

# **Samir Amin**

## **The Components of the Democratic Movement**

The “Egyptian Revolution” links different active components: youth “repoliticized” by their own will, the radical socialist left, organisations of the democratic middle classes, independent trade unions, movements of small peasants resisting to the spoliation of their lands, women active for the defence of their rights, a number of organisations of the civil society in defence of political and social rights. Youth (about one million activists) spearheaded the movement. They represent to a large extent the new proletariat of working classes submitted to extreme precarity of jobs. They were immediately joined by the radical left and the democratic middle classes. The Muslim Brotherhood had called for a boycott of the demonstrations sure, as they were, that the demonstrators would be routed by the repressive apparatus. The middle classes as a whole rally around the democratic objective, without necessarily objecting thoroughly to the “market”(such as it is) or to Egypt’s international alignment. The 5 million strong working class’s entry into the battle has been decisive. The combative workers, through numerous strikes, have advanced further in constructing the organizations they began in 2007. There are already more than fifty independent unions. The stubborn resistance of small farmers against the expropriations permitted by abolition of the agrarian reform laws (the Muslim Brotherhood cast its votes in parliament in favor of that vicious legislation on the pretext that private property was “sacred” to Islam and that the agrarian reform had been inspired by the Devil, a communist!) is another radicalizing factor for the movement.

These components of the movement share in common three objectives: democracy, the undertaking of a new economic and social policy favorable to the popular masses (breaking with the submission to demands of globalized liberalism), and an independent foreign policy (breaking with the submission to the requirements of U.S. hegemony and Israel’s plan of expansion in Palestine). The democratic revolution for which they call is a democratic, social and anti-imperialist revolution.

The call for demonstrations enunciated by these active components of the movement was quickly heeded by the whole Egyptian people. Repression, extremely violent during the first

days (more than a thousand deaths), did not discourage those youths and their allies (who at no time, unlike in some other places, called on the Western Powers for any help). Their courage was decisive in drawing 15 million Egyptians from all the districts of big and small cities, into demonstrations of protest lasting days and nights. Their overwhelming political victory had as its effect that fear switched sides.

The generalization of the movement among the whole Egyptian people represents in itself a positive challenge. For this people, like any other, are far from making up a “homogeneous bloc.” Some of its major components are without any doubt a source of strength for the perspective of radicalization. But many “ordinary people” , as usual, can be neutralised or even manipulated by the counter revolution forces.

Conspicuous progress in constructing the united front of democratic forces is happening. In April 2011 five socialist-oriented parties established an Alliance of Socialist Forces through which they committed themselves to carry out their struggles in common. In parallel, a National Council (*Maglis Watany*) was established by all the active political and social forces of the movement. The Muslim Brotherhood and the right wing parties refused to participate thus reaffirming their well known opposition to continuation of the revolutionary movement.

### **Confronting the Democratic Movement: The Reactionary Bloc**

The democratic social and anti-imperialist movement in Egypt is up against a powerful reactionary bloc. This bloc can be identified in terms of its social composition, its means of political intervention and the ideological discourse serving its politics. In social terms, the reactionary bloc is led by the Egyptian bourgeoisie taken as a whole. The forms of dependent accumulation operative over the past forty years brought about the rise of a rich bourgeoisie, the sole beneficiary of the scandalous inequality accompanying that “globalized liberal” model. They make up the active support for Egypt’s placement in contemporary imperialist globalization as an unconditional ally of the United States. Within its ranks this bourgeoisie counts numerous military and police generals, “civilians” with connections to the state and to the new reactionary parties reconstructed after the breakdown of the former dominant National Democratic party created by Sadat and Mubarak, and of religious personalities—the whole leadership of the Muslim Brotherhood and the leading sheikhs of the Al Azhar University who are all of them “billionaires.”

Certainly there still exists a bourgeoisie of active small and medium entrepreneurs. But they are the victims of the racketeering system put in place by the comprador bourgeoisie, usually

reduced to the status of subordinate subcontractors for the local monopolists, themselves mere transmission belts for the foreign monopolies. That authentically entrepreneurial bourgeoisie is in sympathy with the democratic movement.

The rural side of the reactionary bloc has no less importance. It is made up of rich peasants who are the main beneficiaries of the Sadat/Mubarak policies (supported by the World Bank) aiming at eliminating the poor peasants. In modern Egypt the rural rich have always constituted a reactionary class, now more so than ever. They are likewise the main sponsors of conservative Islam in the countryside and, through their close (often family) relationships with the officials of the state and religious apparatuses they dominate rural social life. What is more, a large part of the urban middle classes (especially the army and police officers but likewise the technocrats and medical/legal professionals, cadres in the private economy) stem directly from the rural rich. This reactionary bloc has strong political instruments in its service: the military and police forces, the state institutions, the privileged National Democratic political party (a de facto single party) that is still on the stage under new names, the Moslem Brotherhood which shares the same targets : non democratic and anti social. They are supported by the US, and therefore Europe, Israel and Saudi Arabia who is now considered as “supporting the struggle for democracy” (what a farce!).

### **Two strategies, two legitimacies in conflict**

The strategy of the reactionary bloc had been formulated very early by no else than Obama : a short transition leading to a pluriparty election, the expected outcome of which guaranteeing a majority to the reactionary bloc, reinforced by the participation of the Moslem Brotherhood, thanks to the unlimited financial support of Saudi Arabia. Thus the “movement”, which suffers from lack of means, operating in a legal unfavorable frame (no real freedom of organization) would be “defeated”. The elected bodies would represent the exclusive new “democratic” legitimacy.

The movement considers that the elections, while of importance, are neither the ultimate goal, nor even the decisive battle. The future parliament to be elected is already qualified in popular parlance as “the parliament of the money”. Its legitimacy will be quickly eroded when the common people see that nothing has changed. Therefore the movement has put for himself the target of ensuring the continuation of its legitimacy. The struggles to be continued are (i) the democratization, freedom of organization and of struggle, moving ahead toward secularization of politics, (ii) associating that process with social progress, (iii) restoring the

active role of Egypt regionally and globally. The “Parliament of the people”, which brings together the representatives of the forces that move the society ahead, is not conceived to disappear, but to continue the struggle.