Millions demand downfall of US-backed Egyptian junta

Johannes Stern
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On Friday millions of workers and youth protested against military rule in Egypt and demanded the downfall of the US-backed Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) junta. In Cairo hundreds of thousands of protesters gathered on Tahrir Square. By the early afternoon, the square was packed with protesters chanting, "The people demand the removal of the field marshal," "We will not go, he should go" and "Down, down with military rule."

Throughout the day, mass marches kicked off from different locations in the capital, all converging in Tahrir Square. Thousands of marchers tore down the banners and posters of parliamentary candidates on their way to Tahrir, protesting the decision to hold parliamentary elections under the thumb of the SCAF junta, and denouncing the political establishment as a whole.

In major cities all over Egypt, hundreds of thousands took to the streets. In Alexandria tens of thousands of protesters gathered in front of Al-Qaed Ibrahim Mosque shouting against military rule and marching towards the Northern Military Zone near Sidi Gaber. Thousands of protesters gathered on Arbaeen Square in Suez. There were demonstrations in Tanta, Mahalla al Kubra, Sohag, Ismailiya, Damanhour, in the Upper Egyptian cities of Luxor, Minya and Assiut, and on the Sinai.

Friday's mass demonstrations were the seventh day of continuous mass protests against the junta. Protests erupted last Saturday after the notorious *Amn Al Markazi* (Central Security Forces) violently attacked a small sit-in on Tahrir Square. Thousands of workers and youth poured into the streets to defend the sit-in against Mubarak's generals, who have continued the same anti-social and anti-democratic politics as the ousted dictator.

The junta has launched a brutal crackdown against protesters since Saturday, killing at least 38 and wounding several thousand. Military and Central Security Forces have shot rubber bullets, birdshots and tear gas canisters at protesters. The latest autopsy records indicate that at least 22 protesters were shot with live ammunition. There is increasing evidence that the Egyptian military is also using armored vehicles against peaceful protesters. A Youtube video shows tanks chasing protesters through the streets of Ismailiya, an industrial city on the west bank of the Suez Canal.

The crackdown is closely overseen by Washington, the main sponsor of the Egyptian military. The ammunition used to kill and wound Egyptian workers and youth is labeled "Made in USA." After the Tuesday speech by junta leader and de facto dictator Mohamed Hussein Tantawi, the US State Department cynically criticized "excessive force" used by the junta but praised Egypt's military leaders for pledging to hold elections and supposedly hand over power to civilians before July.

For the US and the Egyptian bourgeoisie, much is at stake. The situation in Egypt is the most explosive since the revolution began on January 25. The masses are demanding the overthrow of the junta that replaced Mubarak, and they are turning against the military—the backbone of the Egyptian state, defending Egyptian capitalism and the interests of imperialism in the entire region.

The junta and its imperialist backers are insisting that the SCAF must retain power and elections must take place under their control. At a Thursday press conference in Cairo, General Mokhtar Al-Molla and General Mamdouh Shahin stated that this would be a "betrayal" of the people's trust and insisted that they would not be dislodged by a "slogan-chanting crowd."

The biggest political group in the country, the Islamist Muslim Brotherhood (MB), distributed leaflets at Friday prayers supporting the elections. The MB did not take part in the protests, but organized their own protest in front of al-Azhar mosque.

In the eyes of masses of protesters, the MB is deeply discredited. On Monday one of their leaders, Mohamed ElBeltagi, was thrown out of Tahrir Square when he tried to enter to calm down protesters. The MB has established close ties with the US and the junta in the recent months and is collaborating closely with them to stop the revolution.

To achieve this aim, the Egyptian ruling elite is using a double strategy. On the one hand, violence against protesters continues. On the other, SCAF issued a cynical apology on Facebook "to the families of the martyrs throughout Egypt" and is trying to stabilize the situation. On Tuesday the chief of staff of the Egyptian Armed Forces, Sami Anan, met with various political forces in an emergency meeting. There have also been reports that SCAF approached Mohamed ElBaradei

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to form a so-called national salvation government.

On Thursday, Kamal El-Ghanzouri was named prime minister and charged with forming a new government. Like his predecessor Essam Sharaf, Ghanzouri is a former Mubarak official, having served as prime minister in 1996-1999. His cabinet championed free-market policies and included many figures now in prison, like hated former interior minister Habib El-Adly.

On Friday Ghanzouri spoke at his first press conference after his appointment, indicating that the new cabinet would be not much different from the previous one, including members of the former cabinet and possibly even his predecessor Essam Sharaf. "I'm keen to have some of those ministers and some newcomers," Ghanzouri said.

Ghanzouri also made clear in his speech that he had been given more powers than his predecessors: "The powers given to me exceed any similar mandates. I will take full authority so I can serve my country."

This only signals that the junta and the new PM are preparing even more violence against protesters to push through the elections.

Workers and youth on Tahrir Square rejected the junta's latest maneuver, chanting "Illegitimate, illegitimate" after hearing Ghanzouri's speech. Some 2,000 protesters immediately started a sit-in front of the cabinet building, to keep Ghanzouri from entering.

Protester Mohammed el-Fayoumi told *AP*: "Not only was he prime minister under Mubarak, but also part of the old regime for a total of 18 years. Why did we have a revolution then?" Another added: "The revolution was hijacked once. We won't let it happen again."

US President Barack Obama declared his full support for the new government and SCAF-controlled elections, stating that the US "strongly believes that the new Egyptian government must be empowered with real authority immediately. … Egypt's transition to democracy must continue, with elections proceeding expeditiously, and all necessary measures taken to ensure security and prevent intimidation."

The aim of the junta, the US, and large parts of the Egyptian bourgeoisie is to hold the elections at any price on November 28 as scheduled. They hope to use these elections to legitimize the state apparatus inherited from the former Mubarak regime and to protect the wealth and property of the Egyptian ruling class and the interests of imperialism in Egypt.

White House demands that "all necessary measures" should be taken to push through the elections amount to a blank cheque for the junta and the new government to use large-scale violence against the mass protests if they do not die down before the elections on Monday.

The Egyptian revolution is again at a turning point. Workers and youth understand that the elections under military rule are a farce, and that any "elected" government would be deeply reactionary and controlled by SCAF and the US. Friday's mass protests show again that the Egyptian masses are willing to bring down the junta through revolutionary struggle. But for these struggles to be successful, a new, socialist perspective is needed.

The whole experience of the last 10 months has shown that only a government emerging directly from the struggle of the Egyptian workers and youth—that is, a workers' government—can achieve the social and democratic aspirations of the masses. To fight for such a government to reorganize society on a socialist basis, workers and youth must build their own independent organizations of state power. They cannot and do not want to rely on a state apparatus controlled by the junta and its imperialist backers.

The most dangerous opponents of such a struggle are so-called "left" opposition groups, like the Revolutionary Socialists (RS), the Democratic Workers Party or the Socialist Popular Alliance Party. These groups participated in the Friday protests not to fight for a socialist perspective, but to disarm the working class politically and subordinate it to one or another wing of the bourgeoisie and thus to the junta itself.

In a statement issued on Thursday, the RS demanded the "immediate handover of power to civilian revolutionary rule […] without the parties and political forces which have accepted to sit down with the killer of the revolutionaries." This is at least unconvincing, however, as many forces tied to the RS themselves have "accepted to sit down" with the junta. On Tuesday night Abou El-Ghar of Egypt's Social-Democratic Party felt compelled to declare himself "truly sorry for participating in the meeting with the SCAF."

Another statement published on their website called for "the formation of a revolutionary goverment […] to manage the transition period and determine the timeline for the transition to an elected democratic government."

According to *Al Ahram*, "representatives of revolutionary movements" proposed Mohamed El-Baradei on Friday evening as the head of a government of national salvation at the Cabinet offices on Kasr El-Aini Street. They would also like to see Hamdeen Sabahi, leader of the Nasserist Karama Party and former member of the Guidance Bureau of the MB, Abdel-Moneim Aboul-Futtouh, in a cabinet led by ElBaradei.

All these people are experienced bourgeois politicians and announced presidential candidates who cooperated closely with the military regime in the recent months. If the junta decides to bring such a government to power, it would be installed to defend the interests of the Egyptian ruling elite and crush the protests and strikes even more ruthlessly than the junta dares to do it now.

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