

Sudan: Protest leaders agree to collaborate with Transitional Military Council

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Sudan's Transitional Military Council (TMC) has agreed with leaders of the protest movement that forced the removal of long-time autocrat Omar al-Bashir to form a joint body to lead a two-year transition to civilian rule. The military ousted Bashir on April 11 in an unsuccessful attempt to put an end to months of strikes and protests.

Ayman Nimir, an opposition negotiator in the coalition known as the Declaration of Freedom and Change Forces said, "Today we have taken positive steps and we expect to reach an agreement satisfactory to all parties."

The TMC is seeking a government of "technocrats" in which it would retain the key interior and defence portfolios—thereby ensuring military rule behind a civilian façade.

Any attempt to present such an arrangement, in a country dominated by a small, wealthy clique as a step towards genuine democracy that would resolve the enormous social and economic problems confronting Sudanese workers, is a treacherous lie. It exposes the deep chasm that exists between the Declaration of Freedom and Change Forces, including the Sudanese Professional Association (SPA) of doctors, lawyers and teachers, the National Consensus Forces (NCF), Sudan Call, the Unionist Gathering, the Umma Party and the Sudanese Communist Party (SCP), and the millions of protesting workers and youth.

Workers and youth came out onto the streets for a fundamental transformation of the entire social order, not a civilian-fronted military regime, technocratic government or political reshuffle, and have already voiced their anger at the agreement with the TMC.

Conscious of what happened to the Egyptian Revolution in 2011-13, protestors continued the mass rallies in the capital Khartoum in the weeks following the army's ouster of al-Bashir on April 11 and demanded an end to military rule.

Furious at the appointment of regime insider Awad

Mohamed Ahmed Ibn Auf, the military chief and al-Bashir's close aide, as the interim leader of a Transitional Military Council to run the country for two years and the imposition of military rule, including a state of emergency and curfew, they demanded a swift transition to civilian rule.

When Auf claimed that al-Bashir was under arrest, this met with widespread disbelief. No one believed that he was in jail. They demanded his imprisonment, pending prosecution for corruption, abuse of power and crimes against the people. Auf sought to placate the protestors by claiming that the transition period could be as short as a month if it were managed "without chaos." This was viewed as a threat that the security forces might instigate "chaos" in order to justify a crackdown.

Protests forced the TMC to announce Auf's resignation and to replace him with Lieutenant General Abdel Fattah Burhan within 48 hours of al-Bashir's ouster.

The TMC then moved to announce some anti-corruption measures, the resignation of some former officials and the dismissal of others, as well as some arrests.

It removed al-Bashir's ruling National Congress Party (NCP), which is affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood, from the political scene, in part at least to win support from its Saudi Arabian patron. Military intelligence claims that the chief public prosecutor is to question al-Bashir after his transfer to Kobar prison, after suitcases loaded with cash were found in his home.

All of this was met with contempt and suspicion. Last week, protestors encamped in Khartoum were joined by hundreds of workers who had travelled by train from Atbara, with thousands more joining them from cities, towns and villages along the way. There were renewed calls for a general strike.

Atbara has long been a centre of the country's trade unionists and political activists before and after Sudan's independence in 1956. It is where the protests started on

December 19 over the removal of bread subsidies that tripled its cost, with students setting fire to the local offices of the NCP. Within days, the protests became a generalized political movement across the country, protesting the soaring cost of living and the impact of privatization of the port and railways on jobs and demanding the ouster of al-Bashir.

Last week's decision of the African Union (AU), meeting under the rotating chair of Egypt's military dictator General Abdel Fattah el-Sisi in Cairo, to give the military council three months to implement democratic reforms provoked outrage. This extended the AU's previous 15-day deadline for Sudan's TMC to hand over power to civilians, or face suspension from the AU.

El-Sisi was one of the first to voice his support to the TMC.

Protestors are conscious that it was el-Sisi, an army leader and minister of defence in President Mohammed Morsi's Muslim Brotherhood-led government, who overthrew the elected government, drowned the opposition to his coup in blood and has introduced legislation enabling him to stay in power until 2030. El-Sisi regards his southern neighbour as his country's Achilles heel.

Thousands marched on the Egyptian embassy in Khartoum, holding up posters and chanting slogans against el-Sisi, demanding an end to his interference in their country's affairs. The Egyptian authorities have deported dozens of Sudanese activists who had fled to Egypt to escape al-Bashir's brutal regime and handed them over to Sudan in recent months.

Sudan's TMC know they can rely on the support of the major imperialist powers and the region's dictators, all of whom hate each other but fear even more their own working class and poor peasants and the threat they pose to their shaky regimes.

While the US and the European Union long opposed al-Bashir, backing his indictment at the International Criminal Court for war crimes, including genocide in Darfur, and not openly supporting him during the protests, the last thing they want is instability in Sudan and a new wave of refugees heading for Europe. The country is strategically located in the Horn of Africa, alongside the Red Sea and the entrance to the Suez Canal through which much of the region's oil passes. Washington has issued a statement calling on Sudan to move speedily to democracy.

The petro-monarchies of the Gulf, as well as Turkey, Russia and China have all been competing for influence in

the Horn of Africa. Their conflicting agendas and local clients will only serve to accentuate the power struggles within the narrow circles that dominant economic and political life in Sudan.

Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates have reportedly offered \$3 billion in aid in the form of cash, food, medicine and petroleum products to Sudan, which is all but bankrupt following the secession of the oil-rich South Sudan in 2012, the civil war in South Sudan and the loss of income from the transport of oil through its pipeline from the south to Port Sudan. Russia and Turkey, which is seeking to build a military base in Suakin, near the Red Sea, have pledged fuel, wheat and other aid, with Russian private contractors training Sudan's security forces.

Protesters rejected Saudi aid, which they saw as support for the counterrevolution, and chanted, "We don't want Saudi support." There is enormous opposition to the government's support for Saudi Arabia's war in Yemen, as well as its sale of vast swathes of irrigated agricultural land to Gulf companies at the expense of local farmers.

The movement of the Sudanese working class is part of a growing wave of strikes and demonstrations by workers across North Africa—in Algeria, Tunisia and Morocco—and around the world. The only way to establish a democratic regime in Sudan is through a struggle led by the working class, independently of all the rotten bourgeois parties, trade unions and pro-capitalist alliances, to take power and expropriate the regime's ill-gotten wealth in the context of a broad international struggle for socialism.



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