

Egypt: Prime Minister Resigns

Marcus Halaby Wed, 05/03/2014 - 08:27

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Barely a month after a rigged constitutional referendum held to enshrine continued military rule, Egypt's post-coup regime has seen the sudden resignation of its prime minister Hazem Al Beblawi and his cabinet.

This has taken place even as the regime continues its repression of Muslim Brotherhood activists, and of the broader Anti-Coup Alliance led by it, which has been holding weekly demonstrations across the country, including in provincial regions that had not previously seen mass protests.

Iran's Press TV has reported that Egyptian security forces are currently holding 692 university students in detention, with 21 students from Al-Azhar University recently sentenced to five-year prison terms for rioting; while Turkey's World Bulletin reports that three courts in Alexandria have given 220 protesters seven-year prison sentences for participating in illegal protests.

Turkey's Anadolu Agency also reported Anti-Coup Alliance spokesmen Hisham Kamal and Ehab Shiha accusing the security forces of subjecting female detainees to rape and sexual assault.

The Anti-Coup Alliance's demands include the release of prisoners and the punishment of those involved in the killing of protestors, in particular the massacre of up to 2,600 unarmed protesters outside Cairo's Rabaa Al-Adawiya Mosque on 14 August 2013. The four-fingered 'R4BIA sign', showing solidarity with the victims of this massacre, has become a symbol of the anti-coup protesters, and has been banned by the coup regime.

Military strongman Abdel Fattah el-Sisi will remain defence minister in the new government of outgoing housing minister Ibrahim Mahlab, previously an official in former dictator Hosni Mubarak's National Democratic Party (NDP). Mahlab vowed on his appointment as prime minister to 'crush terrorism in all corners of the country', in order to 'restore security and safety to Egypt'.

At the same time, the coup regime's Interim President Adly Mansour has reconstituted the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) under Sisi's leadership as defence minister, leading to speculation that Sisi may now not stand for election as President in March or April after all, but will instead continue to operate as the post-coup regime's real leader behind a screen of constitutional legitimacy.

The Beblawi government's resignation was also accompanied by strikes, with Imam Youssef of the Salafist Asala ('Authenticity') party, a component of the Anti-Coup Alliance, commenting that a 'handful of labor strikes' had doomed to failure a government that 'came to improve the coup's image'.

Journalist Mostafa Bassiouny of Egypt's Revolutionary Socialists (RS), associated with Britain's Socialist Workers Party (SWP), reported a revival of strike struggles amongst iron and steel workers and workers in factories in El Asher, Alexandria and Suez. More than 10,000 workers at state-owned textile factories in Mahalla El-Kubra struck on 10 February, demanding that employers raise their wages from £44 per month

to the official minimum wage of £105.

A rise in the minimum wage was one of the promises made by Sisi's junta to win support for the military regime after its overthrow of the Muslim Brotherhood-led government of President Mohamed Morsi on 3 July last year. The junta even appointed former Egyptian Federation of Independent Trade Unions (EFITU) president Kamal Abu Aita as manpower and immigration minister in order to sell the coup to trade union members.

Since then, however, the minimum wage has been subjected to a range of exemptions that have restricted the number of people benefitting from it from six million to only 400,000. Private sector workers in particular are outside of its remit, prompting strikes by workers in privatised enterprises for their renationalisation.

Elsewhere, transport workers, medical staff and tax collectors have also struck in Alexandria, Kafr el-Sheikh and Cairo, with Britain's Socialist Worker reporting all 28 of Cairo's bus garages closed by strike action on 25 February.

Taken as a whole, the signs are that, despite the defeat inflicted on the revolution by Sisi's July coup, despite the silence or explicit support of the dominant imperialist powers East and West, and despite moves to legitimise a counter-revolutionary political settlement, Egypt's ruling class has not yet succeeded in bringing the revolution firmly to an end. The economic situation in particular has not improved, even if one takes account of the economic sabotage to which the Egyptian 'deep state' subjected Morsi's government. Power cuts and shortages of fuel and other basic goods remain widespread.

What is now needed is the uniting of the emerging workers' struggles with the continuing struggles for democracy and for the demilitarisation of the state. But, for this, the Egyptian workers' movement will need to go beyond trade unionism. The left should call for unity in action with all those fighting against and on the receiving end of the state's repression, Islamist or otherwise.

It will not be possible to assert the principle of working class political independence from the pro-capitalist forces of the Muslim Brotherhood and their various Islamist and Salafist allies without demonstrating to their mass base that this independence goes hand-in-hand with a deep commitment to their own democratic rights.

For this, the Egyptian workers need a political party. And all revolutionary socialists in Egypt should strive to use this revival of struggle as an opportunity to build one.

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