

Former South Korean president arrested

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Former South Korean President Park Geun-hye was detained Friday after a judge granted the prosecutors' request for an arrest warrant at a hearing the previous day. She has been charged with bribery, abuse of power and leaking state secrets, the same allegations that led to her impeachment and removal from office on March 10. A formal indictment is expected by mid-April. If convicted, Park could face between 10 years to life behind bars.

In approving the prosecutors' request, Judge Gang Bu-yeong stated, "The need for her arrest is acknowledged because there is probable cause to charge her and a concern of evidence being destroyed." Park was taken to a detention center where other high-profile figures in the scandal have been held, including her friend Choi Soon-sil with whom she is alleged to have conspired to collect bribes from major conglomerates or *chaebol*. It is also claimed that Choi had access to state documents and took part in decision-making despite holding no formal government office.

The charges assert that Park and Choi set up two non-profit bodies—K-Sports and Mir—to funnel a total of 77.4 billion won (\$70 million) into their pockets in exchange for favors. Lee Jae-yong, the de facto head of Samsung, was arrested in February for handing over 43.4 billion won to gain approval for a merger between Samsung affiliates that gave him control over the conglomerate.

Park is the third South Korean president to be arrested in the tumultuous history of the country's politics. Two generals—Chun Doo-hwan and his successor Noh Tae-woo—led the country from 1979 to 1993, but were arrested in 1995 for their roles in the coup that brought Chun to power, for the massacre in Gwangju that killed hundreds in 1980, and for corruption. Both were convicted with Chun receiving a death sentence but President Kim Young-sam pardoned both, supposedly on the grounds of national

reconciliation.

The Park scandal led to massive, weekly protests in South Korea beginning in October, during which hundreds of thousands of workers and students denounced not only Park but the *chaebols* as well. However, Park was not removed simply for being corrupt. Her opponents worked to prevent the movement from developing beyond the control of the existing political establishment. Furthermore, her attempts to build a closer relationship with China led her to fall from favor with the United States, which did not oppose her removal.

The likely Democratic Party of Korea (DPK) candidate and current front-runner for the May 9 presidential election, Moon Jae-in, has benefited the most from Park's removal and widespread anti-Park sentiment. Moon recently stated after winning the second of four rounds in the DPK primaries, "We need an overwhelming victory in the presidential election if we are to properly reform the country and create a brand new nation following a change of power."

However, the conservatives were only able to return to power in 2008 under Lee Myung-bak, and then in 2013 under Park precisely because the Democrats were widely discredited in the eyes of the working class.

From 1998 to 2008, Presidents Kim Dae-jung and Noh Moo-hyun enforced the austerity demands of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) after the 1997–1998 Asian Financial Crisis. Both presidents carried out mass job cuts and repression against striking workers with the aid of the Korean Confederation of Trade Unions. The Democrats also deployed troops to Afghanistan and Iraq in alliance with US imperialism. Moon served as chief of staff during Noh's administration and has attempted to alleviate concerns in Washington, telling the *New York Times* for example, that he was "America's friend."

At the same time, the Democrats are tapping into anti-

war sentiment by posturing as opponents of the US deployment of a THAAD (Terminal High Altitude Area Defense) anti-ballistic missile battery in South Korea. They submitted a resolution to the National Assembly on Tuesday calling on the government to seek parliamentary consent for the system while also criticizing China for its economic retaliation against South Korea for allowing THAAD on its territory. This anti-China rhetoric helps legitimize Washington's war drive against China and North Korea.

The other major parties are also in the process of selecting their candidates. Yu Seung-min of the Bareun Party has already clinched the nomination, but with public support hovering around 2 percent, it is likely he will form an electoral alliance. His party supported Park's impeachment, splitting with the Saenuri Party, now known as the Liberty Korea Party (LKP). Yu stated he is willing to join forces with the LKP so long as its candidate is anti-Park.

The Bareun Party, which backs even stronger ties with Washington, is clearly concerned over what a Moon presidency would mean. Its policy chief, Lee Jong-gu, stated, "It will be paradoxical to expect a strong alliance with the US if Moon is elected president considering he first protested against THAAD and demanded a decision be left up to the next government, while the US wanted to deploy it quickly."

The LPK on Friday chose South Gyeongsang Province Governor Hong Jun-pyo as its candidate. Hong has kept his distance from Park while also calling for a broad alliance against Moon, which could mean uniting with the likely People's Party candidate, Ahn Cheol-soo, who has publicly remained cool to the idea.

The People's Party was formed last year in a split from the Democrats, moving further to the right. This makes an electoral alliance between Ahn and dissatisfied members of the Democrats another possibility. Former DPK interim leader Kim Jong-in left the party in early March, saying he would help play a role in forging an electoral alliance to defeat Moon. His close aide, Choi Myeong-gil also left the DPK on March 29, stating, "I believe Kim will play a pivotal role, and that his role will create a great, successful outcome. And that will make people happy."

None of these politicians or political parties is capable of solving the crisis of capitalism in South Korea or halting the drive to war. Should Moon win, he

will enforce the demands of big business and Washington just as readily as the other candidates. Workers and students should place no faith in him, the DPK, or any organization that calls for supporting this capitalist party.



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