

Opposition mounts in Israel to Netanyahu's fascistic government

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More than 90,000 people rallied outside Israel's Knesset building in Jerusalem Monday amid a mass strike in opposition to the plans of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to neuter the judiciary and give his government unchecked powers.

It follows the sixth mass protest on Saturday evening, when tens of thousands took to the streets in towns and cities across the country, including in the settlement town of Efrat in the Occupied West Bank. Polls show that more than 60 percent of the population want the plans to be either paused or halted altogether.

Last week, around 8,000 army reservists marched 50 kilometres from Latrun to the Supreme Court in Jerusalem under the banner "Brothers in Arms: The March to Save Democracy."

The protests come just weeks after Netanyahu returned to power with the backing of fascistic, racist and ultra-religious forces committed to an agenda of annexing the West Bank, which Israel has illegally occupied since the 1967 Arab Israeli war. They are determined to reinforce Jewish Supremacy, apartheid rule, and Jewish prayer at the al-Aqsa Mosque; roll back already circumscribed anti-discrimination measures through sweeping changes to Israel's legal system; and step up police and military repression against the Palestinians, and against workers, Jewish and Palestinian, in Israel itself.

Such a programme entails the gutting of what remains of Israel's public services and massive transfers to the religious schools and seminaries, under conditions of soaring rents and prices in a country where around 20 percent of its 9.3 million population live in poverty and a handful of families have staggering levels of wealth.

This means eliminating the few restrictions on government power, with a tranche of legislation that had its first reading in parliament Monday. It enables the government to override Supreme Court decisions, while limiting the court's ability to strike down legislation that infringes on human and civil rights or overturn ministerial appointments, like the reappointment of the thrice-convicted Shas leader Arie

Dery. It also gives the government complete control over judicial appointments.

Further legislation is planned that would abolish the post of attorney general, paving the way to end Netanyahu's corruption trial and speeding up settlement construction.

Almost the entire legal establishment in Israel have criticised the plans. A layer of secular generals and opposition leaders from Israel's short-lived and misnamed "government of change" under Naftali Bennett, Yair Lapid and Benny Gantz, many of whom have served under Netanyahu in the past, have come out in ferocious opposition, to the point that media analysts are talking about whether or not a civil war is in the offing.

Netanyahu's coalition partners have demanded that Lapid and Gantz, along with former generals Moshe Ya'alon and Yair Golan, be "arrested and handcuffed" for the crime of "treason against the homeland" after they called for "widespread civil disobedience" to halt the judicial coup. These right-wing layers, who represent Israel's high tech employees and the most affluent layers and have few policy differences with Netanyahu, fear that a power grab by a scandal-ridden and indicted prime minister, beholden to fascistic forces, is a danger to the stability of capitalist rule and the Israeli state.

Israel's allies abroad, including the Biden administration, have voiced "concerns." Washington fears that its chief attack dog in the region is about to provoke a Palestinian uprising on the West Bank that could spill over into Israel itself and involve neighbouring countries, jeopardising the covert wars against Iran and its allies in the region. This is bound up with their broader plans for war against Russia and China, with which Tehran has drawn closer in recent years.

On Monday, opposition legislators accused the committee chair Simcha Rothman of riding roughshod over Knesset procedure and violating the legislative process, leading to angry denunciations and the forcible ejection of at least 14 opposition legislators from the Knesset chamber. The vote to send the bill for hearing was held despite President Isaac Herzog's call to halt the legislative proceedings.

In the run up to the parliamentary proceedings, the various organisations that have organised the weekly Saturday evening mass rallies issued a call for a general strike on Monday, with opposition leader Lapid appealing to employers to let workers strike to “fight for democracy.”

Arnon Bar-David, chair of the Zionist trade union federation, the Histadrut, wrote to his members to say that he did not intend to join the protests or call for a general strike, declaring absurdly, “Israel is a country of laws and only the head of the Histadrut has the authority to shut down the economy.”

Doctors and health workers, high tech workers, educators, university staff and students were among those joining Monday’s strike and rally, although their trade union leaders also said they did not intend to join the protests, announce a labour dispute or shut down services. This is despite Religious Zionism leader and Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich promising during the election campaign to ban strikes by workers providing essential services.

The rise of such fascistic, anti-working class forces in a state hailed for supposedly providing a safe and egalitarian haven for Jews who had suffered so terribly at the hands of Hitler’s Nazi regime is part of an international shift among powerful sections of the bourgeoisie. In country after country, right-wing and authoritarian forces are being mobilized to divert and suppress rising social discontent and the alienation of masses of working class people from the traditional parties of the ruling class.

Underlying the breakdown of democratic institutions and norms is the protracted global economic crisis, exacerbated by the pandemic and the disruption to global supply chains that has massively increased social inequality and led to soaring inflation, the extreme growth of militarism and war, and, above all, the intensification of the class struggle.

To the extent that neo-fascistic forces have been able to win broader support, political responsibility rests with the right-wing and anti-working-class character of the nominal “left,” who joined a right-wing “government of change” that continued Netanyahu’s economic policies in the interests of Israel’s oligarchs and upped the oppression of the Palestinians. Last year more Palestinians were killed than at any time since 2005. Some 231 lost their lives to the security forces or far-right settlers, including two with joint US citizenship, Al Jazeera journalist Shireen Abu Akleh and 78-year-old Omar Assad.

These right-wing layers opposed to Netanyahu call for a general alliance of “democratic forces” on a capitalist, pro-austerity basis, seeking little more than a watering down of the government’s plans for the judiciary and Netanyahu’s removal from office. They have no proposals to change a social, economic and political set-up that has enriched the

financial aristocracy at the expense of the broad mass of the population, much less any plans to so much as ameliorate the brutal repression of the Palestinians in the occupied territories. There Israeli governments of whatever party coalition operate a de facto military dictatorship, abetted by a corrupt Palestinian bourgeoisie, while Israel’s Palestinian citizens are subject to generalised economic and social discrimination. Indeed, the organizers of the anti-Netanyahu marches have actively discouraged Israeli Palestinians from participating in rallies that are dominated by Israeli flags.

Israeli and Palestinian workers must take heed. These so-called centrist leaders that presently control the protest movement offer no way forward for either Israeli or Palestinian workers. They seek to shore up the crumbling institutions of bourgeois rule and maintain the grip of the ruling elite. The struggle against Netanyahu’s judicial coup takes place as workers are coming into struggle against their capitalist leaders all over the world. It is part of a broader, international struggle whose features, whatever the local differences, are broadly similar: opposition to war, dictatorship and economic hardship.

The central task today is to mobilize the working class, Jewish and Palestinian, independently and in unity with workers throughout the region and in the main imperialist centres, against the source of war, dictatorship and poverty—capitalism—and for the reorganisation of the world economy on a socialist basis. This is the perspective of permanent revolution fought for by the International Committee of the Fourth International.



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