

Anti-Sisi protesters return to Egypt's streets in teeth of fierce repression

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In the teeth of a massive police state crackdown, Egyptian workers and youth took to the streets again Friday to demand an end to the six-year-old dictatorship of General Abdel Fatah al-Sisi, who seized power in a bloody 2013 coup.

The protests, which followed similar demonstrations last week, were launched after Friday's prayers and were largest in towns and cities outside of Cairo. The Egyptian capital was under a complete lockdown. Every street leading into Tahrir Square, the iconic scene of mass demonstrations during the Egyptian revolution that toppled the US-backed dictatorship of Hosni Mubarak, was blockaded by police-military checkpoints.

The regime also closed down subway stations in the center of the capital to further restrict movement. Streets in central Cairo were clogged with police buses, cars and armored vehicles, while uniformed riot police and heavily armed plainclothes thugs covering their faces with balaclavas roamed the area.

At Cairo's Al-Fateh mosque, a rallying point for the mass demonstrations in 2011, dozens of police vehicles and scores of police, some carrying assault rifles, were deployed at exits as prayers let out.

The Interior Ministry even issued an order to doctors at Cairo hospitals to report any patients seeking treatment for injuries suffered in demonstrations. According to *Middle East Eye*, police were deployed to Kasr Al Ainy, one of Cairo's main hospitals, to patrol wards and inspect ambulances as they arrived.

While there were no demonstrations in central Cairo, at least 200 people were arrested there anyway. At some checkpoints, police were demanding people's cellphones, checking to see if there was anything on them indicating sympathy for the anti-Sisi protests.

Despite this crackdown, crowds marched and chanted slogans against the regime in a number of cities, including Luxor, Qena and Sohag, as well as al Warraq, an island in the center of the Nile river on the northern outskirts of metropolitan Cairo.

In Warraq, well over 1,000 demonstrated, chanting slogans denouncing not only Sisi, but also the conditions of poverty and social inequality that are rampant in Egypt. Impoverished residents of the island have waged a running battle over the past few years against the drive by the regime, along with major real estate interests and Gulf state backers, to drive them out in

order to clear the land for the development of tourist zones and luxury housing. The protest was met with tear gas as well as gunshots.

Video of the protest in Qena posted on Twitter showed large crowds marching through the streets, including school children. The crowd ripped down a pro-government banner bearing Sisi's image, stomping on and burning it.

Police dispersed demonstrations in various parts of Cairo and in Alexandria before they could even get started.

Sisi, who arrived at Cairo international airport Friday morning after attending the United Nations General Assembly debate, told a small group of supporters gathered to meet him not to "worry about anything" in relation to the protests, asserting that "the country is really strong."

In the wake of last week's protests, however, international and domestic capital clearly felt otherwise, with the Egyptian stock market plummeting 5 percent.

Goldman Sachs issued a statement Monday warning that the protests "serve as a reminder of the potential risks to social stability emanating from the decline in living standards among a large proportion of Egyptians in recent years, combined with widely reported allegations of corruption in the ruling political and military elite."

Sisi's claim that there was nothing to "worry about" was belied by the regime's massive police crackdown and frantic attempt to prevent any gathering of crowds. The regime ordered the postponement of a major football match that was supposed to take place Friday in Cairo between FC Masr and Aswan FC.

The regime also staged its own rally in support of Sisi, which was swelled by soldiers in plainclothes, government workers and workers employed by state corporations, including the Delta Sugar Company, who were bussed in from the Nile Delta. Video posted on social media also showed that poor Cairo residents were drawn to the event with a free food distribution.

Significantly, the site chosen for the event was a stone's throw from where security forces carried out a massacre of at least 95 supporters of Egypt's elected President Mohamed Morsi, who was overthrown by Sisi. The massacre was part of a nationwide bloodbath that claimed the lives of thousands.

Morsi, the country's first democratically elected president, died in June in the midst of a show trial in which he was being

prosecuted on trumped-up espionage charges. He had been imprisoned for the six years since the coup.

The demonstrations Friday were all the more extraordinary in that they took place after a massive police roundup in which more than 2,000 people were arrested in the last week, according to the tallies kept by human rights groups. The regime itself has admitted to detaining and interrogating 1,000. While most of those detained were under the age of 25, a number of prominent lawyers—detained for defending other detainees—journalists, professors and political figures, including some who had explicitly disassociated themselves from the protests, were also arrested. They are being charged with spreading false information and aiding “terrorist” organizations.

It was the largest number of arrests in a single week since Sisi seized power. The regime now holds an estimated 60,000 political prisoners. Prisoners are subjected to systematic torture, and some 2,500 of them have been sentenced to death, with at least 144 already executed.

At the UN General Assembly, Sisi received an effective green light for his police state crackdown. President Donald Trump, who infamously described the Egyptian general earlier this year as his “favorite dictator,” held a press event with Sisi in which the US president dismissed the protests. “I’m not concerned with it,” he said. “Egypt has a great leader. He’s highly respected.” Clearly, Trump aspires to do the same things in the US that Sisi does in Egypt.

This same attitude is reflected in the corporate media, which has paid scant attention to the events in Egypt. Sisi’s regime is viewed as a bulwark against revolution in the Middle East, and is also valued as a defender of capitalist interests in Egypt itself as well as a major customer for US and European arms manufacturers.

Amnesty International issued a call for “world leaders” to “confront” Sisi over his crackdown. “The world must not stand idly by as President al-Sisi tramples over Egyptians’ right to peaceful protest and freedom of expression,” declared the human rights group. The appeal clearly fell upon deaf ears.

The recent demonstrations have been sparked by a series of videos posted online by an Egyptian contractor and regime insider turned actor, self-exiled in Spain. He has charged Sisi and his family with siphoning off millions of dollars in public money and building multiple luxurious presidential palaces under conditions in which the bulk of the Egyptian population lives under conditions of abject poverty. He has called for the population to revolt, declaring that it is “numerically stronger than the army and police.”

If this spark could trigger demonstrations under conditions in which the regime has threatened anyone opposing it with imprisonment and death, it is because conditions of life for the masses of Egyptian working people have become intolerable.

Under the stipulations of a \$12 billion loan agreement with the International Monetary Fund struck in 2016, the Sisi regime

has imposed an economic “reform” plan that has slashed subsidies for gas, water and bread, deepening already rampant poverty and transferring even greater resources from the masses to a narrow wealthy elite and its imperialist patrons. According to official figures, one in three Egyptians lives on less than \$1.40 a day, and, according to the World Bank, “some 60 percent of Egypt’s population is either poor or vulnerable.”

Clearly, despite the police-state measures of the Sisi regime, Egypt remains a social powder keg, and the outbreak of demonstrations poses the renewal of the revolutionary upsurge of the masses that began in 2011.

Now, as then, the decisive question remains that of forging a revolutionary leadership based on the political independence of the working class and the unification of its struggle with that of workers throughout the Middle East and internationally.

Such a leadership can be built only as a section of the International Committee of the Fourth International and in an implacable struggle against the pseudo-left forces that seek to subordinate the struggle of Egypt’s working masses to one or another section of the Egyptian capitalist ruling class.

Nowhere is this tendency more nakedly expressed than in the maneuvers of the misnamed Revolutionary Socialists (RS). The RS has a sordid history of backing one bourgeois faction after another, from the military junta that followed the fall of Mubarak, to Morsi and the Muslim Brotherhood to Sisi and his coup, hailed by the RS as a “second revolution.”

In its latest statement on the popular demonstrations that have broken out against the Sisi regime, the RS calls for a “united front” with all “opposition forces,” stating that “elements” of the demands needed to advance the aspirations of the masses “have already been stated by different parties, forces and platforms.” This is a formulation for seeking, once again, to subordinate the revolutionary uprising of the Egyptian working class to whatever bourgeois faction may succeed in supplanting Sisi.



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