

Mubarak's speech: only revolution can oust regime

Bill Van Auken
11 February 2011

With his speech on Thursday night, Egyptian dictator Hosni Mubarak threw down the gauntlet to the mass protests and growing strike wave that have rocked his regime for nearly three weeks.

After widespread media reports that Mubarak would announce his resignation—and rumors that he had already fled the country—the Egyptian president appeared on national television to declare that he would “remain adamant to shoulder my responsibility, protecting the constitution and safeguarding the interests of Egyptians” until elections are held and his term expires next September.

His remarks, which included vague promises to pursue “national dialogue” and to repeal police state measures in the country’s constitution once “stability allows”, included an announcement that he was delegating some of his presidential duties to his hand-picked vice president, the longtime chief of the regime’s secret police, Omar Suleiman.

Suleiman, a key ally of the US Central Intelligence Agency, then delivered an even more ominous speech. He demanded that Egypt’s millions of demonstrators and strikers “go back home” and “go back to work.” He warned them to “join hands” with the regime, rather than risk “chaos.” And he urged them not to listen to those promoting “sedition.”

The reaction of the millions of demonstrators assembled in Cairo’s Tahrir Square, central Alexandria and in towns and cities across the country was one of stunned disbelief followed by uncontrollable rage. Crowds that had been singing and dancing in celebration of Mubarak’s anticipated downfall began waving their shoes in the air in a sign of hatred and contempt for the US-backed dictator. Thousands were reported to be marching from Tahrir Square to the national state television headquarters and the presidential palace, both ringed by barbed wire and heavy troop deployments. In Alexandria, the majority of demonstrators reportedly left the center of the city to march on the local army base.

With even more millions expected to take to the streets on Friday, the likelihood of a bloody confrontation between the Egyptian military and the masses in revolt is growing. If

murderous repression is unleashed, the political and moral responsibility for the dead and wounded will lie squarely with the Obama administration in Washington.

The decision of Hosni Mubarak to hold on to the Egyptian presidency was not, as the shallow and duplicitous reporting of the American media would have it, a matter of one man’s obstinacy or “military pride.”

Rather, it was the outcome of intense discussions within both Egypt’s own ruling establishment of corrupt capitalists and military commanders and within the corridors of power in Washington and other imperialist capitals.

Involved is the classic debate that besets every reactionary regime confronted with a revolutionary challenge from below. Some insist that at least nominal concessions must be made to defuse the revolutionary threat. And others counter that to make such concessions will only strengthen the revolution and hasten the downfall of the regime.

There are reports from Cairo that the military command, which Thursday convened its “supreme council”—a body that had met previously only during the wars with Israel in 1967 and 1973—was beset by just such divisions. It was Mubarak’s absence from the meeting that convinced many that his departure was already secured.

In his speech, Mubarak made an absurd attempt to appeal to nationalist sentiments by vowing not to bow to “foreign diktats”, by which he meant orders from Washington. However, the reality is that the Obama administration had in the previous days made it clear that it had accepted the Egyptian president remaining in office, while placing its full support behind the country’s chief torturer, Suleiman, as the organizer of an “orderly democratic transition.” It stressed that it was focusing on “process” rather than “personalities.” In other words, what Mubarak and Suleiman announced on Thursday was precisely what the Obama White House had promoted.

Whatever differences exist between the Obama administration and the dictatorship in Cairo are of an entirely tactical character. Within the US administration—as within the Egyptian regime

itself—there are no doubt divisions as to whether salvaging the regime can best be accomplished with or without Mubarak, through a direct assumption of power by the military or by some intermediate means.

Israel, Washington's principal client state, was even more categorical. Israeli Deputy Prime Minister Silvan Shalom announced that any democratic opening was impermissible, because it would strengthen "radical elements."

Meanwhile, President Barack Obama held private discussions with Saudi Arabia's King Abdullah, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Zayed of Abu Dhabi and other Persian Gulf potentates, all of whom urged the US to back Mubarak against the Egyptian masses. The fear, both from the semi-feudal monarchs and Washington itself, is that if an uprising succeeds in overthrowing the Egyptian dictator, these other US-backed regimes may fall as well.

Speaking hours before Mubarak's speech, Obama declared in relation to Egypt, "What is absolutely clear is that we are witnessing history unfold." He added, "Going forward, we want ... all Egyptians to know that America will continue to do everything that we can to support an orderly and genuine transition to democracy."

The events of the last two and a half weeks have thoroughly discredited the Obama administration. It has been exposed before millions of Egyptians and to masses of people throughout the region and around the world as a criminal henchman of the Mubarak dictatorship. Its hypocritical rhetoric about "democracy" is nothing more than a means of playing for time. Its real intention, underlying the weasel words "orderly and genuine transition", is to find a means of salvaging the US-backed military dictatorship in Egypt and defeating the uprising of the masses.

Having relied on Mubarak and his cohorts for more than three decades, it does not have a ready-made replacement. Time is needed to groom such figures, while working to divide the mass base of the popular movement against the regime, appealing to the more politically backward layers and the better-off sections of the middle classes, attempting to turn them against the workers and the oppressed.

Washington is acutely conscious that what it confronts in Egypt is a social revolution. This has been driven home in the last few days as a strike wave has spread throughout the country, bringing into struggle virtually every section of the country's working population, from textile workers, to bus drivers, hospital workers, actors, steelworkers, teachers, hospital workers, journalists, shipyard workers, peasants and countless others. Workers have occupied factories, blockaded major roads and fought pitched battles with riot police.

The greatest fear of the ruling elite in the United States and in every other country is that this mass uprising in Egypt will serve as a spark, radicalizing workers throughout the Middle East, Africa

and beyond under conditions in which the profound and protracted crisis of world capitalism is creating mass discontent in every corner of the world.

For the Egyptian workers and youth who have come into struggle against the US-backed dictatorship, the past two weeks have compressed immense political experiences and development of consciousness in a very brief period. Events have served to dash general democratic illusions as well as the belief that the military could serve as the champion of freedom. It is becoming ever more apparent that the only way forward lies in the revolutionary destruction of the regime.

The demands of millions of Egyptians for democratic rights, jobs and decent living standards are incompatible not merely with the presidency of Hosni Mubarak, but with the entire system of capitalist ownership and imperialist domination that are responsible for the country's grinding oppression and stark social inequality.

The burning question posed to the Egyptian revolution is the building of a mass movement of the working class, rallying behind it all the layers of the rural poor and oppressed, to lay the foundations for a popular insurrection. Only such a movement can confront the power of the military, the base of the regime, and break the masses of conscript soldiers from the discipline of a wealthy and corrupt command.

What is required above all is the emergence of a new revolutionary leadership based upon the socialist internationalist perspective of uniting the struggles of the Egyptian working class with those of workers throughout the Middle East and around the world. This means building an Egyptian section of the International Committee of the Fourth International.

Bill Van Auken



To contact the WWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact