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Egyptian junta imposes martial law amid bloody crackdown

By Johannes Stern and Alex Lantier

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The bloody massacre and imposition of emergency rule carried out yesterday by Egypt's military junta testifies to the ruthlessness of efforts of the Egyptian ruling class and its imperialist backers in Washington and Europe to drown the Egyptian revolution in blood.

The army's ouster of Islamist President Mohamed Mursi on July 3 was a pre-emptive action amidst mass working class protests against the elected government's reactionary policies. The military coup has since developed into an open attempt to restore the military-backed dictatorship that existed before the Egyptian revolution under the regime of Hosni Mubarak.

Starting early Wednesday morning, security forces backed by helicopters, armored vehicles and snipers assaulted protests and sit-ins by Mursi supporters in cities across Egypt. In the capital, Cairo, the army dispersed two pro-Mursi sit-ins and repeatedly attacked the central protest site, at the Rabaa al-Adawiya Mosque.

“Tear gas (canisters) were falling from the sky like rain. There are no ambulances inside. They closed every entrance,” said protester Khaled Ahmed, 20, a student wearing a hard hat who had

tears streaming down his face. “There are women and children in there. God help them. This is a siege, a military attack on a civilian protest camp.”

“At 7 AM they came. Helicopters from the top and bulldozers from below. They smashed through our walls. Police and soldiers, they fired tear gas at children,” teacher Saleh Abdulaziz told Reuters, while clutching a bleeding head wound. “They continued to fire at protesters even when we begged them to stop.”

Egyptian officials reported that 235 people were killed, including 100 in Cairo, and 2,001 wounded. AFP reporters said they had personally counted 124 dead in Cairo. Muslim Brotherhood (MB) officials, who run the protest sites and field hospitals, put the toll at 2,200 killed and 10,000 wounded.

The army tried to prevent coverage of the killings, fatally shooting at journalists who defied orders to avoid protest sites. The victims included Sky News cameraman Mick Deane and Habiba Ahmed Abd El-Aziz of the United Arab Emirates’ Xpress service.

The regime also closed down major highways and train lines into Cairo to keep protesters from traveling to the capital to reinforce the main protest sites. Outside Cairo, Egyptian Health Ministry figures showed that dozens were killed and hundreds wounded in protests in Minya and Fayoum. Dozens more were killed or wounded in protests in Suez, Sohag, and Assuit, and protesters marched in Alexandria and Beni Souif.

The re-imposition of emergency rule, which existed for decades under Mubarak, allows the police and military to arrest and detain protesters at will. Yesterday afternoon, Egyptian police reported that they had arrested 543 people. There will also be a 7 PM to 6 AM curfew in 12 of Egypt’s 27 governorates, including most of the country’s industrial centers.

The army also threw out governors appointed by Mursi, naming a new list of 25 governors that included 19 generals and two judges known as Mubarak loyalists. The new governor of Cairo, civilian Galal Mostafa Saed, was a top official in Mubarak’s now-dissolved National Democratic Party.

These events obey an inexorable political logic: the capitalist ruling class, having been compelled to make concessions in the first upsurge of the revolution, takes the gloves off when the first opportunity arises to deal a blow to the working class.

In this, the Egyptian junta enjoys the support of Washington and its European allies. Washington has repeatedly backed the Egyptian army’s bloody crackdowns since the July 3 overthrow of Mursi, which it declined to call a coup so it could continue giving the Egyptian army \$1.3 billion in yearly military aid. Earlier this month, US Secretary of State John Kerry praised the generals’ decision to topple Mursi as “restoring democracy.”

The responses of US and European diplomats to yesterday's massacre were masterpieces of cynicism and hypocrisy. While Kerry said that he "strongly opposed" the state of emergency in Egypt, White House spokesman Josh Earnest made it clear that support for the junta would continue.

US State Department spokeswoman Jen Psaki blandly declared: "Certainly there have been some significant bumps in the road, but our focus is getting back on a path to democracy."

In a comment as banal as it was hypocritical, European Union foreign policy chief Catherine Ashton said, "Confrontation and violence is not the way forward to resolve key political issues."

As bullets flew in Cairo, British Foreign Secretary William Hague called upon the security forces to "act with restraint."

The fundamental lessons of Leon Trotsky's Theory of Permanent Revolution find bloody vindication in the latest slaughter in Cairo. The struggle for democracy can be carried out only in a ruthless struggle against imperialism, all sections of the capitalist class, and their political accomplices in the middle class. The task of fighting for democratic rights falls to the working class, as part of an independent revolutionary struggle for socialism and workers' power.

Over the two years of mass strikes and protests by workers and youth since the ouster of Mubarak in 2011, the liberal bourgeoisie and sections of the affluent middle class closest to it have shifted openly into the camp of counterrevolution. In the absence of a socialist leadership within the working class, they utilized the growing strike movement and popular protests against Mursi to their own advantage.

While a group of Egyptian billionaires and multimillionaires provided finance and pulled the strings behind the scenes, the necessary political conditions for the planned coup were created by a reactionary coalition of liberal, Nasserite, and pseudo-left parties and organizations, which provided the military with the needed "democratic" cover.

Now, with Egypt in the grip of a murderous dictatorship, these organizations are either backing the repression or trying to cover their tracks.

Hamdeen Sabbahi, the Nasserite leader of the Egyptian Popular Current, cynically blamed the bloodshed on the Muslim Brotherhood. In a statement, his party wrote that the MB had "chosen a standoff scenario with the state." It said it would "reject the Brotherhood's attempt to enlarge the circle of violence in Cairo and the governorates, as well as their targeting of churches and police stations." The statement further called upon the Egyptian people to support the police and the army in "confronting terrorism and upholding popular will."

Before yesterday's crackdown, numerous liberal and pseudo-left parties called for a crackdown against pro-MB forces. Karima al-Hefnawy, a leading member of the Egyptian Socialist Party, said: "This is a violent and armed sit-in, and it is the right of every government to disperse it by law, and the people are saying that if the government does not disperse, we will do it ourselves."

Shadi Ghazali Harb, the founder of the liberal Awareness Party and a former leader of the now-disbanded Coalition of the Youth of the Revolution, said that "these sit-ins should be dismantled by any means ... unfortunately, there will be injuries and probably deaths."

These liberal and "left" forces have blood on their hands. They are politically responsible for the mass murder of peaceful protesters, including women and children.

Another section of liberal politicians, who provided essential political support for the military seizure of power, now seek to cover up their responsibility for the massacre. Liberal leader and Egyptian vice president for international affairs, Mohamed ElBaradei, in an act of consummate political cynicism resigned from his position in the junta's puppet government.

In a letter to President Adly Mansour, ElBaradei wrote: "It has become hard for me to keep bearing responsibility for decisions that I did not approve of and warned against their consequences. I cannot be responsible before God for a single drop of blood."

Can there be any doubt that ElBaradei's letter was drafted in close consultation with the US State Department, which is fearful that this trusted political asset may be of no value to the United States if he is totally compromised by his association with the military?

The middle-class charlatans of the Revolutionary Socialists (RS), who collaborated closely with the pro-Army parties in the run-up to the coup, are also trying to cover up their own role, posing as critics of these forces. They write: "Many who described themselves as liberals and leftists have betrayed the Egyptian Revolution, led by those who took part in Al-Sisi's government. They have sold the blood of the martyrs to whitewash the military and the counter-revolution. These people have blood on their hands."

What a cynical fraud! The liberal bourgeoisie did not "betray" the revolution. It acted, entirely predictably, in accordance with its class interests, to crush popular opposition and restore the infrastructure of a police state. It was the RS that played the filthiest role, promoting the pro-Army Tamarod, rubbing shoulders with those forces organizing and abetting the conspiracy, and presenting them as revolutionaries.

The RS participated in the Tamarod ("Rebel") campaign, a right-wing conspiracy financed and supported by former Mubarak regime elements, to channel mass discontent against Mursi and the MB behind the Army. Tamarod leaders Mahmoud Badr and Mohamed Abdel Aziz, who were

cheered by the RS in their headquarters, later flanked al-Sisi when he announced the coup on state television. Tamarod and its allies, including the RS, all have blood on their hands.

Yesterday's bloody events do not signify the end of the revolution, but its baptism under fire as the different political forces reveal their class loyalties ever more openly. The working class did not participate in mass protests against Mursi in order to bring the military satraps of the Mubarak dictatorship back to power. As the military seeks to extend its repression of the MB into a generalized onslaught against the working class, it will encounter implacable resistance.