

# Egyptians protest in lead-up to anniversary of Mubarak's ouster

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Thousands marched in Cairo, Alexandria and other cities against the US-backed Egyptian military junta yesterday, in the lead-up to today's one-day protest strike called to mark the one-year anniversary of the resignation of Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak.

The anniversary comes amid rising conflict between the junta and the working class. The state security forces' role in a deadly assault on Ahly football fans, 74 of whom were killed at a match in Port Said on February 1, provoked bitter clashes last week outside state ministries. (See, "Mass protests in Egypt against pro-junta football riot".) At least fifteen protesters have been killed in demonstrations over the last week.

Protesters in Cairo marched yesterday to the Defense Ministry in Cairo's Abbasiya District in a "Friday of Determination" protest called by youth groups and affiliated political parties to call for the junta to hand over power to a civilian administration. They chanted slogans demanding the downfall of the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) government and the execution of SCAF leader Field Marshal Mohammed Hussein Tantawi.

In front of the Defense Ministry they faced units of the army, which deployed extra tanks and infantrymen around ministries and state buildings. On an exterior wall of the Defense Ministry, repainted by soldiers to hide graffiti, protesters wrote: "Congratulations on the new paint, down with military rule."

This graffiti highlights the enormous change in popular consciousness that has taken place over the past year. One year ago, millions of workers who had protested in Cairo and throughout Egypt applauded the

army for not joining the police force in murderous attacks against the protesters. A popular chant was "The army and the people—one hand."

Various petty-bourgeois "left" groups in Egypt and internationally, echoing the line of Washington, promoted the view that workers could obtain "democratic space" under the military government. Hostile to the formation of new, democratic organs of the working class power to overthrow the Egyptian bourgeois state and the officer corps, these forces tried instead to find their place on the fringes of the political establishment under Tantawi. They promoted parliamentary elections, which were carried largely by the right-wing Muslim Brotherhood.

After a year of mass protests and political oppression at the hands of the SCAF, the working class is turning against the army and is increasingly disillusioned with the petty-bourgeois "left" groups. During last week's clashes with security forces after the Port Said soccer match, a popular chant was "The army, the police—one filthy hand."

With the political atmosphere dominated by the one-year anniversary of the mass revolutionary struggles against Mubarak, there is a broad sense that Egypt stands on the verge of a renewed wave of revolutionary struggles.

This prospect inspires increasing dread and hostility in the Egyptian bourgeoisie. Writing in *Egypt Independent*, Khalil al-Anani labeled protesters a "mob," noting that they have "lost confidence in the newly elected Parliament," concluding: "Clearly, the mob has lost faith and trust in the state's institutions,

e.g. the judiciary, the government, and Parliament. ... This skepticism could push the country to the edge of complete failure and disorder.”

The fact that the petty-bourgeois “left” called yesterday’s protests on a perspective of allowing a civilian regime to form a new cabinet—which, under the current conditions, would mean giving power to a reactionary Islamist-dominated parliament—no doubt contributed to their relatively small size.

Political officials and parties campaigned against protest actions during today’s strike, hoping to limit the impact of the event. The Muslim Brotherhood’s Freedom and Justice Party ludicrously announced in Cairo that today’s protest should be a “clean-up day,” during which protesters should clean streets and public squares.

Religious officials denounced the strike. Al-Azhar University’s Grand Sheikh Ahmed al-Tayeb and Grand Mufti Ali Gomaa urged the public to abstain from civil disobedience actions. Al-Tayeb asked Egyptians “not to delay work even for an hour,” claiming that “the Egyptian economy is facing a temporary challenge.”

Pope Shenouda III of Egypt’s Coptic Christian church reminded his listeners, according to *Daily News Egypt*, that “a lot of verses in the Bible urge us to obey the ruler.”

Though their tone was somewhat different, the statements of the petty-bourgeois “left” forces had essentially the same content: arguing against any action that would inconvenience the junta. This took the form of advocating a one-day strike today that would be totally divorced from a struggle to bring down the Egyptian junta.

On *Al-Hayah Al-Youm* television, Revolution Youth Coalition member Khaled Tellima stressed that his organization is not calling for civil disobedience, which it views as far too radical. He called the one-day strike “a means of protest, where people stay home and don’t go to work and students don’t attend classes, while civil disobedience is the extreme form of protest, in which people refrain from dealing with the government

and all state apparatus.”

Revolutionary Socialists (RS) leader Kamal Khalil said that the right to hold one-day strikes was “guaranteed by international agreements and codes,” compared to civil disobedience, which he also said is more radical. Nonetheless, he called the one-day strike a “swift weapon that would achieve the goals of the revolution.”

It is hard to describe the full mendacity of such statements, which outline forms of “protest” so toothless they are acceptable even to dictatorial regimes like the SCAF junta. If such counsels were followed one year ago, Mubarak would still be in power.

As it enters into renewed struggle against the junta, the working class will come directly into conflict not only with the army and its Islamist allies, but petty-bourgeois “left” groups who are seeking to emasculate the political struggles of the working class against the ruling elite.



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