

Egyptian opposition warns of an “explosion of the masses”

National day of protest set for Tuesday

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Since the beginning of the revolutionary turmoil in Tunisia, there have been continuous warnings in the media and by politicians of the danger that the protests could spread to other countries in the region or the entire Arab world. Above all, Egypt stands at the centre of such fears.

It is the most important ally of US imperialism in the region and the most populous country, with some 80 million inhabitants. The fear is that were the Egyptian masses to begin to move, the entire imperialist strategy and all of the bourgeois regimes in the region would be at risk.

Against this background, warnings coming from the official Egyptian opposition have grown more strident in recent days. Like the dictatorial Mubarak regime itself, opposition leaders are striving to prevent the spread of popular unrest.

A measure of their concern is the fact that they have felt obliged to call for a national day of protest on Tuesday.

The Mubarak regime has reinforced its security forces at key locations while it tries to maintain food subsidies. The opposition, citing the example of Tunisia, insists that stability cannot be guaranteed through violence or authoritarian methods.

Last week, in the pages of Britain’s *Guardian* newspaper, the best-known Egyptian opposition politician, Mohamed ElBaradei, warned that Egypt faced a “Tunisia-style explosion.” Appealing directly to the imperialist powers and the ruling class in Egypt, he wrote, “What has transpired in Tunisia is no surprise and should be very instructive both for the political elite in Egypt and those in the West that back dictatorships.” He added, “Suppression does not equal

stability, and anybody who thinks that the existence of authoritarian regimes is the best way to maintain calm is deluding themselves.”

In the course of the developments in Tunisia, it is becoming increasingly clear where ElBaradei and the entire Egyptian official opposition stand. Despite their occasional pseudo-democratic criticisms of President Hosni Mubarak, they are vehemently opposed to any movement of the oppressed masses. ElBaradei said he hoped “change will come in an orderly way and not through the Tunisian model.”

“These things need to be organised and planned properly,” he added. “I would like to use the means available from within the system to effect change.”

The position of the Egyptian opposition expressed in the founding declaration of the so-called “Alternative Parliament” is even more explicit. It states: “We announce the parliament as a peaceful means for change in Egypt that prevents the dangers of what could otherwise be a spontaneous explosion of the masses, the consequences of which may get out of control.”

The goal of the newly founded “Alternative” or “Popular Parliament” is to prevent an independent mass movement in Egypt, with its possible consequences for bourgeois rule.

The alternative parliament involves nearly all of the major opposition parties and groups, including conservative and liberal bourgeois parties such as Al-Wafd and El-Ghad, as well as the “left” parties Al-Tagammu and al-Karama and nominally “communist” tendencies. It also embraces ElBaradei’s non-partisan National Association for Change, grass-roots groups like the Kefaya movement, and the country’s largest

opposition group, the Muslim Brotherhood. Even former members of Mubarak's ruling National Democratic Party (NDP) are involved in this "parliament."

The fear of action by the Egyptian population can also be seen in a separate statement from the Muslim Brotherhood issued last Wednesday. It declares that the conditions which led to the revolt in Tunisia exist as well in many other countries in the region. The statement advises the government to immediately lift the emergency legislation by which Mubarak has ruled since he took power in 1981, dissolve Parliament, hold free and fair parliamentary elections, and guarantee that the next scheduled presidential elections are held. Only then can a "revolution" in Egypt be prevented, asserts the Muslim Brotherhood.

Social conditions for the broad mass of the population are even worse in Egypt than in Tunisia, as documented in statistics recently disclosed at the national symposium of the Arab Labour Organisation (ALO). While in Tunisia 6.6 percent of the population lives on less than \$2 a day, in Egypt the figure is over 40 percent. An ALO expert, Amin Fares, reported that some 43 percent of the population in Egypt live in poverty.

At the same time, the symposium showed on which side the supposed "workers' organisations" such as the ALO stand. The event was entitled "Prevent the Tunisian and Algerian Crisis from Occurring in Other Arab Countries." Representatives of the state-controlled Egyptian Trade Union Federation (ETUF), which is completely dominated by Mubarak's NDP, attended the symposium.

From the outset, the ETUF supported Mubarak's economic liberalisation policy, imposed under pressure from the International Monetary Fund (IMF). This programme has plunged millions of Egyptian workers into abject poverty.

With undisguised cynicism, ETUF Chairman Hussein Mogawer told the symposium that the workers were responsible for rising unemployment because they shunned certain jobs as "inferior."

Against the background of the Tunisian developments, as well as rising prices in Egypt, the ETUF has announced that it will increase its "presence among workers." This can only be understood as a threat.

Abdel Halim, president of the General Union of Agricultural Workers, told the independent daily *Al Masry Al Youm* that it was now necessary, "in order to stabilise the country," to prevent "workers' complaints" being "exploited by opposition groups and movements."

The ETUF utilises police methods to block Egyptian workers from taking up the class struggle. Is completely discredited.

Just a few days ago, Chuobaki Amr, an expert at the Al-Ahram Centre for Political and Strategic Studies, said the trade unions in Egypt are "dead." There is no one to represent the general population and the workers, he declared, adding that the same applies to the opposition parties and groups that are now seeking to prevent a mass uprising through the establishment of the "alternative parliament."

He warned that none of the parties has a social base among workers or the impoverished rural population, making it unlikely that they will succeed in deflecting a mass movement.

According to press reports, at least five people in Egypt have set themselves on fire in recent days in order to draw attention to their desperate situation. In Tunisia, it was just such an incident that triggered the protests that forced the dictator Ben Ali to flee to Saudi Arabia.



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