attacks. Significantly, on the same day the government resigned, the Court for Urgent Matters ruled that police forces can be redeployed permanently on university campuses—overturning a 2010 ruling banning police officers from campuses. On the other hand, a draft investment law was passed which protects the interests of foreign companies and investors in Egypt.

There is speculation that Ibrahim Mehleb, the former housing minister in El-Beblawi's cabinet, will become the next prime minister and form a new interim cabinet. Mehleb is a former member of Mubarak's now-dissolved National Democratic Party (NDP) and a former chairman of the board of directors of Arab Contractors, one of the largest Egyptian corporations.

The likely return of Mubarak-era officials to high state positions underscores the counterrevolutionary role of the liberal and “left” groups which backed the military coup. Figures like Eita—a member of the Nasserite Karama Party and close ally of the pseudo-left Revolutionary Socialists—became integral parts of

the military dictatorship.

The right-wing Tamarod movement through which the Egyptian bourgeoisie channeled mass discontent against Mursi behind the coup is spearheading the campaign to install al-Sisi as president. Only days after SCAF called upon al-Sisi to run for president, Tamarod leader Mahmoud Badr demanded “all Egyptians elect Field Marshal El-Sisi as a national and popular agreed-upon candidate.”

The resurgent class conflicts in Egypt will bring the working class into an ever more direct confrontation with official political organizations and parties in Egypt—be they Islamist, liberal or “left”. All of them, in the final analysis, defend the interests of the Egyptian ruling elite and of imperialism. They all fear the threat of renewed mass working class struggles and are willing to collaborate with each other despite their sharp internecine conflicts.



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