

The people of Egypt need freedom - Clinton and Obama think differently

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It is quite clear by Sunday 6 February that Mubarak's days are numbered; the argument now is over how many days he has left. A handful? Or enough to last until September? My guess is that it will be sooner rather than later.

As long as Mubarak is there and (nominally at least) in command it will be very difficult to persuade the demonstrators to go home. Yesterday the head of the army came to the square. He was warmly received until he begged the people to leave. Then he was shouted down.

No doubt the entire ruling class and the Americans are trying to find a way to let him exit with dignity (?He is a proud man? says Obama) and with his ill-gotten gains. Yesterday's Guardian revealed that Mubarak and his family had amassed a private fortune of upwards of \$70bn ? yes that's billions. Much of this has been stashed away abroad; in Manhattan, Belgravia, Beverly Hills, and of course in the Swiss banks.

The next big test for the movement will be when he actually does step down and is replaced by Omar Suleiman. There are a lot of posters and graffiti covering the walls in Tahrir calling for them both to step down, but many of the protesters seemed to consider Mubarak the main enemy.

For now the US and ruling elites in Egypt have thrown their weight behind Omar Suleiman, ex head of the interior ministry and intelligence chief. It is precisely his Jihaz Amn al Daoula (State Security Service) that have been terrorising the people, beating, raping, torturing and killing them for the last 30 years. Now Hillary Clinton and the other imperialist leaders are pushing him into the presidency as a man they can rely on for stability in the 'difficult' transition phase.

It is typical of these so-called Democrats in the White House that they live in a world where replacing a dictator with a torturer is seen as progress. What contempt these people have for Egyptians and for the whole world.

The danger is that the protests by focussing only on Mubarak, because his intransigence about leaving office makes him, not the whole regime, the target of anger. How many will remain in the square after he is gone? After all, the key figures of the regime and their US backers are preparing to sacrifice Mubarak, and will do so, but at a time and in a way that does not encourage the continuation of the revolution in Egypt or its imitation in other Arab countries especially the ones who are the US and Israel's allies. The only way to force him out is to raise the stakes, escalate the action to a higher level. Tahrir square must become the base for mobilising for the seizure of power in Cairo itself.

As long as you have numbers and you are in motion then the chance of victory still remains. In Egypt numbers are not the problem, there are hundreds of thousands in Tahrir square and millions on the

demonstrations and millions more beyond them that support the movement. It is absolutely clear that they want Mubarak to go. Mubarak has few supporters amongst the imperialists. So why is he still in power?

The most important weakness is the question of leadership. It would not be right to say that there are no leaders, there are plenty, but who are they? Those who triggered the revolution - like the activists of the April 6 Youth Movement - undoubtedly seek the demolition of the whole dictatorship and support the new workers movement, in whose defence they initially sprung up.

But they are being upstaged by those who initially did not support the movement like Mohamed ElBaradei of the National Coalition for Change, (who stated before 25 January that Egypt should not go the way of Tunisia, the Muslim League, the New Wafd, etc.) Who chose them to negotiate for the movement on the streets? What parties and class interests do they represent? Clearly they represent the Egyptian capitalist class. Their economic and social programmes would block the road to solving the burning needs of the great majority of Egyptians. They would continue the policy of 'opening up' Egypt to exploitation by imperialist capital that has led to the catastrophic decline in living standards.

The problem is that the movement has not yet gone beyond the understanding of itself as a national movement. The revolution still cloaks itself in the national flag - its call is for national unity, its demands focus on liberal democratic institutions. Even though one of the primary triggers is the chronic poverty and under-employment this has not yet translated into a proper class conscious response. One of the protesters approached me and explained that he was a teacher and he was paid a very low wage, only 70 Egyptian pounds a day and that was why he was protesting. Then another protester quickly stepped in to explain that the protests were solely focused on the question of democracy, not social economics. Clearly there is a conscious effort on the parts of some to repress the inherent class contradiction both within Egyptian society and the protest movement itself.

The limitations of the nationalist terrain on which the movement's ideas remain is clear - for instance the army is approached as a totality, it is simply The Army from top to bottom. There has been incredible fraternisation with the soldiers stationed in Tahrir but there is no concerted attempt to differentiate between them and the generals who staff the party ranks of the NDP and hold positions in and around the government. So for now the rank and file soldiers are sympathetic but even after so many days of mass resistance they remain in the command structure. Their loyalties to either side have yet to be finally tested.

The question of how the movement sees itself and the opposition is another interesting conundrum. The streets of Cairo are full of young men carrying bundles of Egyptian flags to sell. Of course they sell the flags to both revolutionaries and counter revolutionaries, both sides wave the flags at each other, both sides condemn the other side for betraying the country. "those are not real Egyptians!" is the slur thrown from both sides of the barricade. This means that the arguments axiomatically move into a debate about the governmental structures within a very narrow framework, that of liberal democracy and the role of the judiciary.

Of course it is inevitable that a movement like this will see itself in democratic revolutionary terms. And that is what this still is - a democratic revolutionary movement. Hopefully it will establish real democratic freedoms, those the demonstrators have established de facto on the streets and squares - freedom of speech, of assembly, of political and trade union organisation. But how full and real these are and how long they last depends on the scope and scale of the struggle in the next days and weeks.

If the regime survives intact - under Suleiman or even under a 'transitional government' with opposition figures remains to be seen. But lodged within the democratic revolution is all the essential components of a socialist revolution, the working class people on the protests, the importance of economic questions, the

necessity of revolutionary means to secure reforms and so on.

Most crucially, as long as the military remains as it is, as long as Egypt is subordinated under international capital, the democratic reforms will be shallow and temporary. Only breaking the rank and file soldiers from the generals, a general strike, seizure of key buildings and roads, and a constituent assembly can really secure the change people want to see.

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