

# Military show trial of Suu Kyi begins in Myanmar

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Myanmar's ousted leader Aung San Suu Kyi was placed on trial behind closed doors this week, on the first of a series of bogus charges evidently designed by the military junta to shore up its power and claim international legitimacy for its dictatorship.

The military's February 1 coup prevented elected legislators from Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy (NLD) from taking office, following what was officially confirmed as a landslide election victory last year.

The army justified its coup by alleging that Suu Kyi's government failed to properly investigate accusations of voting irregularities. Since then it has claimed to have found evidence of fraud, but that assertion has been rejected so far by various international agencies.

The trial is being conducted amid ongoing repression, against widespread popular opposition. United Nations deputy spokesman Farhan Haq this week said a UN team on the ground estimated that at least 861 women, children and men had been killed since February 1, with thousands more injured. About 4,800 people are in detention, including politicians, teachers, health care workers, civil servants, journalists and ordinary citizens.

Suu Kyi's lawyers said she had been charged with illegally importing walkie-talkies for her bodyguards' use, unlicensed use of the radios, and spreading information that could cause public alarm or unrest. There were also two counts of violating the Natural Disaster Management Law for allegedly breaking pandemic restrictions during the 2020 election campaign.

Two more serious charges against Suu Kyi are being handled separately. One is for breaching the British colonial-era Official Secrets Act, which carries a maximum 14-year prison term, and another for bribery, which has a potential penalty of 15 years' imprisonment and a fine.

The proceedings are an obvious travesty. Although Suu

Kyi faced her first charge just days after the coup, she was not allowed her first face-to-face meeting with her lawyers until May 24, when she made her initial appearance in court for a pre-trial hearing. She had only another brief meeting with them before the trial started on Monday.

Representatives of the ousted government, which was a partnership between the NLD and the military, are agitating for intervention by the imperialist powers. Myanmar's ambassador to the UN, who has continued to be recognised by that body, despite being fired after the coup, has called for "effective collective measures" against the junta, ahead of expected UN Security Council talks on the crisis.

These appeals underscore the fact that the orientation of the NLD and its alternative "national unity government" in exile, is not to the youth and workers, who have conducted widespread strikes against the junta, but to the same world powers that backed the previous power-sharing arrangement between the NLD and the generals.

To overthrow the junta requires the mobilisation of the millions of workers, as well as the rural masses, to fight, not just for essential democratic rights, but for improved social conditions, which were under assault by the NLD-military regime.

As happened internationally, the COVID-19 pandemic intensified the attacks of government and big business on workers' jobs and conditions. Suu Kyi's government provided virtually no cash support to those hardest hit.

According to one survey conducted last October, the proportion of the population living in poverty (making less than \$US1.90 a day) had risen from 16 percent to 63 percent over the previous eight months.

With the military takeover, the UN Development Program now expects half of Myanmar's population of 55 million to fall into poverty over the coming six months, and the World Food Program worries that 3.5

million more people will face hunger.

Essential medicines and treatments are reported to be in extremely short supply, and during 2021, 950,000 infants will not receive the vaccines they need for diseases such as tuberculosis and polio.

Since the pandemic erupted, industries on which working-class households rely, such as tourism, have collapsed, as have remittances by migrant workers overseas, which totalled about \$2.4 billion in 2019. The garment industry, which employed over a million people, many of them young women, has been devastated as orders from Europe have dried up.

Within days of the coup, hundreds of thousands of people poured onto the streets, demanding an end to military rule. A civil disobedience movement emerged, with medics leaving government hospitals, and quickly spread across the public sector. On February 22, a general strike shut down businesses, including banks.

The army cracked down ruthlessly. During the last week of February, elite infantry divisions, including units responsible for the ethnic cleansing of the Rohingya ethnic minority, began moving into cities, firing on people in residential neighborhoods, breaking down doors and hauling people away.

Nevertheless, protests persisted. Young men and women erected makeshift barricades and wielded shields to defend themselves. On March 14 alone, dozens were killed in Yangon's industrial suburb of Hlaingthaya. On March 27, over 100 died as the army opened fire on crowds across Myanmar.

Amid the resistance, some protesters raised signs calling for "R2P," referring to "responsibility to protect." This is a doctrine developed to justify imperialist intervention, supposedly to defend people from crimes against humanity. Hopes of such action have since faded.

Some youth have since joined armed separatist groups, based on ethnic minorities in border areas, but these are outgunned by the military. Numbering perhaps 75,000 fighters in total, they face a military with over 300,000 personnel, equipped combat aircraft, drones and rocket artillery.

The fight for democratic rights, moreover, is bound up with far broader political issues, including overturning the divisive nation-state framework imposed over the region by British colonialism and maintained by the local ruling classes, which are utterly subservient to the global capitalist powers.

In 1937, ten years before Pakistan was split from India along religious lines, the British partitioned Burma from

India on the basis of perceived racial differences. After being granted formal independence in 1948, the Burmese elite retained a communalist policy, denying basic rights to those designated as "aliens," such as the near million Rohingya, driven into neighbouring Bangladesh.

Mired in this Burmese Buddhist nationalism, Suu Kyi and the NLD defended the military's atrocities committed against the Muslim Rohingya.

The military had freed Suu Kyi in 2010, after 15 previous years of detention, and staged elections under a constitution that ensured its continued grip on the key levers of power. The Obama administration and its allies oversaw this anti-democratic arrangement, seeking to coax the generals away from links to Beijing, as part of US imperialism's offensive against China.

As this history demonstrates, the working class can place no faith in Suu Kyi to defend democratic rights. No less than the generals, the NLD leaders fear a working-class uprising that could threaten capitalist rule. They represent sections of the capitalist class in Myanmar, whose profit-making interests have been flattened by the military, which controls substantial sections of the economy, including mining operations.

Myanmar is the world's third-largest source of strategic mined rare earths. This not only provides the regime with revenue but heightens Myanmar's strategic value for the US and its allies in their conflict with China, which borders Myanmar to the north and east. Any imperialist intervention will seek to pursue that confrontation, not defend the masses of Myanmar.

That is why, rather than looking to the NLD's "national unity government" or pleading for Washington's help, Myanmar workers need to appeal to the international working class for support, and turn to the International Committee of the Fourth International for assistance to build the revolutionary socialist party.



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