

Egyptian presidential elections mark new stage in counterrevolution

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The presidential elections in Egypt starting today are a farce. They are held at gunpoint and serve only to give the Western-backed military dictator General Abdel Fattah al-Sisi and his counterrevolutionary terror regime a pseudo-democratic cover.

Voters are being told to choose between only two candidates: al-Sisi and Moussa Mustafa Moussa, a stooge of his regime. Even before the elections, the regime forced out or arrested one candidate at a time, including Mohammed Anwar al-Sadat, a nephew of former President Anwar al-Sadat, former Prime Minister and Air Force General Ahmed Shafik, and lawyer and activist Khaled Ali. Others arrested and sometimes taken to unknown locations were other military candidates, such as Colonel Ahmed Konsowa and Sami Anan, the former chief of staff of the Egyptian army.

The only remaining candidate, Moussa Mustafa Moussa, leader of the liberal al-Ghad party, has been sent into the race by the regime and is an ardent supporter of his “opponent.” Prior to announcing his candidacy, Moussa had openly supported al-Sisi’s campaign, and even after that, a picture of the dictator remained on the cover of his Facebook page for an extended period.

For the elections, the Sisi regime has been mobilizing tens of thousands of heavily armed troops and security forces across the country to stifle any protest. Presenting the security plan for the three election days until Wednesday, Egypt’s Interior Minister Magdy Abdel-Ghaffar threatened last week: “Security forces will deal firmly and decisively with any attempts to disrupt the elections or target vital state institutions.”

The Secretary General of Amnesty International in Germany, Markus N. Beeko, commented that “the difficult human rights situation” in Egypt “has

worsened in the weeks leading up to the ... presidential election.” The regime is “systematically against political opponents. Opposition politicians and activists as well as civil society organizations are threatened and their employees are subjected to arbitrary arrests, abductions and violence by security forces.”

It is no coincidence that the Supreme Administrative Court in Egypt overturned a previous ruling against the long-term dictator Hosni Mubarak, ousted in February 2011, and his Prime Minister Ahmed Nazif and Interior Minister Habib El-Adly, on the eve of the elections. Seven years ago, in May 2011, an Egyptian court sentenced the three for having cut off electronic communications—including the Internet, cell phones, and landlines—during the mass revolutionary protests. The court, however, now states that these measures were taken “in accordance with the law and the Constitution” in order to “preserve national security.”

The full legal justification of the Mubarak regime’s repressive measures symbolizes the counterrevolutionary development in Egypt under al-Sisi. Since the bloody military coup on July 3, 2013, against Islamist President Mohammed Morsi, the new Western-backed military ruler has completely rehabilitated the old regime and its henchmen and has been oppressing the Egyptian masses with even more brutal methods.

Shortly after the coup, according to Human Rights Watch, the “worst case of unlawful mass killings in Egypt’s modern history” occurred. Army and police stormed two protest camps of coup opponents and killed more than 1,000 people. Since then, the regime has incarcerated at least 60,000 political prisoners and condemned more than a thousand to death. In the last year alone at least 112 executions took place. The freedom of the press is no longer even on paper. In mid-

January, the state of emergency was extended once again.

This brutal repression goes hand in hand with more and more severe attacks on the working class. In 2016, the Egyptian regime took out a new loan from the IMF and pledged to carry out further profound economic structural adjustments. To reduce government spending, subsidies have been cut, including for gas, water and bread, and workers' extremely low wages. The consequences are poverty and despair. About 40 percent of the nearly 100 million Egyptians are forced to live on less than \$2 a day.

The imperialist powers and international finance capital support the regime, but fear the outbreak of new mass protests. It was only last year that the German government passed a law "on security cooperation" with Egypt in order to "increase internal security in both states." Since then, the German authorities have been working closely with the Egyptian security and intelligence services and regularly holding joint workshops and meetings.

The US, still the main sponsor of the Egyptian military, intensified its cooperation with the al-Sisi regime before the elections. Just last week, an Egyptian business delegation traveled to the US for high-level talks. "Everyone here praised Egypt's economic reform programme and recognised the effort needed to make such difficult and bold decisions," American Chamber of Commerce in Cairo President Tarek Tawfik told reporters in Washington.

The Egyptian delegation reportedly held more than 90 consultations with members of the United States Congress and representatives of international financial institutions. Merza Hassan, responsible director for the Arab world at the World Bank, described the new Egyptian reform program as a model for other countries.

A recent analysis by BMI Research on the elections in Egypt makes clear why ruling-class officials in the US and Europe are supporting al-Sisi's election farce. His re-election "bodes well for further progress on Egypt's reform drive and for business sentiment," BMI Research states, and the country will be an "economic outperformer in the Middle East region in 2018."

In another comment the *Financial Times* warns the regime not to provoke a new revolutionary mass uprising like it did seven years ago. "The elections

show that the army-backed government has drawn only one lesson from recent history: that public disaffection can boil over with dangerous consequences if left uncontrolled. Yet, Egypt's past bears another lesson that is as important: that too much control eventually destabilises."



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