

Egyptian junta extends state of emergency and censors social media

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Five years after the July 3, 2013 military coup against Islamist president Mohamed Mursi and the massacre of more than 1,000 of his followers on the streets of Cairo, the Western-backed military regime of dictator Abdel Fatah al-Sisi is intensifying its counterrevolutionary terror.

On July 14, the state of emergency was extended once again for another three months. Effectively, constitutional rights remain suspended, and habeas corpus is abolished. Strikes and demonstrations are banned, and the police and security forces have the power to incarcerate individuals indefinitely without charges.

In the past five years, the Sisi regime has extensively used these powers, through which the Egyptian ruling class has crushed protests and strikes and banned political activity for decades. It has imprisoned at least 60,000 political prisoners and sentenced over a thousand to death. In 2017 alone, at least 112 executions took place. The freedom of opinion has basically been abolished.

Terrified by the specter of a renewed eruption of mass revolutionary struggles that led to the ouster of longtime dictator and imperialist stooge Hosni Mubarak in February 2011, the regime is stepping up its repression.

Last Monday, the Egyptian parliament approved three new media laws effectively criminalizing critical journalism and comments on social media. Under the new laws, the Supreme Council of Media, a body appointed by Sisi himself, can control and shut down media platforms, blogs and private social media accounts with more than 5,000 followers.

Article 19 of the new law states that “newspapers, media outlets, or websites are prohibited from publishing or broadcasting fake news or advocating or inciting a violation of the law, or violence, or hatred.” That is, any dissenting statement in a printed newspaper or on the Internet that the regime declares to be “fake news” is a criminal act and can be prosecuted.

As capitalist governments in the US and Europe back Sisi’s reign of terror and enact similar censorship laws in their own countries, several human rights groups have condemned the new law. “The new press law that was approved ... seems to set in stone repressive practices that were already in place in Egypt, effectively legalizing new methods of cracking down on the freedom of information,” said Sophie Anmuth of Reporters Without Borders.

Amnesty International released a statement declaring that the new regulation “would increase the Egyptian government’s already broad powers to monitor, censor and block social media and blogs, as well as criminalize content that violates vaguely defined political, social or religious norms.” It added that Egypt has already blocked 500 web sites, including independent news outlets and pages belonging to rights groups, on charges of “publishing false information” and “harming national security.”

The crackdown is a response to rising opposition among workers and youth to a new round of austerity measures imposed by the regime.

On Saturday, Egypt raised natural gas prices for households and businesses by between 33.3 and 75 percent. The measures will come into effect in August. They set the price for consuming up to 30 cubic meters of gas at 0.175 Egyptian pounds, a 75 percent increase. Already last month, the regime raised fuel prices by up to 50 percent—the fourth fuel subsidy cut since 2014—to meet the IMF’s demands. Harsh subsidy cuts also increased electricity costs for households by 30-45 percent and the price of cooking gas cylinders by 66 percent.

In 2016, the Sisi regime agreed to a new IMF loan and pledged to slash government spending and cut subsidies for gas, water and bread, and workers’ extremely low wages. The new round of cuts amounts to a declaration of war against the impoverished Egyptian masses. “It is

without a doubt that the road to true reform is difficult and cruel and that it causes much suffering, but it is also without a doubt that the suffering which comes from the lack of reform is much greater,” Sisi threatened in a recent speech.

In response, tens of thousands of Egyptian Internet users have been calling upon Sisi to step down. The hashtag “Irhal ya Sisi” (Get lost Sisi) has become a top trend in Egypt. The comments testify to the revolutionary anger that is once again building up in the Egyptian working class. “We will not let you go quietly, and you will taste the same bitter cup that you gave the Egyptian people. From killing, imprisoning, torturing and hiding minors to oppressed youths and displacing our people everywhere. Al-Sisi killer. Al-Sisi war criminal. Traitor,” writes a user named Abo Mahmoud.

Another Twitter user states, “We don’t have any time for you again. We are starving. Everything has become too expensive. Gas, food, electronics, electricity and fuel. Please, we need to feel free.” And someone else: “No freedom, no justice, no education, no country, no humanity. It’s time to go away.” Many repost images from the revolutionary mass struggles in 2011 and issue the call: “Let’s do it again.”

In Iraq, mass demonstrations are taking place against the US-backed regime following protests, and strikes shook Morocco, Tunisia and Iran earlier this year. As the Egyptian and Middle Eastern masses move once again into struggle, it is crucial to work through the experiences of the Egyptian Revolution and the broader upheavals throughout the region.

The mass strikes and demonstrations of the Egyptian and Tunisian working class in 2011 were able to overthrow US-backed dictators and shake the ruling elites throughout the region and internationally. But without establishing its political independence and without a revolutionary party to lead it, the working class could not achieve its social and democratic aspirations. Instead, the ruling elites were able to remain in power and intensify their policies of war, repression and the exploitation of the working class.

The central lesson of these bitter events is that the only way forward is an international revolutionary struggle of the working class that consciously seeks to overthrow the capitalist state and imperialism, struggling to take state power and restructure society along socialist lines.

The development of such a struggle requires a political reckoning with pseudo-left forces like the Revolutionary Socialists (RS) in Egypt, who rule out a struggle for

socialism by the working class and instead call for a “democratic” struggle in alliance with capitalist parties.

The RS are aware and afraid of growing opposition in the working class. In a recent statement, they warn: “What history shows is that such a combination of austerity capitalism and a semi-absolute military dictatorship is not sustainable in the long term.” They call for a “a long and arduous struggle to regain democratic spaces and to fight neoliberalism [...] Let us begin together in this long road to overcome the plight of the rule of capitalism and the generals.”

This vague rhetoric covers over the filthy, anti-worker record of the RS in the Egyptian revolution. In each phase of the revolution, the RS sought to subordinate the working class to one or other faction of the bourgeoisie. First, they promoted illusions that they could obtain a “democratic space” under the military junta that replaced Mubarak after his fall, then they hailed Mursi and the Muslim Brotherhood as the “right wing of the revolution.” They capped off this reactionary record by aligning themselves once again with the military and praising Sisi’s coup as a “second revolution.”

That is, the RS are continuing to subordinate the working class to parties and organizations of the bourgeoisie. In Egypt, they have issued joint statements with parties such as Strong Egypt of former Muslim Brotherhood leader Abdel Moneim Abul Futuh, or the liberal Constitution Party of Mohamed ElBaradei. Internationally, the RS hail social-democratic scoundrels such as British Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn, claiming that his “arrival to power would constitute the first systematic attack against neoliberalism in advanced capitalist states.”



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