

Letter from Egypt 4

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As protests spread across the Middle East countries, the news about events in Egypt have dwindled in the U.S. media. What is happening there these days? Since my primary country of interest and experience is Egypt, I will try and fill that void for those who are interested.

So much has happened and is happening daily in Egypt since the resignation of Mubarek last week. For starters the military has dismissed Parliament and asked the Cabinet of Ministers to continue to fulfill their duties and run the day to day operations of the country. The State media is trying to regain trust by reporting truthfully on the real happenings throughout Egypt, and democratic efforts are being made by youth groups, workers, and many others to position themselves for the coming elections --- which are to be “soon”, like 6 months from now. In preparation for those elections a committee of “wise persons” trusted by the people has been appointed by the military to rewrite the Constitution to meet the dreams and aspirations of the “New Egypt”. Might I say the military has given them 10 days to complete their task!!!!

Economically, Egypt is struggling. Workers have arisen and protests have broken out in many places in the country. The military is doing their best to keep the lid on strikes which have surfaced in many places from textile workers in the Delta to bankers in the cities to miners between Cairo and Alexandria to name a few. Each entity wants higher wages and better working conditions. Workers everywhere have received very low wages for years which is very little relative to what is needed to provide for their families. The minimum wage in Egypt is supposed to be 1200 LE (the Egyptian pound) which is equivalent to \$204 American dollars/mo. It was increased last year from 400 LE (\$68) per month but not implemented in many places. Now that they have their freedom and a public voice, they are demanding higher wages. Strikes are spreading and the military is having difficulty convincing workers now is not the time to leave their jobs. If the workers continue to strike and keep from working, the economy of Egypt will be damaged severely. The military leaders and others have the challenge of convincing the workers that their demands will be heard and addressed but later. The teapot is boiling over and the military is in a very precarious position. They are trained to defend the country from enemies, not to manage an economic and political upheaval. Time will reveal how successful they are.

Politically, much is going on behind the scenes. Meetings of the protester youth are surfacing everywhere and they are learning how challenging it is to come to consensus. However, they are organizing and today a prominent group for lack of a better name called 25 January Revolution announced they have selected a “board of trustees” which will work to formulate a platform for the election process. Other groups are also organizing including but not exclusively the Muslim Brotherhood. More will surface in the next few days and weeks.

The dominant political party in Mubarek’s regime, ironically called the National Democratic Party, is in shambles. Most of the members have resigned or disappeared. Mubarek himself is reported to be quite ill and residing with his family in Sharm el Sheikh on the Red Sea. There was some suspicion before the revolution that he was not well and was not intending to run for another term as President. He was making political moves to enable his son, Gamal, to succeed him. Gamal has been in Egypt for the past few years and quite involved politically. Before that he worked in England in the banking industry. Mubarek’s wife is

English. There have been rumors that the family would move to England but Mubarek has made it clear that he wants to die in his own homeland. The Saudis have offered him sanctuary, but reported that he refused.

Topics for future updates:

Muslim Brotherhood

The youth and their new freedom

Other developments as Egypt “grows” into a post-revolution nation