

Mass protests erupt after Sudan's military junta guns down school children

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Tens of thousands of students and youth took to the streets this week after Sudan's armed forces opened fire on a youth rally Monday over bread and fuel shortages in El-Obeid, the regional capital of North Kordofan. Six people were killed, including four school children, and more than 60 injured. The military junta has now closed down all the nation's schools.

Videos on social media show security forces in El-Obeid firing a truck-mounted machine gun against protesters from close range. The truck is marked with a skull and crossed swords insignia and a windscreen sticker reading, "Playing with the big guys is tough." It has rocket-propelled grenades hanging on the side. According to the Sudanese Doctors Committee, some of the protesters were shot by snipers.

Demonstrators accused the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), the paramilitary group led by one of the leading members of Sudan's military junta, Mohammed Hamdan Dagolo, also known as Hemeti, of the killings.

The governor of Northern Kordofan ordered a statewide closure of schools and a 9 p.m. to 6 a.m. curfew in four towns and cities in a bid to quell the unrest. But outrage provoked by the killings could not be contained. One of the main protest groups, the Sudanese Professionals Association (SPA), called for nationwide demonstrations "to denounce the El-Obeid massacre and demand the perpetrators be brought to justice."

Tens of thousands of students and youth responded in the capital Khartoum on Tuesday and in El-Obeid on Wednesday in a rising tide of opposition to the Transitional Military Council (TMC), which ousted long-term dictator President Omar al-Bashir in April to prevent the overthrow of the entire regime. Some protesters in Khartoum wore school uniforms and chanted, "Killing a student is killing a nation." Security

forces used tear gas and live ammunition to disperse the crowds. As the unrest continued, the nationwide shutdown of schools was ordered.

The Forces for Freedom and Change (FFC), an umbrella opposition front including the Sudanese Communist Party, once the strongest in the Middle East, and armed rebel groups from the conflicts in Darfur, South Kordofan and Blue Nile, said they would not be taking part in the planned talks with the TMC on Tuesday.

These layers are hostile to the workers' and rural poor's basic demands: social equality, better living standards and political freedom. The FFC agreed on July 17 to a "Political Declaration" that would establish a joint civilian-military transitional ruling body to supposedly oversee the formation of a civilian administration and prepare for elections after three years. The power-sharing agreement gave free rein to the military and is an attempt to sell out the months-long protest movement that brought cities across the country to a virtual standstill.

A civilian-led transitional government in alliance with the military, while giving the social layers represented by the FFC a greater share in Sudan's national cake, would continue to represent the interests of the country's capitalist elite and its enforcers. This venal clique presides over a country where at least 80 percent of the 40 million population live on less than US\$1 per day, with some 5.5 million in need of humanitarian assistance in 2018, an increase of 700,000 compared to 2017, and where some 2.47 million children suffer from acute malnutrition.

The power-sharing agreement was met with widespread scepticism and smaller protests continued. The very next day, security forces fired tear gas on demonstrators in Khartoum, who were commemorating

those killed since the start of the demonstrations in December last year, calling for “Civilian rule, civilian rule!” and “Freedom, peace, justice!”

According to the Sudanese Doctors Committee, at least 250 people have been killed by the security forces and 400 wounded since the start of the protests in December, with at least half killed on June 3 as the military and paramilitary forces cleared the sit-in outside the military’s headquarters in the capital.

On July 20, angry protesters again took to the streets of Khartoum after an official investigation into the June 3 crackdown cleared the TMC of all responsibility for the bloodshed. Fath al-Rahman Saeed, who headed the investigation, claimed that just 87 had died and 148 had been wounded and that those officers responsible did so without authorisation from the TMC. He said eight army officers had been charged and could face the death penalty, but did not name them. Saeed denied that there was any evidence of rape, despite widespread reporting by local medics of rape, a means of war and repression widely used by Diagalo’s RSF in Darfur.

According to protest organisers, at least 11 people have been killed in the biggest demonstrations since June 3.

The murderous assault on the school children in El-Obeid took place as Dagalo, the deputy leader of the TMC, was meeting with the Egyptian butcher President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi in Cairo. El-Sisi, along with Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), has backed the TMC since it ousted Omar al-Bashir in April.

It was el-Sisi, the chair of the African Union (AU), who brokered the deal between the TMC and opposition leaders at the behest of US imperialism, which is determined to ensure that the uprising does not spread to its regional allies: Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Egypt. These dictatorial regimes, fearing their own working class and poor peasants, backed the junta, ordered the crackdown on protesters and dictated the terms of the “deal” with the opposition forces that would provide a civilian cover for the continued rule of the Sudanese elite.

The last thing the US—and Europe—wants is instability in Sudan, 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. Imperialism also fears a new wave of refugees heading

for Europe.

The AU, in its former guise as the Organisation for African Unity, once espoused Pan-African Socialism, whose origins lie in the efforts by the Stalinist bureaucracy to subordinate the workers and poor peasants to an emerging bourgeoisie based on advocacy of “two-stage revolution”—first a unified movement for national liberation and only much later a struggle for socialism.

Trotsky’s theory of Permanent Revolution explained that the emerging bourgeoisie in countries with a belated capitalist development could not carry out national revolutions against imperialist domination because it feared any challenge by the working class to efforts to establish its own rule.

In the immediate post-war period, Soviet backing initially gave such movements room to manoeuvre and advance limited reforms and economic policies of “import substitution.” But following the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 and the restoration of capitalism, nationalist regimes throughout Africa embraced the free market and established themselves as local enforcers of the exploitation of the region by the major powers and transnational corporations.

It is the working class, in alliance with the rural poor, that must now play the decisive role in the struggle for democratic rights, jobs and all of life’s essentials in a struggle against the national bourgeoisie and the imperialist powers. This struggle cannot succeed if confined to the national soil.

Sudan’s struggle takes place amid a growing wave of working class militancy, as evidenced by the strikes and demonstrations by workers in Algeria, Tunisia and Morocco. Workers in Sudan must seek consciously to unify their fight with their brothers and sisters throughout Africa and with workers in the imperialist centres, based upon the programme of world socialist revolution.



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