

Netanyahu's far-right government presses ahead with judicial coup

What way forward for Israeli and Palestinian workers?

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The largest outpouring of popular opposition in Israel's history took place on March 26, when hundreds of thousands of people took to the streets in protest against Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's plans to neuter the country's judicial system, the only arm of the state that his coalition of fascists and ultra-orthodox religious parties does not control.

It culminated in a full-scale walk out by workers the following day, shutting down government operations in Israel and overseas, education, healthcare, public services, transport and major industries.

Netanyahu's judicial coup is bound up with a broader agenda of reinforcing Jewish Supremacy, apartheid rule, Jewish prayer at the al-Aqsa Mosque; rolling back already circumscribed anti-discrimination measures through sweeping changes to Israel's legal system; and stepping up police and military repression against the Palestinians, and workers, Jewish and Palestinian, in Israel itself. It entails the gutting of what remains of Israel's public services and massive transfers to the religious schools and seminaries.

Such a programme means eliminating the few restrictions on government power.

The scale of the opposition, precipitated by Netanyahu's firing of his defence minister, Yoav Gallant—who warned that the plan to curtail the powers of the Supreme Court was splitting the Israel Defense Forces and posed a threat to Israel's security—led to the temporary suspension of the legislative plans.

This came after three months of Saturday evening protests animated by justified fears of a dictatorship of the religious Zionists and the extremist settlers and anger over Netanyahu's corruption, now the subject of a major trial. The protest movement has been fueled by immense social inequality, 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; the impact of the global pandemic and the broader capitalist crisis fueling a strike wave by millions globally. It was also spurred on by opposition to the pogrom-like attack by settlers on Palestinians in Huwara in February.

This marked the greatest political crisis in Israel's 75-year history, with Netanyahu and others admitting the country was on the brink of "civil war." The weekly protests have continued, even after Netanyahu retracted his firing of Gallant. Repeated polls have shown that the vote for Netanyahu's Likud party would collapse if an election were held now. He would win just 20 seats, down from 32 today, and his coalition bloc 50 seats, down from 64. Former Defence Minister Benny Gantz and his National Unity party would win around 30 seats, enabling him to form a coalition government.

But Netanyahu is pressing ahead nevertheless. His legislative pause came with a concession to the far-right, the establishment of a new National Guard, under the control of National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir of the fascist Jewish Power. The same forces employed against the Palestinians—fascistic settlers—in the occupied territories will now to be used against Israel's Palestinian citizens and Jewish workers and youth as well.

On Thursday evening, tens of thousands of pro-government protesters gathered in Jerusalem in what was advertised as the "march of a million," in support of the government's plans and to insist that the judicial coup go ahead. Protesters chanted "We don't want compromise," and "Fire [Attorney General Gali Baharav] Miara!" as prominent coalition figures, including Justice Minister and Likud member Yariv Levin, Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich of the fascist Religious Zionism, Ben-Gvir and

his fellow Religious Zionism legislator Simcha Rothman, took to the stage.

Ha'aretz reported that Israel's anti-overhaul protest movement responded to the right-wing demonstration by saying, "From this evening, the mask is off, and Israel is on the brink of dictatorship," and pledging to continue the protests. It added, "Only one vote separates Israel from a dangerous messianic dictatorship," saying that talks entered by the opposition parties, brokered by Israel's figurehead president Israel Herzog, have proven a "scam."

Parliament, reconvening on Sunday after a one-month recess, is expected to pass legislation that will enable the government to control the appointments to the Supreme Court. Gantz said that the talks at the President's Residence, "haven't seen progress on any of the issues - especially the issue of the judicial appointments' committee."

Throughout, Gantz and other opposition leaders, including former Prime Minister Yair Lapid and former generals and security and intelligence chiefs, have sought to confine the protests to vague demands for an end to the judicial coup. They have refused to even call for new elections.

According to leaked reports from US intelligence, moreover, the Histadrut corporatist trade union federation called the mass strike on March 27 only after a call from Netanyahu—stressing that this would in fact give him bargaining power with his coalition partners, calling it off the minute after his announcement of the legislative pause.

Committed like Netanyahu to the Zionist project of settlement expansion, annexation of the occupied territories and Jewish Supremacy, these self-proclaimed leaders have opposed all attempts to mobilise support among Israeli Arabs and the Palestinian population of the occupied territories more so. Early attempts to include the Palestinians were discouraged and Palestinian flags were ruled out of order. Instead, the demonstrations have been drowned in a sea of blue and white Israeli flags, provided and paid for by the organisers and distributed every week, crowding out the home-made banners that were a feature of the earlier protests. Their intention was to send a signal to the bourgeoisie and Israel's international backers in the US and Europe that this was not a "left," pro-Palestinian or anti-Zionist movement.

These Zionist leaders have stolen the traditional symbol of right-wing protests, including the infamous annual Jerusalem Day Flag March, marking the capture of East

Jerusalem during the June 1967 Arab Israeli war. Far-right and religious Israelis celebrate the day, which falls on May 18 this year, by marching through the Damascus Gate and the Old City carrying Israeli flags and hurling racist abuse at East Jerusalem's Palestinian residents.

Gantz and Co are right-wing politicians who represent Israel's high-tech employers and the most affluent social layers. Differing little in their policies from Netanyahu, they fear that a power grab by a scandal-ridden and indicted prime minister, beholden to fascistic forces, endangers the stability of capitalist rule and the Zionist state. Their aim is to engineer some kind of national unity government that would oust the fascists. They have the backing of the Biden administration, "concerned" that its regional subcontractor will provoke a Palestinian uprising that could spill over into Israel and its neighbours and jeopardise the covert war against Iran and its allies in the region that is an essential component of Washington's broader plans for war with Russia and China.

The so-called centrist leaders that presently control the protest movement offer no way forward for either Israeli or Palestinian workers and are handing the initiative back to Netanyahu and his fascistic supporters. The struggle against Netanyahu's judicial coup takes place as workers are coming into struggle against their capitalist leaders all over the world, including in the occupied West Bank where teachers have been on strike for the last two months. 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 is to take up the difficult task of unifying the working class, Jewish and Palestinian, independently of their traditional leaderships and together 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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