

# Mass protests demand “second revolution” in Egypt

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Hundreds of thousands of Egyptians turned out for demonstrations in Tahrir Square in Cairo and in cities throughout the country, demanding an end to military rule and the trial and punishment of officials of the dictatorship of former president Hosni Mubarak.

Protest groups, mainly comprised of young people, labeled Friday’s protests the “second day of rage,” the first having taken place on January 27, when demonstrators confronted Mubarak’s thugs in a pitched battle that left them in control of Tahrir Square.

Many demonstrators voiced calls for a “second revolution,” expressing widespread sentiment that the revolution that brought down Mubarak has not resulted in any fundamental improvement in the conditions of life for the masses of working people, small farmers and agricultural laborers.

Tahrir Square was decorated with photographs of many of the 840 people killed during the 17 days of mass struggle that brought down Mubarak, as well as placards demanding punishment of those responsible for the killings, and for the corruption and mismanagement of the 30-year Mubarak regime.

There were banners declaring, “The Egyptian revolution is not over” and demanding “now, not later,” a new constitution and the formation of a civilian presidential council to oversee elections, replacing the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces, the military body that has ruled the country since Mubarak’s resignation February 11.

Other banners called for democratic reforms like a free and uncensored press, replacement of corrupt officials, including governors and university heads, and an end to trials of civilians before military tribunals. Economic demands were also raised, including a minimum wage and higher living standards for workers.

By late afternoon, according to reports in the Egyptian media, the crowd in Tahrir Square was well over 100,000,

assembled around at least four separate stages where speakers addressed the audience on a variety of political themes.

The main division among the speakers was over the call for a second revolution, and over proposals to carry out an occupation of Tahrir Square at the end of the rally. Most representatives of liberal and youth organizations, such as Kafeya Movement for Change, the National Association for Change of former UN official Mohammed ElBaradei, the April 6 Youth Movement, the Youth Revolution Coalition, the Democratic Front Party and the Egyptian Social Democratic Party, urged the crowd to disperse at the planned time of 6 p.m. and promised another rally next Friday if the ruling SCAF made no significant change in course.

Tens of thousands also marched in Egypt’s second largest city, the Mediterranean port of Alexandria, in Suez, Port Said and Ismailia, the main cities along the Suez Canal, and in many other towns and cities, including Fayoum, Mansoura in the Nile delta, and Luxor and Aswan in the south.

The demonstrations were regarded with hostility by the military council, composed entirely of longtime Mubarak stooges. The SCAF issued a statement warning that “suspicious elements were trying to sow strife between Egypt’s people and the military.”

The council said that military units would stay away from the locations of the protests, an indication that the junta feels itself too weak to engage in direct and open repression. Some demonstrators told the press they regarded the military statement as an invitation to pro-Mubarak plainclothes thugs to attack the protests.

In Tahrir Square, there were several attempts by small groups of gangsters to disrupt the protest, but popular committees formed by the groups that called the demonstration were able to repel them without serious incident.

More than on direct repression, at this stage, the generals are relying on bourgeois forces like the Muslim Brotherhood and the liberal groups, together with the trade unions and the pseudo-left organizations, to divert the mass movement away from any fundamental challenge to the Egyptian ruling elite.

The Muslim Brotherhood adopted a low profile during the movement to bring down Mubarak, with only its youth organization taking an active role in the struggle. Before Friday's protest, however, the Islamist group openly declared its opposition to the demonstrators in a well-publicized statement that criticized "communists and secularists."

The group declared itself "very concerned" by the protest, asking, "Who are the people angry with now?" The statement continued by declaring that the call to protest can "only mean that the anger is directed at the people themselves or at the army." A Muslim Brotherhood spokesman told Al Jazeera that the group opposed the replacement of the ruling SCAF with a civilian council.

There was widespread resentment over the decision by the Muslim Brotherhood to oppose the demonstration and back the ruling military council. Demonstrators chanted, "Revolutionaries are here, where is the Brotherhood?" and other slogans that pointed to the absence of the Islamic group.

Former Muslim Brotherhood member of parliament Sobhi Saleh, in an interview with the Egyptian newspaper Al-Ahram, condemned the demonstration and declared that the Muslim Brotherhood and the military council "share an agreement" on the future course of events in Egypt. The SCAF, he claimed, "took a historic and glorious decision when they decided to protect the revolution."

This is the rewriting of history favored, not only by the Egyptian right, but by the imperialist powers and the various liberal and pseudo-left organizations, all of which claim that the military averted a bloodbath by easing Mubarak out of power.

Meanwhile, the military regime detained four activists for putting up posters calling for the Friday demonstration, including graffiti artist Mohamed Fahmy, film director Aida al-Kashef, musician Abdel Rahman Amin and April 6 Youth Movement member Ibrahim Abd. They were arrested by military police, but later released.

The SCAF sought to blunt the impact of the Friday protest with the latest in a series of cosmetic gestures,

aimed at appeasing popular anger while leaving the power and wealth of the ruling elite—which includes the top military brass—untouched.

On Wednesday, the regime announced that it will permanently open its border crossing with the Gaza Strip on the weekend, ending the highly unpopular Egyptian collaboration with the Israeli blockade of Gaza, home to 1.5 million Palestinians. The SCAF has held official meetings with leaders of Hamas, which rules Gaza, and brokered an agreement between Hamas and Fatah to form a joint Palestinian government.

On Tuesday, Egypt's top prosecutor announced that Mubarak would be put on trial for conspiring to kill protesters during the movement against his dictatorship, a charge that could carry the death penalty. He is also to face charges of corruption in relation to his seaside mansion in Sharm el Sheik, and for helping steal \$714 million in public funds in a deal to sell natural gas to Israel.

Mubarak will be charged with conspiring with Interior Minister Habib Adli to kill demonstrators, and with "inciting some officers and members of the police to fire their weapons at the victims, shoot them and run over them with vehicles, and to kill some of them in order to terrorize the rest and force them to relinquish their demands."

At the Friday protest, demonstrators told the press that the charges against Mubarak were only brought to forestall further protests, and they expressed skepticism that the ousted dictator, now 82, would ever be put on trial.

Other measures taken by the military in recent weeks include: firing 10 provincial governors appointed by Mubarak; placing Mubarak and his two sons under arrest; disbanding his ruling National Democratic Party; filing corruption charges against former prime minister Ahmed Nazif and other top officials; and removing Mubarak's name from hundreds of public buildings and institutions.



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