

Protests continue against threat of counter-revolution in Egypt

Our reporter
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“This is a counter-revolution at work,” said the computer engineer Khaled S, one of many thousands who protested on Friday in Cairo’s central Tahrir Square. He was holding a placard with a warning for the army. “We will not allow a return to the dark times before the Revolution. The power of the state security forces and the NDP must finally be broken. What has happened so far is completely insufficient.”

Many of the demonstrators on Friday calling for a realisation of the demands of the revolution and for unity between Muslims and Christians shared Khaled’s concerns.

Two teenagers who spoke with the WSWWS said, “We are dissatisfied with the new government. The proposals for constitutional amendments are a joke. We do not want a revision of the old constitution, but rather one which is new and genuinely democratic.”

Both also called for the immediate dissolution of the national security, saying, “These forces are now trying to stir up hatred between Muslims and Christians. But we are brothers; we all have Christian and Muslim friends.”

Another protester pointed to the counter-revolutionary role of the army. “The army cleared Tahrir Square on Wednesday using the services of violent thugs,” he said. “Peaceful protesters were detained and tortured in the Egyptian Museum.”

Another young person said: “The incitement of violence and chaos once again seems to be the last card of the regime. They want to create conditions where they can bring the police back onto the streets.”

In recent days, the old regime had resorted to terror and violence in order to sow divisions between Muslims and Christians and drive a wedge between sections of the population. Ten days ago a church in Helwan, a suburb south of Cairo, was burned down. Afterwards, the Coptic Christian minority protested in different regions in Cairo, demanding the reconstruction of the church and equal rights. Many Muslims joined the protests, including one held in front of the state television building.

Violent clashes between Christians and Muslims erupted on Tuesday night. Radical Salafis (fundamentalist Muslims) attacked a predominantly working-class neighbourhood inhabited by Copts in Moqattam Cairo. Thirteen people were killed and 165 were injured in the fierce fighting.

Mounir Megahd, a spokesperson for Egyptians Against Discrimination, says it’s likely the State Security apparatus has orchestrated the clashes.

“Recent reports released have shown the close ties between the state security apparatus and the Salafist movement,” he adds. “It has been reported that state security has used them to bomb the Two Saints Church in Alexandria” (on the first of January). This is evidence, he says, that state security has infiltrated the Salafist movement and is using them now in their attempt to foment a counter-revolution.

On March 9, new Prime Minister Essam Sharaf also announced in a television interview that the country faced a “counterrevolution”. “The government confirms that what is going on is organised and systematic. Unfortunately there are people who are attempting to destroy state structures.” Later in the interview Sharaf sought to pose as the conscience of the revolution, declaring it was now necessary to take measures to protect this “pure revolution.”

It is not clear to what extent Sharaf is behind the most criminal excesses of the counter-revolution, but as a former member of the NDP and former minister for Mubarak he is definitely connected. The Egyptian bourgeoisie is now using the chaos which it unleashed in order to mobilize the police and military to end the protests which peaked the last weekend in the attack on the state security headquarters, as well as further strikes and student protests in the universities.

On March 16 the Egyptian stock exchange is due to open again, for the first time since Mubarak’s ouster, and the aim of Sharaf and the military is to use every possible means to pacify the country. Sharaf has urged the population to co-operate with, and respect the police. Police officers have been a rare sight on Egyptian streets since the violent confrontations on Friday,

January 28, the so-called Day of Rage, when protesters overran the despised security forces.

The Egyptian masses, and especially the youth, oppose any return of the brutal police forces that terrorised them for decades. Only last summer, Khaled Said, an Egyptian youth from Alexandria, was tortured to death by the police. Hundreds of people were killed in the course of the revolution. According to the group “Front to Defend Egypt’s protesters,” the total number of victims is 686, and this figure is expected to rise. Most of the deaths took place on the Day of Rage when police intervened with enormous brutality against demonstrators.

An end to the massive police violence of the Mubarak regime was one of the main aims of the revolution. When Sharaf now declares that “The police establishment is the most significant element in the mechanism of the state,” this speaks volumes about the character of the post-Mubarak regime.

In his book *State and Revolution* Lenin declared that the army and the police were “The main tools for the exercise of state power” and exclusively served the class interests of the bourgeoisie. His thesis has been fully confirmed just over a month following the Egyptian Revolution.

On Wednesday, thugs armed with machetes and stones once again attacked the peaceful protesters in Tahrir Square. Rather than protect the protesters the military lined up with the attackers and used the opportunity to forcefully dismantle the tents set up by protesters.

According to reports, on the previous evening the military had lined up alongside such thugs to attack the Copts. An eyewitness told *The Daily News Egypt* that the thugs had attacked “from the tanks of the army.” When the priest at the funeral for the dead thanked military officers for ensuring the safety of Egyptians, mourners responded with angry cries directed against the military.

The events of the last week in Egypt are reminiscent of the early days of the Egyptian Revolution when the Mubarak regime used secret service agents and goons to cause chaos. The Egyptian daily *Al Ahram* recently published an inquiry into the violent events and cited a high-ranking security expert in the army, who preferred to stay anonymous. He declared that it was the NDP and members of the old regime who planned the attack to make the revolution fail. “They wanted to destroy and eliminate; it was part of their counter revolution strategy,” he said. The expert pointed out that the fact that the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces released a statement just hours before the battle asking protesters to evacuate Tahrir Square is suspicious.

The events and revelations in recent days has led to growing suspicion of the role played by the army on the part of Egyptian workers and young people. Conflicting class interests are increasingly becoming apparent. For workers and youth intent on wiping out the roots of the old regime, and eliminating social

inequality and unemployment, the revolution has just begun. For the Egyptian bourgeoisie and the military it is already over, and now all layers of the Egyptian ruling class now more or less uncritically support the policies of Sharaf and the military.

Abdel Monem Abul Fottouh, a leader of the Muslim Brotherhood, made clear to the daily *The Egyptian Gazette* that the group fully supports the course of Sharaf: “The transitional phase is very important because it will determine the future of our nation. Therefore, the security forces should remain resolute and ready to help the nation.” The Muslim Brotherhood also supports the constitutional amendments proposed by the Sharaf and the military leadership.

On March 19 there will be a vote on a number of constitutional amendments. These are a purely tactical manoeuvre designed to give the appearance of an incipient process of democratisation. In fact these amendments do little to alter the fundamentally undemocratic nature of the Constitution of 1971. Surveys show that a large majority of the population are thoroughly sceptical of the proposed amendments and reject the changes.

Other representatives of the ruling class of Egypt such as Amr Moussa and Mohamed ElBaradei have spoken out against the proposed constitutional amendments, but basically support the course of Sharaf and the military.

ElBaradei’s National Alliance for Change welcomed the decision of the Supreme Military Council to install Sharaf as the new prime minister after his predecessor Ahmed Shafiq was forced to resign following mass protests. Prior to this decision talks had taken place between the military, ElBaradei and Amr Moussa on how to proceed. Meanwhile, both men have announced they will stand in the proposed presidential elections.

The Egyptian bourgeoisie is closing its ranks in order to suppress the revolutionary movement of workers and youth in Egypt and, like Mubarak regime, has demonstrated it is quite prepared to use violence against peaceful demonstrators.

The events of the last weeks and days have shown that revolutionary workers and youth in Egypt can only realise their demands by establishing their complete independence of all bourgeois forces and take up the struggle for power. Only a government of the workers themselves would implement the requirements of the majority of the population, break with the henchmen of the old regime and establish a society based on genuine democracy and social equality.



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