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General strike against military regime brings Sudan to a standstill

An indefinite nationwide general strike brought cities across Sudan to a virtual standstill Sunday, nearly one week after security forces launched a counterrevolutionary bloodbath with an assault on a mass sit-in outside the defense ministry headquarters in Khartoum. The Central Committee of Sudan Doctors estimates that 118 protestors have been killed, including four on Sunday, and a further 784 wounded since the crackdown began last Monday.

Tens of thousands of Sudanese have been regularly gathering for months outside the defense ministry and protesting across the country as part of the popular movement that began in December 2018 demanding the end of military rule and the transfer of power to a democratically elected government.

The Transitional Military Council (TMC) seized power in a coup on April 11, ousting President Omar al-Bashir after months of mass protests in an effort to preempt a revolutionary overthrow of the entire military regime, which has been in power for three decades.



Demonstrations in Sudan (Credit: Amnesty International)

Headed by the deputy of the TMC, Lieutenant General Hamdan “Hemedti” Dagalo, who aspires to take al-Bashir’s place as dictator, Rapid Support Force (RSF) paramilitary soldiers used live fire and stun grenades to disperse the sit-in on June 3.

Dozens of protestors were forced off or thrown from the Blue Nile bridge by the RSF, some reportedly with concrete blocks tied to their bodies to ensure that they drowned and their bodies were not found. The RSF, formed out of the notorious Janjaweed militia, deployed the same brutal tactics in the heart of Khartoum utilized to suppress rebellions in Darfur and the country’s east.

The rampage came in the wake of Dagalo’s visit with Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman in Saudi Arabia and trips by General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, the head of the TMC and Sudan’s de facto ruler, to Abu Dhabi and Cairo, where he received pointers on drowning a revolution in blood from Egyptian dictator General Abdel Fattah El-Sisi.

While the Trump administration has raised concerns about the instability caused by the military crackdown, with its support, the main allies of American imperialism in the Middle East have been and continue to be key financial and political backers of the military dictatorship in Sudan. In turn, the RSF has sent thousands of its members to fight in the Saudi-led assault on Yemen. The Saudi monarchy and Emirati sheiks have pledged \$3 billion to prop up the TMC.

Outraged by the brutal RSF assault, millions across the country heeded the call of the Sudanese Professional Association (SPA) trade union for a movement of “civil disobedience” and “open political strike” against the ruling Transitional Military Council.

Photos and video posted on social media showed empty streets and shuttered markets in a number of state capitols across the country, from Damazin in Blue Nile to El Obeid in North Kurdufan, Wad Madani in Al Jazirah and Port Sudan on the Red Sea.

Metro Khartoum, an urban region with more than 5 million residents, was brought to a near standstill, with public transportation shut down and most stores, banks and offices closed.

A 20-year old protestor was shot and killed in Omdurman as security forces used tear gas and live fire to disperse demonstrations. Protestors erected barricades of bricks and tires in Khartoum North to blockade major roads and bridges. Travelers filled up the departure terminal up at Khartoum International Airport as most flights were cancelled.

“We blocked the streets to send a message to those trying to steal our revolution that they will fail,” Emad Ibrahim, 25, a protester from Khartoum North told the AFP. “It is a long road ahead for us, but after the sacrifice made by our brothers who have been killed, we believe that we will achieve our goal.”

The military sought to break the strike movement by blocking social media, cutting off mobile access to the internet and arresting “essential employees,” including bank executives and airport and electrical utility workers and forcing them to work at gunpoint.

Despite this effort at intimidation, workers and professionals expressed their determination to continue striking until the junta is gone. “We will not go back to work until the [SPA union] announces the end of the strike,” Ahmad al-Noor, a 46-year-old private food company employee told Reuters. “Sudan must be governed by a civilian government.”

“The roadblocks prevented me from reaching the market to buy vegetables,” vegetable vendor Hassan Abdelrahim told the AFP. “This will impact my income, but when I look at these youngsters who are on the streets since six months, I’m not angry even if I lose my income.”

A statement released by the SPA declared that the civil disobedience campaign would continue until “a civilian government announces itself in power on state television.” The SPA is part of the Forces for Declaration of Freedom and Change (FDFC) civilian popular opposition alliance, which has been engaged in talks with the TMC over a transfer of power.

The talks broke down last month over the question of whether a military or civilian figure would head a joint regime during a three-year transition period to prepare for new presidential elections.



Barricades erected in Khartoum North (Credit Twitter: @ThomasVLinge)

An effort by Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed to revive talks between the TMC and the FDFC coalition were spurned by the military over the weekend, with the arrests of Mohamed Esmat, director of the Khartoum branch of the Central Bank of Sudan, and Ismail Jalab, secretary general of the Sudan People's Liberation Movement-North. Esmat and Jalab, leading representatives of the FDFC, were detained shortly after meeting with Ahmed.

The bourgeois and petty-bourgeois elements represented by the FDFC, regardless of their differences with the TMC, offer no way forward for the workers and poor in Sudan. A civilian-led transitional government would continue to represent the interests of the country's capitalist elite and its enforcers in the military.

With the first day of the general strike, the working class has shown its collective strength. What is required now is the establishment of independent and democratic organs of working class struggle to mobilize the working masses in Sudan to take power, establish a workers' government and seize the country's immense wealth as part of an international struggle for socialism.

This requires the building of a section of the International Committee of the Fourth International, the World Party of Socialist Revolution, in Sudan. All those who are serious about taking up the fight for socialism should **contact us** today.

10 June 2019