

Egypt - Mubarak refuses to resign, a general strike is needed to bring him down!

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The Egyptian masses thought Mubarak would resign, but he had other plans, Simon Hardy reports on what happened and what comes next

In the afternoon of 10 February the Egyptian Army Supreme Council, which had met without its commander in chief Hosni Mubarak, issued Communique number 1. The communique explained that the army had stepped in in order to safeguard "the people's achievements and demands". Omar Suleiman, the Vice President, was sent to meet Mubarak to relay the discussion and opinions of the generals.

ABC news in the US announced that Mubarak would step down. Leading members of the NDP had said that they "did not think Mubarak would be president by Friday." Thousands surged into Tahrir and took to the streets across the country to be there when they heard the news that they had been waiting for.

Everyone thought he would resign - the mood in tahrir square was phenomenal, celebratory - a feeling of triumph surged through the crowd. But Mubarak had other plans.

Mubarak's speech was an astonishing piece of hypocritical filth. This man who sat atop of the regime which brutalised his people for 30 years, and tried in the last 17 days to destroy the movement any way that it could shed crocodile tears for the people that his police had killed. Over 300 people have died to force him from power, and after cursing the movement and trying to drown them in blood he addresses his speech to the "youth of the nation". These are the youth of the nation who have risen up against him and hate him with a passion - they have nothing in common with him or his regime. They are the future and he is the past, that is why he has fought against them so violently.

He promised a full investigation into anyone involved in persecuting protesters and swore again that he would resign in September, but not before.

During his entire speech he did not offer one serious concession to the people - he did not even withdraw the state of emergency. He proposed the amendment of 6 sections of the constitution, including the most controversial ones of article 76 and 77. He said he would scrap article 179. Article 179 is a relatively new anti terrorism amendment which stipulates "the state will assume responsibility for safeguarding security and public order in the face of the dangers of terrorism", which allows for anti terror suspects to be investigated and arrested without any kind of judicial over view.

The crowd in Tahrir square became enraged when word spread that he was not resigning. People began to wave their shoes in the air, the universal sign of disrespect and contempt in the Arab world, they were lifted up on sticks, held aloft above their heads. Mubarak knows that he cannot step down, if he does so it will give a green light to everyone across the region that dictators can fall under popular pressure.

But now the masses will become enraged. Tomorrow will see millions upon millions of people marching across the country. Masses of workers are due to join the protests. The strikes should not be called off, they need to be extended and co-ordinated into an all out general strike. The strikes should be co-ordinated by democratic councils of the workers, they need to organise the defense of the revolution. It is also important now that the rank and file soldiers be won over to the revolution.

Now the demand for a constituent assembly is crucial. It is not the military or technocrats which should decide the new constitution but a democratic assembly composed of recognised delegates from the people.

Whether Mubarak is working in relative agreement with the army or defying them is not clear. Clearly the army wants to consolidate its influence in the political process. Clearly the military are divided over what to do - still the different factions within the regime do not know what to do. Some within the NPD want Mubarak gone, but Mubarak and his clique want to hold on to power. The army's position is changing, but it is not clear yet what role they will play.

Tomorrow may see a revolution in the country, or a military coup. There will be a reckoning between the people and the army sooner or later. All the world is watching history happen in Egypt tonight!

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