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Update from Cairo, Egypt

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As we enter the fifth day of mass direct action by the Egyptian people all over the country against the ruling military council (the SCAF), we talked with our anarchist-communist comrades in Cairo to know what demonstrators on the streets think about the dealings between the political parties and the SCAF to speed up the power transfer deal and the possible referendum on this issue.

Protests are expanding all over Egypt: millions have taken to the streets not only in Cairo, but also in Alexandria, Suez, Port Said, Aswan, Mahalla, Luxor, Mansoura and Ismailia among many others. All over the country people are mobilising against the military council (the SCAF) and demanding their resignation, to complete their

revolution started in January. In the meantime, the SCAF has stated that elections will go ahead on Monday 28th as planned. The political parties are discussing a National Rescue Government and the military junta has agreed with them to speed up the power transfer from the SCAF to a civilian authority by June 2012. This has not stopped protestors who want them out now. Nor do protestors accept the apologies and promises to bring to justice those responsible for the murder of protestors done by the SCAF today, the 24th. The Muslim Brothers have rejected the current protestors and have sided squarely with the SCAF, which has prompted new cracks in their ranks as many of their grassroots supporters have not heeded the calls for restraint by their leaders and have taken to the streets with the Tahrir revolutionaries. Repression has been fierce: over 40 people have died and thousands have been injured in these clashes... doctors in makeshift hospitals to attend to injured demonstrators have denounced the use of quite toxic gas against protestors — CN and CR gas. There are also reports of the use of out-of-date gas, something which increases its toxicity.

The following update on the situation in Cairo was reported by our comrade Yasser Abdullah, from the Egyptian Libertarian Socialist Movement, on Wednesday 23rd at around 3:00 pm.

While the battles between the repressive forces of the regime and the people demanding that the SCAF step down were raging yesterday in Cairo, representatives of the political parties were negotiating with the SCAF for it to step down earlier than expected. What do you make of these negotiations?

The State authority, the SCAF, and the potential authority, the political parties, are trying to settle an agreement. The military have ruled the country since July 1952, on occasions compromising with various sectors, but at the same time holding all the strings in their hands. Under Sadat (1970–1981) the Egyptian political parties were invented. Actually, the regime invented the whole Egyptian

question their parliament about the aid which has helped rebuild the repressive Egyptian police, and which has helped them have more sophisticated gas, like CR and CN. I call on all libertarians to occupy and demonstrate in front of Egyptian embassies all over the world. This Egyptian uprising is only a phase in the worldwide revolution... when you help the Egyptian people and stand in solidarity with them, you're helping your own revolution.

Long live the Egyptian uprising!
Glory to our heroes, glory to the martyrs!
Long live the anarchist revolution!

political elite... now the revolution will topple the regime and with it the whole political system. So they have to help the system, but no one really cares about them, they only represent themselves.

But I want to talk about Tantawi's speech.

- a. First, Tantawi delayed his speech, like his master Mubarak had done many times before him, to hear first what his errand boys, the political parties, had to say. The parties sat down with brigadier general Sami Anan, who acts as the American delegate to the SCAF, and only after receiving feedback from the parties did Tantawi speak.
- b. Secondly — and now I'm talking about what happened on the streets during his speech — the Central Security Forces and the Military Police jointly attacked Bab Elouq square, to beat the protesters back so as to lay siege to Tahrir. The speech itself was the type of military trick every Egyptian has studied while under conscription to the army, and is called diversion.
- c. Thirdly, Tantawi talked in the first person plural, using “we” not “I”, unlike Mubarak who in his famous speech just before the “Camel battle” on February 2nd said “I have fought for this country”. Tantawi instead said “We, as military forces, protected Egypt during the revolution”. By protection he means that when the police was defeated by protesters in January, the military was very kind in not slaughtering protestors, so he's talking of a mafia form of protection.
- d. In talking in the first person plural, Tantawi is sending the message that he's not talking as Field-Marshal-Tantawi-the-main-authority and that the junta is not a fascist clique. But Tantawi has also said “I am the army, I am Egypt”. Shortly after his speech, a retired general talked to Al Jazeera and stated that even after the elections, even after the SCAF delivers the authority to an elected president, the SCAF will

stay firmly put, with the ultimate power in its hands, as if the SCAF was a Holy Trinity beyond Heaven and Earth. The SCAF is trying to stay behind the scenes, pretty much along the lines of the Turkish military as Stephen Cook has made clear in one of his articles (see the article: "Istanbul on the Nile" pomed.org).

- e. Tantawi said that they, the SCAF, were willing to call for a referendum about their role and to step down from power. This proposal sent us back to the French Revolution, representing a position typical of the Gironde back in 1793. Time and again throughout history, voting has been the weapon of the bourgeoisie against "plebeian" direct action. This is part of Tantawi's attempt to push the apolitical middle class – or as we call them here the "couch party" – to act against the Tahrir revolutionaries.

What political sectors and social forces are protesting in the streets right now?

I'll continue with my analysis. The social forces in the streets have a lot in common with the UK rioters last August and with the suburban riots in Paris in 2006. We are talking mainly of angry youth from a poor background, coming from the suburbs. The only organised force fighting against the police are the Ultras (football fans). The Ultras have played a crucial role in the Egyptian uprising: on the ground the Ultras is a kind of Black Block, so it has some revolutionary potential. It is important to take into account that Tahrir is divided logistically into two fronts: the calm front is the square, while the hot front is near the Interior Ministry. So Tahrir is where most people from the bourgeois parties are, and the front line – literally a war zone where the real fighting is taking place – is in the streets around Tahrir. Actually, we have not discussed anything with the people inside the square. For the past four days we have been around Mohamed Mahmoud street and Bab Elouk

street. I don't think the people fighting in this frontline will take anything coming from above.

As repression mounts and the dead keep piling up, what are the next steps for the Egyptian people and what can international solidarity do by way of practical steps for solidarity?

At this very minute, the police have broken a truce once again, the sixth one they have broken in a row. The general inspector sent a committee to start a check and the army said there would be a truce... then they started putting barbed wire in the streets around the Interior Ministry. Every time there's talk of a truce, the police forces use it to get more ammunition from the army. The SCAF stated in their 83rd statement that they have not shot people with banned gas – they gave Central Security Forces the gas while the military shot us with live ammunition. You have to watch a video made by an Egyptian newspaper, "Almasry Alyoum". While Field Marshall Tantawi was talking about the army not using violence against people, you can see the army shooting at the people, running them over with armoured vehicles, hitting them with sticks.

(Video here: www.youtube.com).

Egyptian people should stand our ground and hold our frontlines until Friday. Then Friday will bring a lot more people and a renewed impetus to the uprising. Maybe we will defeat them this time. Actually no one believed that we, peaceful protestors who can only fight with stones and some fireworks for the purposes of self-defence, could hold our position in this battle, in the face of all of this aggression, for more than four days... but we did. I think the heroes in the frontline of the struggle now are writing a new history, for this is a collective, largely leaderless revolution which can resonate all over the world. I hope Friday will be the greatest day in Egypt's history.

As for international solidarity, I call on the workers who work in factories who supply weapons to the Egyptian police to strike in solidarity with the Egyptian people, who are getting shot by those weapons. I call on the Occupy Wall Street movements to