

Mass protests continue against Egyptian regime

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Huge protests took place across Egypt on Friday. Under the banner, “The Friday of Final Warning,” tens of thousands gathered in Cairo’s Tahrir Square and the industrial city of Suez. Many smaller demonstrations took place across the country.

It was the second week of mass demonstrations in Egypt, as working people and youth voiced opposition to the military-dominated government that took over power after the ouster of Hosni Mubarak in February. The Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) is the ultimate power in the country; its generals, who were an integral part of the Mubarak dictatorship, have maintained Egypt’s repressive state apparatus and subservient relationship with US imperialism.

There is growing hostility to the regime, which is seen as shielding Mubarak, his family and top officials, as well as members of the security services responsible for the torture and killing of thousands of protesters during the February uprising.

Following last week’s protests, the SCAF announced Wednesday that 700 senior police officers linked to attacks on demonstrators would be moved from their posts. Under the plan, some officers would be offered early retirement and others would be relocated or promoted.

Interior Minister Mansour El-Essawy claimed the move was the “biggest reshuffle in the police force’s history,” and that new recruits hired to replace those departing would “pump fresh blood in to the system.”

The token gesture had no discernible impact of the mood on the streets across Egypt on Friday. “It’s just theatre,” one protester camped out in Tahrir Square told Agence France-Presse. “These announcements are not enough,” said another demonstrator. “The priority is to have trials for the murderers of the martyrs.”

A number of those camping in Tahrir Square are on hunger strike to demand the prosecution of Mubarak-era officials.

The military regime has also delayed proposed parliamentary elections. The vote had been expected to take place in September, but the official Middle East News

Agency reported that the date has been pushed back to November.

Despite the blazing summer sun, which caused some protesters to pass out from heatstroke, huge crowds gathered in Tahrir Square all day. They chanted slogans demanding an end to military-dominated government and a purge of Mubarak’s cronies from positions of power.

Al Ahram reported that thousands of copies of a leaflet titled “We demand prosecution, the gang is still in power” were distributed by revolutionary committees in Tahrir Square. There were calls for pay cuts for top politicians and businessmen, and increases in the minimum wage for workers. Protesters and speakers on the podiums also condemned attempts by the regime to pit Christians and Muslims against each other.

Public rage was directed in particular against ex-President Hosni Mubarak, SCAF leader Field Marshal Hussein Tantawi, and the state media, which has blackguarded the protesters and continues to disseminate pro-regime propaganda.

There were calls for the continuation of strikes and sit-ins at workplaces across the country. Industrial action has been legally banned by the SCAF, though strikes have gripped scores of workplaces throughout Egypt to demand economic and political concession.

Sit-ins and demonstrations staged in solidarity with the mass gathering in Cairo took place in Suez, Alexandria, the city of Tanta to the north of the capital, the southern city of Luxor, and in many other locations.

The protests in Suez rapidly grew throughout Friday until tens of thousands were gathered in the city’s Arbaeen Square. Well-known poet Mohamed El-Tamsah and several other demonstrators are carrying out a hunger strike in the square to express their opposition to the military regime.

Another march from the Shohada mosque descended on Suez’s main police station to demand the prosecution of officers involved in torture. Videos appeared on the Internet Thursday showing a protester badly injured after being detained by police in the city. Speaking to *Ahram Online*,

Mohamed Mahmoud of the Suez Youth Bloc claimed that six anti-regime activists, including El-Tansah, had been detained and abused by police.

There have been strikes by workers at the Suez Canal Authority, one of Egypt's main industrial concerns. Workers have threatened to shut down the Suez Canal, a vital world trade route, unless demands for wage increases and the dismissal of corrupt management are met.

In response to the militancy of the working class, the SCAF have moved thousands of troops to Suez to protect business interests. The Egyptian Third Army deployed forces near banks, police stations, industrial estates and the canal.

In Alexandria, hundreds protested against the appointment of Khaled Gharba as the new regional governor. The previous governor of Alexandria, Essam Salem, resigned on Wednesday following weeks of protests and strikes. Demonstrators outside the Ministry of the Interior building in the city demanded the ouster of the SCAF and the prosecution of security forces personnel.

A protest also took place outside the exclusive hospital in Sharm El Sheikh where Mubarak is residing. Demonstrators called for the deposed president to be transferred to a prison hospital and to face immediate trial for the crimes committed during his 30-year rule.

Despite the massive popular opposition to the SCAF-led regime, many of the organizers of the protests continue to sow illusions in the generals and the bourgeois state.

Abdul-Ezz El-Hariri, a senior member of the Socialist Popular Alliance, called on the SCAF to "act in the spirit of the revolution" or "step down and allow a civilian council to run the transitional phase."

Two of the main protest groups, the April 6 Movement and the Revolution Youth Coalition, issued a call for civilian government and the resignation of Prime Minister Essam Sharaf.

The statement, co-signed by the Egyptian Independent Trade Union Association and presidential hopeful Mohamed ElBaradei, claimed that, "Sharaf is an honorable man but he is not fit to lead the country *at this stage* or to achieve the goals of the revolution in a timely manner." (Emphasis added.)

The tactical and unprincipled nature of such opposition to the regime was made clear when spokespeople from the April 6 Movement, addressing the crowds in Tahrir Square on Friday, called on Sharaf to form a "revolutionary government."

Such initiatives serve only to politically disarm the working class. Sharaf and the SCAF leadership are incapable of and opposed to forming a revolutionary government, because they are politically hostile to the working class.

Sharaf was a longstanding member of the Mubarak regime, serving as transportation minister from 2004-2005. While he resigned from the government over a disagreement with then Prime Minister Ahmed Nazif, his differences with the Mubarak regime were over issues of transport infrastructure. After the departure of Mubarak, Sharaf was handpicked by the generals to be the civilian figurehead of their government—precisely because he was a trusted insider, with links to other bourgeois "opposition" leaders such as ElBaradei.

The generals responded to the opposition's pleas with a July 12 communiqué stating that the SCAF and Sharaf would continue in power, organizing any future elections and participating in writing a permanent constitution. The SCAF statement also warned it would not tolerate any protests that impeded the work of the government.

The statement was delivered on state television by General Mohsen El-Fangary, deputy defense minister and a member of the SCAF. He called on "honorable Egyptian citizens to stand against any attempts to hinder the restoration of normal life." The general also warned against "spreading rumors" of a rift between the army and the people.

One protester told the WWSW that El-Fangary's speech was like a pronouncement by Mubarak. "They [the generals] are 100 percent representatives of the Mubarak regime. Like Mubarak in his speeches, they denounce us as criminals who want to destroy the country and spread chaos. The obvious aim of the military council is to threaten us and to mobilize people against the revolution."

Another "opposition" party boosting the military-dominated regime is the Muslim Brotherhood. A right-wing Islamic organization that was suppressed for years under Mubarak, the Brotherhood is now seeking an accommodation with the military and its backers in Washington. It refused to participate in Friday's protest and welcomed the threatening SCAF communiqué.

The Brotherhood only reluctantly sent a delegation to last week's massive demonstration in Tahrir Square, and has repeatedly stated its confidence in Tantawi and the military junta to safeguard the "revolution." They also back Prime Minister Sharaf, urging their supporters to give his government time to implement its policies.



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