

Millions protest to demand overthrow of US-backed Egyptian junta

Johannes Stern
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On Tuesday, millions of workers and youth staged protests and strikes all over Egypt, demanding the downfall of Field Marshal Mohamed Hussein Tantawi and the US-backed Egyptian junta.

In Cairo, mass demonstrations headed to Tahrir Square from Cairo and Ain Shams Universities, the working class districts of Shubra and Sayda Zeinab and other parts of the capital. Marchers shouted slogans against the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF), and for unity between Muslims and Copts.

Early yesterday evening, Tahrir Square was packed with hundreds of thousands of protesters. In Alexandria over one hundred thousand gathered in front of Al-Qaed Ibrahim Mosque and marched to the Northern District military command and the police headquarters. In Suez tens of thousands protesters gathered on Arbaeen Square, one of the epicenters of the January 25 protests that ultimately forced President Hosni Mubarak from office.

Other marches took place in major cities all over Egypt, including Mansoura, Ismailia, Qena, Beni-Souef, Al-Sharqiya, and Al-Wadi Al-Gadid, al-Minya and Assiut.

Peaceful protests were met with continued violence by military and police forces, which have launched a brutal crackdown since the early hours of Saturday, killing dozens and injuring thousands. Protesters carried the coffin of a protester who had been killed through Tahrir Square.

Three American students were held by Egyptian forces after they participated in protests against the junta. Egyptian officials accused them of throwing Molotov cocktails at police.

The situation in Egypt is the most explosive since the beginning of the revolution, when protests and strikes ousted long-time dictator Hosni Mubarak. The masses are demanding the overthrow of the junta that replaced Mubarak, while continuing his antisocial and undemocratic policies.

Confronted with this renewed upsurge, the Egyptian ruling class and its imperialist backers are even more panicked than in January and February. They view the military as the backbone of the state, defending Egyptian capitalism and the interests of imperialism in the entire region.

As in January—when the US supported Mubarak as long as possible—it is now supporting Mubarak's generals in the SCAF.

Washington is the main sponsor of the Egyptian military, and the ammunition killing and wounding the protesters is largely made in the USA. The Obama administration is calling “for restraint on all sides,” but behind the scenes it is monitoring the protests and supporting the junta’s crackdown.

Like the US, the official Egyptian political parties—Islamist, liberal or petty-bourgeois “left”—fear nothing more than the overthrow of the junta through revolutionary struggle. Their aim is to bring the protests under control and proceed with the so-called “democratic transition” run by the generals and supported by Washington.

The Islamist Muslim Brotherhood (MB) issued a statement on Monday opposing participation “in any protest that may lead to more confrontations and congestion.” Other groups—like the April 6 Youth Movement, the Democratic Workers Party or the Revolutionary Socialists (RS)—claim to support the protests. There are reportedly no visible party signs or platforms on the square, however.

After months of collaboration with the junta, the entire political establishment faces deep distrust from the population. Significantly, Mohamed ElBeltagi, a leading MB figure, was pushed out of Tahrir Square by protesters when he tried to enter Monday night.

Since the protests erupted, the junta and political leaders have maneuvered desperately to get the situation under control. Mohamed ElBaradei, current presidential candidate and a leader of the liberal opposition, proposed the formation of a “national salvation” government, warning that “the country is falling apart.” His call was supported by 37 political groups, including the April 6 Movement, the 25 January Revolution Youth Coalition and various Islamist groups.

On Monday evening, the current interim government headed by Prime Minister Essam Sharaf, a former minister under Mubarak, resigned. Early Tuesday, SCAF issued a statement inviting “all the political and national forces for an emergency dialogue to look into the reasons behind the aggravation of the current crisis to resolve it as quickly as possible.”

Late Tuesday afternoon the political parties went to the proposed emergency meeting with General Sami Anan, Chief of Staff of the Egyptian Army and member of the SCAF. They agreed to hold parliamentary elections on November 28 as

scheduled and presidential elections on 30 June 2012.

It was also decided to form the proposed “national salvation” unity government, and to hold a referendum on whether the army should return to their barracks or not. The SCAF approached ElBaradei to lead the “national salvation” government.

Shortly before 8 p.m., junta leader Field Marshal Mohamed Hussein Tantawi appeared on State Television and addressed the nation. He reported the agreements made between the political parties and Anan, then claimed that “the army will never stand in opposition to the Egyptian people” and that “the army has not shot one bullet at an Egyptian citizen.”

As Tantawi gave his speech, however, security forces were attacking and killing protesters in Cairo, Alexandria, Suez, Ismailia, Mansoura and other cities all over Egypt.

Tantawi then threatened that “the Army has been patient in dealing with multiple attempts to smear its reputation and patriotism over the last few months,” making clear that the junta is prepared to employ even more violence against the masses. At the end of the speech, he warned of a “deep economic crisis” and that foreign investors are fleeing the country because of the protests.

After he finished his speech, hundreds of thousands shouted “*Irhal, Irhal*” (Leave, Leave) and slogans calling for Tantawi’s removal and the overthrow of military rule. In scenes like those this February, when Mubarak gave a speech refusing to step down, people waved their shoes in contempt, shouting: “You will leave, we will not leave” and “Tantawi you coward, come down to the square if you dare.”

Shortly after the speech, US State Department spokeswoman Victoria Nuland made clear that the US stands behind the junta. She criticized Egypt’s police for using “excessive force,” then praised Egypt’s military leaders for pledging to hold elections and supposedly hand over power to civilians before July.

Like the Egyptian bourgeoisie, the US is keen on holding the elections because it hopes to use them to legitimize the state apparatus of the former Mubarak regime. Amongst the Egyptian masses, the election process is rightly seen as a farce. After Tantawi’s speech, workers and youth continued to advance on police headquarters in Alexandria, Suez and other cities and the Interior Ministry in Cairo—making clear their continuing determination to bring down the junta.

To be successful in this fight, Egyptian workers and youth need a new political perspective. The main task for the Egyptian workers and youth is to build their own independent organizations of revolutionary struggle, and a revolutionary leadership based on an international socialist perspective. This is the only way to bring down the junta. It must be replaced with a workers’ government, fighting to fulfill the masses’ social and democratic aspirations based on socialist politics.

The trap now prepared by the junta and its political supporters is the so-called “national salvation” government, proposed by ElBaradei and largely agreed on by other political parties and

the junta. Such a government’s task would be to provide a pseudo-democratic façade for the generals to try to dampen popular opposition, and then crush remaining protests and strikes to allow the ruling class to return to the policies of the junta—though possibly with different politicians at the top.

The main role in selling a “national salvation” regime as progressive to workers and youth falls to the petit-bourgeois pseudo-left groups, who falsely pose as revolutionary or even socialist.

Thus the Democratic Workers Party—a pro-capitalist party built by the RS—issued a statement demanding the dismissal of the Sharaf Government,” and calling for “a government of the revolution to manage the transition” with “all necessary powers in the political administration and legislation to be able to eradicate corruption and the remnants of the Mubarak regime and prepare the country for the process of democratization.”

This is nothing else then a “left” cover for the deal prepared between the junta and various political parties to form a government of “national salvation.” For the Democratic Workers Party and the RS, a “government of the revolution” is not a workers’ government.

It would rather consist of various bourgeois groups, like ElBaradei’s followers and the Islamist right, with whom they have a long record of collaboration and who are now in discussions with the junta. In a statement published on November 20 the RS made clear that their aim is to “unite all the forces” in “a single front.” This is only another name given to the same type of government of “national salvation” first proposed by ElBaradei, and now advanced by the junta itself.



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