The victory of the Islamists in the parliamentary elections is a dangerous sign, warns Simon Hardy. The mobilisations of 2011 saw millions of Egyptians protest and take strike action, but they did not succeed in splitting the army. The left is fragmented across a myriad of different parties. Many boycotted the elections, in protest at the violence carried out by the military during the campaign, which made a mockery of the claim that the elections were ?free and fair?. Attacks on women and Coptic Christians increased, stoking up the fires of sectarian division typical of the divide and rule politics on which military juntas and reactionary elites rest. Those who did participate did quite poorly, winning only a handful of seats.
More worrying still is the rise of the ultra-reactionary Salafists, whose extreme conservatism contrasts with that of the Muslim Brotherhood. They had none of the Brotherhood?s pre-established infrastructure, but were flush with money ? suspected to come from Saudi Arabia ? and won 25 per cent of the vote.

The critical question now is the relationship between the streets and workplaces on the one hand, and the military institutions and Islamist-dominated political system on the other. The latter will seek to cohere Egypt around a socially conservative political agenda, while carrying through massive austerity measures. This will inevitably strain the relationship between the huge numbers of poor people who voted and the political elite that promised social justice.

That huge numbers of Egyptians abstained in the election is therefore not likely to be down to ?apathy?, but because they could see that the electoral process was flawed.

These are still reasons to be optimistic for the future of the revolution. The political system that is being created today will be inherently unstable. The breathing space the left and workers? movement won last February ? freedom to protest, to strike, and to organise ? will have to be defended vigorously.

The forthcoming 100-person constituent assembly that will be created by the parliament will rest not on the revolutionary masses in struggle, but on the old state apparatus. The army was has decided to refrain from nominating its share of 90 politicians to the lower house until after the presidential elections in June. They will probably allow the new president ? almost inevitably from the Muslim Brotherhood ? to do this for them, between to cement the new alliance between the army and the Brothers against the people.

The revolutionary that began on 25 January has not yet ended. The new masters of Egypt still have to contend with the fact that one dictator was toppled, and that their governments also can be. Next time the Egyptian people must clean out the entire system, rooting out the capitalists, the generals and the reactionaries, in order to secure their real liberation.

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