

Fatal accidents fuel discontent with Egyptian Islamist government

By Johannes Stern
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In recent days a series of fatal accidents shook Egypt, fueling discontent with Islamist President Mohamed Mursi and the ruling Muslim Brotherhood (MB). This comes only days before the second anniversary of the beginning of the Egyptian Revolution on January 25, which led to the ouster of longtime dictator Hosni Mubarak on February 11, 2011.

The week began with a horrible train accident in the Giza neighborhood of Badrashin, a suburb of the capital, Cairo. On Monday, minutes before midnight, the last two wagons of a 12-carriage train carrying 1,328 police conscripts from rural areas of Upper Egypt derailed and crashed into a freight train parked outside a storage depot. Nineteen soldiers were killed and 120 injured. *Ahram Online* gave a shocking account of the scenery after the accident took place: “Two train carriages could be seen: one upside down, the other – several meters away – lies crushed in a field. Among the rubble, one can see passengers’ clothing; the stench of death is in the air.”

Eyewitnesses said it took long before official help arrived, and local residents tried their best to help and rescue the injured.

Reda Abdel-Latif, a housewife who was washing her three grandchildren’s clothes when the accident occurred, recalled: “I got up when I heard conscripts screaming ‘Help!’ I stopped a car that was passing by and we called the ambulance and police. Then we stopped trains coming from both directions and began moving the injured to the hospitals.”

Abdel-Latif then recounted how she and other residents collected money to buy medical equipment for the nearby Hawamdiya Hospital, which, according to her, lacked any necessary equipment. “The young people wanted to donate blood, but found no syringes or bags in the hospital.” Mohammed El-Sayed, an

employee at the local morgue said: “There was no cotton, no alcohol or bandages; there was a lack of the most basic supplies. I saw injured people who might have been saved if we had had the right equipment.”

The accident comes less than two weeks after Mursi appointed a new transportation minister, and just two months after a train crashed into a school bus in the Assiut governorate, killing 51 pupils and injuring 17.

On Wednesday, only two days after the Badrashin train accident, an eight-story building collapsed in Alexandria, Egypt’s second largest city. Officially, 24 people were killed, but rescue workers fear that at least 10 more bodies are trapped under the rubble. The collapsed building in eastern Alexandria’s Al-Maamoura district housed at least 24 families.

Angry citizens blamed the government and widespread corruption for the collapse and the city’s catastrophic housing situation. Since Mursi took power after the presidential elections last June, at least 13 people have been killed in similar collapses in July and October of last year.

The situation in other parts of the country is no different. On Thursday another building collapsed in Kom Ombo, an agricultural town in the Upper Egyptian governorate of Aswan. A 70-year-old woman was killed and her two sons injured when the two-story building collapsed.

The deadly collapses point to the desperate housing conditions facing masses of Egyptian workers and peasants. According to the investigation, the building in Kom Ombo was made of clay bricks and the second story did not have a roof. The whole building broke down in only a few seconds, when the ceiling of the first floor gave way.

On Thursday morning a second train collision took place in Giza with a train crashing into a taxi. Four

people, amongst them a woman and her small child, were killed.

The accident immediately sparked protests by hundreds of angry workers and youth who blockaded the train tracks and brought train traffic to a halt on Thursday. The protesters accused government officials of not taking up repeated complaints about a defunct alarm system.

Watchmen tasked with regulating the traffic told the media that they are informed via cell phones by the watchtower guards only seconds before a train arrives, because the regular system does not work. The time window the workers have to close the crossing manually is too short, the workers explained.

Saad El-Katatni, the head of the Freedom and Justice Party (FJP), the MB's political arm, blamed the Mubarak regime for the recurrent accidents. According to *Ahram Online*, the accidents "were proof of the almost total collapse of infrastructure caused by corruption during the Mubarak era."

As the Mursi government seeks to deny any responsibility for the destruction in the past days, mass anger in Egypt is turning against it.

Mohamed Ashraf, an eyewitness, blamed Mursi for the fatal crash: "This is the third accident after the revolution but nothing has changed. Can you imagine media crews arriving before any paramedics or even an official assessing the damage? Where is the government?"

On Tuesday, the day after the first train accident, protests broke out at Ramses, the main train station in Cairo. Hundreds blockaded the railway tracks condemning the "dictatorship" of Mursi and the MB and demanding its fall: "Down with the rule of the supreme guide" and "We will not leave, he [Mursi] has to leave!"

Condemning Mursi's policies, one protester held a banner reading: "Renaissance, the eradication of the people," a variation of Mursi's campaign slogan, "Renaissance, the will of the people." "Renaissance" is the name of Mursi's economic program, which masses of workers and youth correctly understand as the continuation of Mubarak's anti-working class policies, which looted Egyptian industry and infrastructure in collaboration with global finance capital.

Mursi is currently securing a new IMF loan and preparing to carry out massive austerity against the

working class. Mursi's plans, which are carried out in the name of the entire Egyptian bourgeoisie, include plans to cut subsidies such as fuel or bread on which masses of impoverished Egyptians depend. These plans will have devastating social consequences and can only produce further catastrophes for the Egyptian working class.

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