

Mass protest in Egypt calls for “second revolution”

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Hundreds of thousands of workers and youth are expected to turn out to the streets today in protests dubbed “Friday of Persistence” or “The Revolution and the Poor first”. In recent days, protests and strikes have swept Egypt, calling for a “second revolution” against the US-backed military junta led by Field Marshal Mohamad Hussein Tantawi, which replaced President Hosni Mubarak after he resigned amid mass protests in February.

In Cairo a sit-in has been staged on Tahrir Square since June 29, after police forces brutally attacked protesters with tear gas and rubber bullets injuring more than 1,100. Occupiers who spoke to the WSWs said everybody on the square shares the opinion that a “new revolution” is needed. Workers and poor have the feeling that “nothing has changed” and that’s why they are expecting a massive rally for Friday.

“There is no other solution than a second revolution. It is clear now that the military is against the revolution and is part of the old regime,” explained one protestor named Essam.

The same feeling is shared by protesters in Suez, where there has been another sit-in on the central Arbaeen Square since Monday, after policemen accused of the murder of 17 protesters were released on bail. On Wednesday hundreds of protesters took to the streets and tried to storm police headquarters after a Cairo court refused to reverse the release of the police officers.

Soldiers tried to cordon off the building with army trucks, but clashes erupted between the angry protesters and the police. Protesters threw stones at the building and tried to climb the walls while the police forces inside the building threw stones back. Reports say that no police officers dared to appear on the streets, which resembled a battlefield.

According to a report in the Egyptian daily *al-Ahram*, one female protester whose son was killed on January 28 shouted at the police headquarters: “Burn it and burn them all, those bastards”. The protesters smashed all the windows of the building, chanting: “Suez is not military ruled. Down, down with Tantawi!”

On one building next to the police headquarters, one can read the inscription: “Our date is July 8.” A protestor named Ahmed told *al-Ahram*: “Friday is going to be Suez’s second revolution. It’s clear now that one wasn’t enough.”

Yesterday the Suez sit-in was joined by hundreds of Suez Canal workers, who have been on strike since June 14. They marched from the headquarters of the Suez Canal Authority to Arbaeen square and have also been joined by quarry workers and ceramic factory workers.

The Suez Canal workers are demanding a 40 percent increase in basic salary, 7 percent bonus payments, a hike in their meal allowances and the removal of General Ahmed Fadel, the CEO of the Suez Canal Authority. The waterway is a huge source of revenue from transit fees, but the money goes largely into the coffers of the military.

“We used to feel we have a national role because we’re generating a lot of funds for the country,” one worker named Ali told *al-Ahram*. “But when you are feeling humiliated, down and so unappreciated, this feeling of romantic nationalism fades away and is replaced by anger and a bitter feeling of hatred.”

He added that the new slogan of the workers was, “The worker is always right. Before, it used to be: the customer is always right. But we changed it in February. It can’t work as a slogan with the revolutionary situation we are living in.”

The Suez Canal workers already went on strike on February 8, and the massive strikes in Suez played an important role in ousting Mubarak. Later, they began another strike in April but none of their demands have been met.

The anger of the workers against the regime is growing with every day. “I can now tell you the revolution is not over,” one worker said. “Everything is as it is, only the heads have been hunted but the body is still corrupt.” The workers said they would further escalate their protest in the coming days. “Next, we will take action against the strategic waterway.”

Another open-ended protest began on Tuesday, when more than 3,000 workers of the Nagaa Hammadi Sugar Factory

went on strike to demand higher salaries and better working conditions. The workers request a monthly bonus of 200 percent of their basic salary, the payment of hazard allowances, and permanent contracts.

Also, 200 hundred workers at the Swiss Company for Stainless Steel Sinks began a strike on Tuesday, demanding better wages and higher bonuses.

The junta is increasingly nervous about the rising wave of protests and strikes. On the one hand, it tries to spread the propaganda that striking workers and protesting youth are “thugs” fomenting “nationwide chaos”. The Ministry of the Interior issued a report claiming that youth groups would plan attacks on police and gave instructions to police and military commanders to tighten security measures today, particularly at government buildings.

On the other hand, the junta is steadily increasing violence against protesters and beginning to apply the anti-protest law banning strikes and protests affecting the economy. The law was passed in March to give the junta legal ammunition to suppress working-class struggles. After clashes with the Suez Canal workers on Monday, the military police arrested five of the striking workers.

The Arabic Network for Human Rights Information said at the beginning of the week that over 10,000 civilians have been sentenced in military trials since January 25.

The attempt of the junta to step up the violence against workers and youth in order to bring the revolution to a halt is most actively supported by the United States, which remains the main backer of the Egyptian military after the fall of Mubarak. Since the peace treaty with Israel in 1979 the Egyptian military is the biggest recipient of US military aid after Israel itself, receiving a total of nearly US\$36 billion, or US\$1.3 billion annually.

In the recent weeks, several high-ranking US delegations—including figures like former presidential candidates John Mc Cain (a Republican) and John Kerry (a Democrat)—visited Cairo to promote closer economic, political, and military ties between Egypt and the US. They were completely silent about the brutal violence used by the junta against the Egyptian people and stressed instead the need for “short-term financial stability.” The code word “stability” is regularly used by the junta to justify the anti-protest law and crackdowns on protesters.

On June 30, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton announced that the US government was establishing direct contact with the Islamist Muslim Brotherhood (MB), the biggest political group in Egypt. The MB has worked closely together with military junta in recent months, and the US now regards the Islamists together with the military as potential allies against the Egyptian working class. The MB, which had denounced today’s protest for weeks since their announcement,

unexpectedly shifted its position and said it would join the protests—which suggests that the US and Egyptian military fear they could lose control of the situation.

This fear is shared by the Egyptian bourgeoisie as a whole. Recently the presidential candidate and vice president of the Court of Cassation, Hesham al-Bastaswisi, called for the establishment of a “National Defense Council”. The council would include the president, the commander in chief and the chief of staff of the armed forces and assume absolute power for making decisions on “national security issues.” He also demanded that the military should be consulted before passage of any legislation affecting the armed forces.

Bastaswisi’s proposals—which aim to safeguard the status quo of military rule in Egypt, whatever the outcome of any elections that might take place—have either been supported by other political forces or drawn minor criticism.

Confronted with the growing militancy of workers and youth, all sections of the Egyptian bourgeoisie—liberal, Islamist or “left”—see the military as the last bulwark against the threat of a “second revolution” by the working class.

Amin Iskandar, one of the co-leaders of the Nasserist Karama Party told the Egyptian daily *al Masry al Youm*: “the military has to remain part of the equation“. Hamdeen Sabahi, the Karama Party’s presidential candidate, also announced that he would “give the military wider powers.”

Mohamad ElBaradei, the leader of the National Association for Change, also made clear again that he regards the military as the main guarantor of the Egyptian capitalist state. In an interview with the state-owned daily *al-Akhbar*, he cynically maintained that the military junta was a force for civilian democracy in Egypt: “we need the military to protect the constitution and the civil nature of the state during this phase of incipient democracy.”



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