

# Egyptian uprising grows despite regime's reform gestures

**Barry Grey****1 February 2011**

Tens of thousands of people continued to demonstrate in Cairo and other Egyptian cities Monday. Protest organizers called for a “march of a million” to descend on Cairo’s Tahrir Square and the Presidential Palace Tuesday to demand the resignation of President Hosni Mubarak and an end to his dictatorial regime.

The growing confidence of the masses was reflected in a comment made by a demonstrator in Tahrir Square and cited by the *Guardian*. The newspaper quoted the man as saying, “People have lost their fear.”

There were reports of thousands of people from all over the country pouring into Cairo for Tuesday’s protest, despite efforts by the military-controlled government to impede access to the capital by shutting down rail lines. Internet service and some cell phone service remained shut off for the fourth straight day.

While the military pledged not to use force to silence “legitimate” demands for reform, it deployed troops and tanks in ever greater numbers, erecting barricades in the center of Cairo and establishing control over access to Tahrir Square. In Alexandria, troops fired live bullets over the heads of demonstrators.

Also on Monday, the regime stepped up its attacks on Al Jazeera, closing down its Cairo office and arresting members of its staff.

The call for the biggest demonstration yet after seven days of continual protests represented a popular repudiation of moves by the Mubarak regime, urged on by the Obama administration, to give the impression of a willingness to reform and respond to popular economic and political grievances. On Monday, the newly appointed vice president, former intelligence chief Omar Suleiman, went on state television to announce that he had been instructed by Mubarak to meet with representatives of oppositional groups.

Suleiman also raised the possibility of new elections in districts where the constitutional appeals court had found violations in last November’s parliamentary elections—a poll widely seen as rigged, with the ruling National Democratic

Party (NDP) awarded 93 percent of the votes.

The same day, a new cabinet was announced. It consisted for the most part of holdovers from the previous cabinet and longtime figures in the Mubarak regime and the NDP. However, certain changes were made in an attempt to placate popular outrage against the regime.

Most significant was the removal of the hated interior minister, Habib al Adly, and his replacement by retired general Mahmood Wajdi. Al Adly, along with Mubarak, has been a particular target of mass protests because of the brutality of his police force.

The previous finance minister, Petrous Ghali, was also sacked. He is associated with free market policies of privatization and deregulation that have, over the past decade, further increased the chasm between rich and poor in Egypt. Absolute poverty rose between 2000 and 2005 from 16.7 percent to 19.6 percent, according to official figures. Over that period, social disparities in Cairo have become increasingly marked, with the rich moving into gated communities on the outskirts of the city, leaving the mass of impoverished workers and unemployed to survive in teeming slums.

These pro-business policies are also associated with Mubarak’s son Gamal, who had been slated to succeed his 82-year-old father until the revolutionary events of the past week.

There are signs that the basic class issues underlying the uprising are coming to the fore and the weight of the working class is increasing. The *Sydney Morning Herald* reported that workers at a factory in Suez went out on strike Sunday and called for an indefinite national general strike.

The *New York Times* published a worried article Monday headlined “Elite Areas Attacked as Class War Explodes.” The newspaper wrote: “Then, on Friday night, the police pulled out of Egypt’s major cities abruptly, and tensions between rich and poor exploded.”

The article continued: “The new rich communities and older affluent enclaves closer to the city were seized with

fear over the weekend after a rash of looting Friday night."

The US and other foreign governments began mass evacuations of their citizens from Egypt. Washington announced it was sending a heavily armed Marine detachment to protect the US embassy in Cairo.

With the popular movement broadening and deepening, despite early attempts to terrorize and repress it—estimates of the dead from police attacks last week range from 138 to 150, but the real figure is likely much higher—there are growing concerns within the bourgeoisie both in Egypt and internationally that the Egyptian capitalist state could be overwhelmed by revolution.

The Obama administration is spearheading international efforts to save the Egyptian state, pursuing a two-track strategy of transitioning to a new puppet regime, dominated by the military but endowed, at least initially, with some democratic window dressing, while shoring up the military and security agencies upon which capitalist rule in Egypt depends.

At some point, Washington as well as its subordinates in Cairo well understand, the military will need to be mobilized to crush popular resistance. But the US wants to make sure that the conditions are created—by demobilizing and confusing the masses and ensuring the reliability of the troops—for a successful counterattack.

Monday saw a flurry of statements from official quarters around the world urging an “orderly” and “peaceful” transition by Mubarak and the holding of “free and fair” elections when the scheduled presidential vote takes place in September. Taking their lead from the White House, the European Union, individual European governments and the Arab League couched their calls for “reform” so as to leave open whether the transition will occur with or without Mubarak remaining as president.

These calls for “order” and “peace” from the imperialist powers and the Arab bourgeoisie are accompanied by efforts to promote opposition forces within Egypt who can be relied upon to oppose socialist revolution and defend the Egyptian capitalist state and imperialist interests.

The US government is unofficially promoting Mohamed ElBaradei as its candidate to head up negotiations between oppositional forces and the Egyptian military. The US media, always a reliable mouthpiece for consensus opinion within the American bourgeoisie and state, is more openly boosting the former head of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

Both the *New York Times* and the *Wall Street Journal* ran front-page banner headlines Monday declaring that the Egyptian opposition had united behind ElBaradei. Washington has had its differences with ElBaradei, who as IAEA head refused to rubber-stamp American claims about

Iraqi weapons of mass destruction and Iranian nuclear weapons programs. But he is a well-known representative of the Egyptian bourgeoisie and opponent of revolution.

In an interview with the BBC Monday, he reiterated his call for Mubarak to resign and be replaced by a “government of national salvation in coordination with the army.” This is a formula for a military-dominated government that will continue the basic domestic and foreign policies of the Mubarak dictatorship, including Egypt’s military alliance with the United States and support for Israel.

ElBaradei, who only returned to Egypt from his home in Vienna after the first major demonstrations last week, is looked on with suspicion by the mass of protesters, who rightly regard him as a representative of the rich and closely aligned with the US government.

According to reports Monday, there is no firm agreement among opposition groups for ElBaradei to head up talks with the army. Reuters cited the Arab nationalist Karama Party as rejecting ElBaradei and wrote that the Muslim Brotherhood appeared as well to be backtracking on making ElBaradei the chief negotiator for the opposition.

Maneuvers are also underway between the Obama administration and the Muslim Brotherhood, until now denounced by Washington for its Islamist views and demonized by Mubarak as a subversive force. A White House spokesman on Monday denied that the US had been in contact with the Brotherhood, but went on to list conditions for the initiation of talks. He said the organization had to give assurances that it would abide by the law, avoid violence and display a willingness to be part of a “democratic process.”

“NBC Nightly News” that evening featured an interview with a Muslim Brotherhood leader in Cairo who assured the reporter that his organization was peaceful, moderate and could “work with the US.”

It is critical that the working class and its allies among the students and the rural poor place no confidence in either the Obama administration or any section of the national bourgeoisie, including its supposedly democratic factions. The demands of the mass movement for jobs, democratic rights and equality can be met only through the revolutionary struggle for a workers’ government and socialism.



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