

Sudanese military kills protesters demanding return to full civilian rule

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Sudan's military crackdown on the mass sit-ins in the capital Khartoum demanding the end of military rule, left six dead Monday night, including an army officer.

According to the Central Committee of Sudanese Doctors (CCSD), this brings the number killed in Sudan since the protests started on December 19, bringing down the 30-year-long rule of President Omar al-Bashir on April 11, to nearly 100.

The deputy chief of the Transitional Military Council (TMC), General Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo, threatened a further crackdown, warning that TMC members "are committed to negotiate, but no chaos after today." He repeated his calls for protesters to clear their blockades of the roads and railways.

The violence erupted after the TMC's military leaders, who seized power in a pre-emptive coup against al-Bashir in a bid to head off the mass movement, announced they had reached an agreement with opposition leaders.

The military said they had approved the composition and structure of a transitional joint civilian and military authority that would hold power for three years, after which there would be a transfer of power to a civilian administration. But the TMC is insisting that the "armed forces remain in the sovereign [ruling] council."

The announcement follows weeks of on-again off-again talks between the TMC and opposition groups organised under the umbrella of the Forces for the Declaration of Freedom and Change. The latter is a coalition including the Sudanese Professional Association (SPA) that has led strikes, protests and road closures that have rocked the country since last December. Saying that "The military council is not serious about handing over power to civilians," the SPA had called for "civil disobedience" and "million-

strong marches" after the military earlier rejected their plan for a joint civilian-military body.

As well as the mile-wide central Khartoum sit-in and barricades outside the military headquarters, regularly attended by tens of thousands of people, demonstrations and blockades have spread to other parts of the Khartoum-Omdurman conurbation demanding the military step down.

Workers at the Kenana Sugar Company have been on strike for several days, with strikes by other workers in the northern town of Atbara, as well as by nurses and miners. Engineering workers at the Sudanese Electricity Transmission Company joined the protests, after rumours spread that the TMC had ordered electricity cuts to wear out support for the rallies.

According to subsequent announcements, the parliament is to be composed of 300 members, with 67 percent from the Alliance for Freedom and Change and the rest left open for other political parties. The first task would be to end long-running fighting in the east and west of the country.

While it is unclear who was behind Monday's violence, uniformed gunmen opened fire at nightfall, shortly after the end of the day's Ramadan fast. This was as the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF), headed by TMC deputy chief Dagalo, were patrolling the streets, breaking up protests with tear gas and live ammunition, driving demonstrators from the Mek Nimr bridge—that links North Khartoum with the city centre—and trying to dismantle barricades on Nile Street, a main thoroughfare.

Dagalo, a close associate of al-Bashir whose paramilitary force led the suppression of the insurgencies in Darfur and in the east of the country, was one of the military leaders who toppled the president. Widely believed to have plans for the top

job, he apparently has the backing of the Gulf Arab monarchies that have pledged US\$3 billion to keep Sudan afloat.

The RSF has denied responsibility for starting the violence. Some have blamed al-Bashir's supporters, while the TMC has claimed that "lurking groups," unhappy with the agreement on joint military-civilian rule, were behind the attack.

The killings have further heightened tensions, with angry protesters flocking to the sit-in site outside the military headquarters, building new barricades and blocking roads and bridges, and demanding an independent investigation.

The SPA, one of the opposition groups party to the treacherous agreement for joint civilian-military rule with the TMC, called for rallies "to complete 'our' revolution and protect it." This is merely an attempt to use the millions of workers and youth to secure their own interests within a capitalist setup, creating a trap that will pave the way for another strongman to take the reins, as Sudan's six coups since independence in 1956 demonstrate.

Presenting such an arrangement, in a country dominated by a small, wealthy clique, as a step towards genuine democracy exposes the deep chasm that exists between the Declaration of Freedom and Change Forces, including the SPA, the National Consensus Forces (NCF), Sudan Call, the Unionist Gathering 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.

Conscious of what happened to the Egyptian Revolution in 2011-2013, protesters continued the mass rallies in the capital Khartoum in the weeks following the army's ouster of al-Bashir on April 11. This forced the military, within 24 hours of al-Bashir's overthrow, to eject Lieutenant-General Ahmed Awad Ibn Auf, his deputy and replacement, in favour of General Abdel-Fattah Burhan, a slightly less tainted figure.

The TMC sought to further appease the masses by announcing 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. This incurred the wrath of Turkey's President Erdogan who had forged close economic, political and military relations with al-Bashir's regime.

When the TMC's claims to have arrested al-Bashir were met with scepticism, the Public Prosecutor's Office was forced to charge him with money laundering and the possession of large sums of cash and imprison him. More recently, the authorities announced that the former president "and others have been charged for inciting and participating in the killing of demonstrators," during a protest in Burri, a neighbourhood in the east of Khartoum.

Protesters have called for an end to Sharia law, opposed foreign interference in Sudanese affairs, including aid from Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, which they view as support for the counterrevolution. They are opposed to the decision of the African Union (AU), meeting under the rotating chair of Egypt's military dictator General Abdel Fattah el-Sisi in Cairo, to extend its previous 15-day deadline for the TMC to hand over power to civilians, or face suspension from the AU, to three months.

While the Sudanese working class faces a gang-up by the region's elites, fearful of their own working class and poor peasants and the threat they pose to their own shaky regimes, their allies are their class brothers and sisters taking part in the growing wave of strikes and demonstrations across North Africa—in Algeria, Tunisia and Morocco—and around the world.

The only way they can 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 broader international struggle for socialism.



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