

Mass protests mark “Friday of Determination” in Egypt

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Cities across Egypt saw the largest demonstrations yesterday since the revolutionary struggles that forced the resignation of US-backed dictator Hosni Mubarak on February 11. Protests, including indefinite sit-ins in public squares like those that forced Mubarak from power, showed the rising opposition to the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) military junta that replaced Mubarak.

Among those joining the protests were striking workers from several critical industrial facilities in Egypt, including the Suez Canal and the Mahalla textile plants.

A key cause of public anger is the SCAF’s defense of Mubarak regime officials, and police who imprisoned or killed protesters. In contrast, the SCAF has passed a law banning strikes and protests that hurt the economy, trying and convicting an estimated 7,000 to 10,000 civilians in military tribunals.

So far, only one noncommissioned police officer has been convicted for attacks on protesters during the anti-Mubarak protests, which left approximately 1,000 unarmed protesters dead. The officer was convicted in absentia, and his sentence cannot be enforced. The release on bail of police officers accused of killing 17 protesters in Suez led to protests and an attempt by the population to storm police headquarters.

Hundreds of thousands marched in Cairo’s Tahrir Square, which has been occupied by protesters since June 29. SCAF security forces did not appear on the square, where security was provided by protesters who organized a series of checkpoints to guard against police infiltration. They also guarded the Egyptian Museum on Tahrir Square, which had previously been looted.

Protesters on Tahrir Square in Cairo chanted slogans against the SCAF and its leader, Field Marshal Mohamed Hussein Tantawi. The slogans included: “Tantawi is

Mubarak and Mubarak is Tantawi,” “The people want the downfall of the Field Marshal,” “The people want the downfall of the Regime,” “Revolution till victory,” “Revolution in all the streets of Egypt”. Other chants were directed against the United States and Israel.

Protesters also called for the execution of Mubarak, who now resides in a mansion in the resort city of Sharm el-Sheikh under military guard, and a purge of the media and the Interior Ministry.

One worker named Ahmed spoke to the WSW on Tahrir Square: “I am here today because the revolution has to continue. We brought down Mubarak, but the system of corruption is still in power. Nothing has changed at all. But our fight will go on.

“Actually, I have the feeling today that it is January 25 [the day of the first mass protests against Mubarak] again. Our slogans and demands are still the same, we have only replaced the name Mubarak with Tantawi. For me the revolution will be finished only when we have a real democracy, where everybody has a job and social rights and can live in dignity.”

A young woman protester told the WSW: “We have been protesting now for more than five months, but it’s all the same or even worse than before. The problem is the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces. Mubarak’s generals are now the new dictators, and they do everything to stop the revolution.

“I was in front of the Ministry of Interior when they attacked us on June 28. They used teargas against us, and also another even more dangerous gas causing cancer, like the one they are using now in Greece against protesters. Everything was made in the US. They are ready to use even more violence against us in the future. Since they

took power they already arrested more than 10,000 activists and other civilians and sent them to military trials.”

Asked about her views of the new regime, she said: “The SCAF is an extension of the system of Mubarak and also of the United States. They work together with the military to stop the revolution and to protect their economic and political interests in the region.” She added, “Socialism sounds very reasonable to me. I mean we can see everywhere that the capitalist system is in a huge crisis and is not working at all.”

The existing political parties present on Tahrir Square are increasingly confused by and afraid of the deep tensions building up between the working class and the SCAF junta. The Coalition of Youth attempted to block discussion of political questions, issuing demands that political parties not identify themselves and instead “put the nation’s interests above their own,” according to a report in *Daily News Egypt*.

The right-wing Muslim Brotherhood, which initially planned to boycott the protests, sent a delegation to the Tahrir Square protest. In discussions on Tahrir Square they stressed their support for the army and the regime. They left at 6 p.m., declaring they would not participate in the ongoing sit-in in Tahrir Square or in other cities in Egypt.

Hundreds of thousands of protesters also marched in the Mediterranean port city of Alexandria, blocking the Corniche waterfront avenue and carrying mock nooses with hanging dummies of Mubarak. They assembled at the Qaed Ibrahim mosque, demanding revenge for protesters killed during the anti-Mubarak protests. Demonstrators in Alexandria said they were finishing logistical preparations for an open-ended sit-in in Alexandria’s Saad Zaghloul Square and the area surrounding the Qaed Ibrahim mosque.

The movement is clearly spreading throughout the country. The Egyptian daily *Al Ahram* reported that thousands of protesters were participating in open-ended sit-ins not only in Cairo and Alexandria, but also in Suez, Port Said and Asiut. It also reported mass demonstrations in Damietta and the cities of Damanhour and Naga Hamidi in central Egypt.

In the textile center of Mahalla El Kobra, workers marched from El Bandar Square to Revolution Square,

carrying banners that read, “Watch out! The revolution is running out of steam.” They demanded the removal of Interior Minister Mansour El Eissawy and the swift trial of all members of the old regime.

International press reports are increasingly focusing on industrial action at the Suez Canal, a waterway connecting the Mediterranean and Red seas, which controls trade between the Middle East and Asia passing westward toward European and US markets. The Suez Canal generates \$1.2 billion in yearly revenues for Egypt and the Suez Canal authority realizes yearly profits of \$100 million. However, the canal’s 18,000 workers—particularly those working for subsidiary companies—are poorly paid, making only \$130 per month.

Suez subsidiary workers have been on strike for three weeks, demanding a 40 percent wage increase, a 7 percent yearly raise, and “proper life and health insurance.” They also demand the release of five co-workers facing military trials after participating in demonstrations. Egyptian Third Army commander General Mohammed Farid has until now refused to address the workers’ demands.

On July 2, Suez Canal workers temporarily cut off electricity to large parts of Suez and the city of Port Tawfiq, on the southern end of the canal. Emad El Sadeq, a technician for Suez Canal Shipyards, told McClatchy Newspapers: “We did not cut the cables, although we could have. We had to give them a taste of what we can do.”

Another technician, Hamdy Saleh, added: “How am I supposed to support my family? I have a daughter and I support my mother as well. I am fed up.” Speaking of the electricity shortage, he said: “This time it was peaceful, but next time we will dismantle the floating dock to block the canal totally.”



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