

# US and Egyptian bourgeoisie close ranks as workers' struggles continue

**Jonathan Aswan****20 June 2011**

In recent weeks and days the revolutionary struggle of the Egyptian working class has witnessed a new upsurge. After the mass protests on May 27 demanding a “second revolution,” thousands of workers have gone on strike and mounted protests all over the country.

Last week temporary workers of the Mansoura Petroleum Company staged protests and demanded permanent contracts. Train drivers of the Damietta-Sherbin line staged a sit-in to press for better wages. Furthermore, cabin crew teams of the Egyptian airline EgyptAir protested against the corrupt management of the airline.

Students have also continued their protests. The sit-in of students of the Faculty of Veterinary Medicine of Mansoura University, calling for the dismissal of the faculty dean, entered its eighth week.

Graduates of Al-Azhar University in Cairo staged protests in front of the parliament demanding jobs and higher salaries. They set up a tent and threatened to begin a collective hunger strike until all their demands were met. The graduates have been joined by auto workers of the state-owned Nasr Car Company and by tenant farmers. The angry farmers were chanting against the government, which they blame for stealing their land.

Last Wednesday thousands of workers of seven different Suez Canal Authority companies resumed their strike. According to the workers, their demands for higher wages and better working conditions have not been met by the government. The workers now demand the resignation of Admiral Ahmed Fadel, chairman and CEO of the Suez Canal Authority. The workers said they want to bring down Fadel as they brought down former dictator Hosni Mubarak and chanted: “Hey sailor, tomorrow you will join the pilot”.

On the same day, railway workers went on strike all over Egypt. They blocked tracks in the governorates of Cairo, Ismailiya, Asyut, Sohag, Aswan and Sharqia. Their demands include bonus payments, better incentives, and permanent contracts.

Confronted with the ongoing massive struggles of the Egyptian workers and the threat of a second revolution, the military rulers of Egypt react with increasing repression and violence against protesting workers and youth.

On June 8 the ruling military junta threatened to apply an anti-protest law that was approved earlier but has not been fully applied. The draconian law punishes striking workers and protesters with arrest, prison sentences of one year and more and/or fines ranging from 30,000 EGP to 500,000 EGP (US\$5,000 to US\$83,000).

A statement published by the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) claims that the law aims to “avoid further economic risks and to achieve stability for the country.” Then it threatens anybody who dares to oppose the dictatorial measures of the junta, stressing that the SCAF “will not hesitate to respond to any attempts by any other party or group to disrupt the law or to harm the national economy, especially during this critical stage the country is going through.”

On the same day the statement was issued, trucks of the notorious Amn al-Markazi (central security forces) and plainclothes police officers appeared in front of the parliament building where the students, farmers and workers were protesting. They tried to disperse the protesters with force and arrested at least 10 of them.

On Wednesday this week, the army and police attacked over 2,000 protesting railway workers in the Sharqia governorate. According to the Egyptian daily *Al Masry Al Youm*, one protester said that the army detained two workers and took them to an unknown destination.

This counterrevolutionary offensive by the junta is fully supported by the US, which aims to stop the Egyptian revolution and stabilize the whole region in the interests of Western imperialism and international finance capital.

It is no coincidence that Admiral Michael Mullen, the US chairman of Joint Chiefs of Staff, was on the same day in Cairo for talks with Field Marshal Hussein Tantawi when the SCAF announced the application of the anti-strike law. According to *Daily News Egypt*, Mullen stated that the “United States military remains committed to a strong bilateral relationship with the Egyptian Armed Forces”.

Mullen then quite bluntly made clear that the US supports the anti-strike law and the use of violence against protesters, explaining that the Egyptian leadership “very clearly understands that security is absolutely critical to the continuing of this smooth transition to democracy.”

He cynically added that “Americans know... democracy is very difficult.”

He also expressed his “awe and respect” for “how professionally the Egyptian military forces have behaved,” adding that he is “grateful [to have stayed] in touch with Lt. General Annan [chief of staff of the Egyptian Armed Forces] throughout the events that have occurred since last January.”

Mullen’s remarks make clear again that the Egyptian military did not “side with the Egyptian people” during the revolutionary upsurge—when they decided not to drown the working class in blood, but instead to replace the Mubarak dictatorship with an outright military dictatorship. In adopting this course of action, they were following orders from the Pentagon. Their broader goal was to save the status quo and the profit interests of imperialism and the Egyptian ruling class.

Now, as the next phase of massive class struggles builds up, the US is again relying on the Egyptian Armed Forces to defend their interests in the region. Only a few days after Mullen’s comments, Vice Admiral William Landy, head of the Defense Security Cooperation Agency, repeated these basic points.

According to the Reuters news agency, he told reporters at the Pentagon that the relationship between the US and Egypt will remain the same: “We continue to do with Egypt what we were doing before the Arab Spring, if you will.”

The fact that none of the official political parties in Egypt is speaking about the role of the US and its counterrevolutionary strategy in the region, including the imperialist war against Libya, but support the SCAF more or less uncritically shows clearly on which side all these groups stand. Besides smaller differences about how to organize the so-called “transitional period,” all the bourgeois forces understand quite well that the military fundamentally protects their class interests and the capitalist state in general.

Leading bourgeois politicians like Mohamed ElBaradei therefore always stress that criticizing or even protesting against the armed forces is a “red line” that must not be crossed, for the sake of the unity of the nation. This week another “secular” presidential candidate, Hamdeen Sabahi—the leader of the “left” Nasserist Karama Party—said in an interview with *Al Masry Al Youm* that he would grant the army higher powers if he were elected. He added that “there would be an article in the constitution that widens its authority so security could be restored.”

Besides their essentially unconditional support for the junta and the armed forces, the Egyptian bourgeois parties are also stepping up their efforts to establish different coalitions between each other, as another means to better control the working class.

A recent poll conducted by Gallup shows that none of the official parties has any influence amongst the masses. The Muslim Brotherhood, as the strongest political force in Egypt, received only 15 percent support while other parties received

only single-digit support.

Against this background 13 parties announced the formation of a so-called “National Coalition for Egypt”. Amongst the members are right-wing Islamist parties like the Muslim Brotherhood’s Freedom and Justice Party or El Wasat, liberal parties like the Wafd and El Ghad, and so-called “left” parties such as the Karama Party, the Nasserist Party and the National Progressive Unionist Party (Tagammu).

The leaders of the different parties of the coalition stressed that all the political forces now have to work together to be able to “handle the coming period”. According to *Al Ahram*, Tagammu chairperson Refaat Said stated that the coming period is “the most important and crucial period in modern Egyptian history”, and cannot be handled by one political force but requires intensive collaboration from different factions of Egyptian society.

El Sayed El Badawy, the leader of the Wafd, also stressed that everybody has “to work side by side as a team.” Mohamed Badie, the Supreme Guide of the Muslim Brotherhood, made clear that “national unity is vital for the stability of Egypt”.

Another call for a coalition with basically the same goal was issued by the Socialist Alliance Party and—according to *Al Masry Al Youm*—adopted by the Egyptian Socialist Party, the Karama Party, the Social Democratic Party and the Democratic Front. Talaat Fahmy, a leader of the Socialist Alliance Party and former member of Tagammu, said that the goal of the coalition is to protect the civil nature of the state and to pressure the state to influence the drafting of a new constitution.

The Socialist Alliance Party and the Egyptian Socialist Party are members of the so-called Coalition of Socialist Forces, which consists of the Revolutionary Socialists [the Egyptian group of the International Socialist Tendency led by the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) in Britain], the Workers Democratic Party [a pro-capitalist party recently founded by the Revolutionary Socialists] and the Stalinist Egyptian Communist Party.

The fact that the pseudo-left parties of the Socialist Front are now openly initiating coalitions with right-wing bourgeois forces shows more clearly than ever before that these groups have nothing to do with socialism or a struggle for workers’ power. Rather, they are part of the general front of the Egyptian bourgeoisie against the working class—a front whose basic aim is to prevent a second revolution by any and all means.



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