

Egypt: The counter revolution starts to bite

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The latest communiqués from the Egyptian military government shows the counter revolutionary nature of the regime still clinging onto power, argues Dave Stockton

Sunday Feb 13: According to Reuters the Egyptian Higher Military Council, which has taken over the presidential powers of Hosni Mubarak, is expected to ban strikes and mass meetings by trade unions and professional workers associations. This attack clearly shows the class nature of the new regime, and the fear that the ruling class has of working class resistance. Resisting and defeating this counterrevolutionary attack is vital to all the gains the masses fought for over the last 18 days.

Military communiqué number 4 dissolved the parliament, whose rigged elections were condemned worldwide, and suspended the dictatorial constitution. This has been widely welcomed on the streets. But military communiqué number 5 will in effect be an antistrike decree that order all Egyptians to return to work. This will come a shock to those with illusions that ?the army is with the people.? It indicates that the six-month transition phase the HMC envisages will not be democratic if it gets its way.

Egypt's Prime Minister Ahmed Shafiq has also announced that he and his cabinet (appointed by Mubarak before he stepped down) are still in power. He had the same message as the military. "The first priority for this government is to restore security and to facilitate daily life for its citizens," he said. Not in any of these communiqués was the repeal of emergency laws".

Field Marshal Mohamed Hussein Tantawi, head of the Military Council stressed the need for an immediate return to normality and discussed "the speedy return of the police to duty" with Interior Minister Mahmoud Wagdy.

In fact the generals ? who were an integral part of the Mubarak dictatorship - are terrified by the entry of Egypt?s organized workers onto the battlefield. As in Tunisia, it was the growing reality of a general strike in the last three days that finally pushed the high command into dumping Mubarak. Now they hope to use the undeserved credibility they have gained by this action to attack the workers and youth who forced them to do it.

In fact a wave of workers action is already underway not just around political slogans but also demands which meet for their urgent needs ? higher wages, jobs for the unemployed and union rights of workers. Widespread is the call for the removal of their dictatorial and corrupt managements.

Public Transport workers are staging protests in el-Gabal el-Ahmar. The contract workers at Helwan Steel Mills are also protesting demanding equal pay and permanent contracts Railway technicians are bring train services to a halt. At the el-Hawamdiya Sugar Refinery thousands are protesting. Oil workers are threatening to strike on Monday demanding higher wages, the sacking of the minister responsible and the halting of gas exports to Israel.

On the same as day the last two military communiqués some 2000 employees of the National Bank of Egypt- the country's biggest bank - gathered at the entrance of its giant headquarters. Not far off in front of

the Banque Misr, Egypt's second largest bank, hundreds also gathered, many waving a printed list of demands, which started with the sacking of the chief executives.

The Cairo Public Transportation workers who have declared an independent union, issued a statement has also called for abolishing the emergency law, removing NDP from the state institutions, dissolving the parliament, drafting new constitution, forming a national unity government and setting a national minimum wage of LE1200 and prosecuting corrupt officials

The liberal politicians and activists from more middle class groups are urging workers to return to work so that negotiations on transition can begin. No course of action would be more fatal for the as yet far from complete democratic revolution. Firstly if the pressure of the working class is eased the military will slow or stop the reforms ? not one of which has been implemented.

It should not be forgotten is all the understandable euphoria over the old dictator's departure (it seems he may have fled to Germany for medical treatment?) that power remains in the hands of the military where it has been for nearly 50 years. These men are used to ruling and will not give it up without being forced to do so by losing control over the apparatus of repression

What freedoms Egyptians had they have won on the streets. Secondly the masses of workers- not just industrial transport and white collar workers but tens of millions of the unorganised, part-time, and unemployed too ? need to use the freedom that has been won, expand and extend it to win wage increases, union rights, a decent minimum wage for all

This is what bourgeois liberals like Mohamed ElBaradei and conservatives like the Muslim Brotherhood (who supported Mubarak against the workers in the strike waves from 2007-2010) want to avoid at all costs.

However the young student campaigners for democracy, the young worker and unemployed who fought together on the barricades against the police and the Mubarak thugs will not be fooled into leaving their most certain and valuable supporters - the workers in the lurch.

The ongoing workers strikes must be generalised; turned into a general strike which must demand the right to strike and join free trade unions, the raising of the minimum wage to the level the independent unions demand, the state of emergency must be lifted at once, all political prisoners released, the media totally freed, and the Mubarak's old cabinet forced to resign.

Moreover it is clear that as long as Tantawi and the Military Council are in power the masses have merely exchanged one dictator for another collective dictator. Their control over the rank and file soldiers must be broken by agitation in the streets, in the barracks, in working class soldiers own families, urging them - not only to not fire on the workers and the demonstrators if commanded - but to create their own democratic organisations, soldiers committees or trades union, to win the right to elect their own officers and purge all those involved in the crimes and corruption of the old regime. The constitution must not be redrafted by a military appointed commission of ?experts? but openly before the whole nation by a freely elected and sovereign constituent assembly. It must be one which the Egyptian masses ? the workers and the peasants in the factories and the villages, the women - put forward their demands not just for democratic freedoms but for social freedoms, freedom from exploitation and oppression.

They must be able to demand for an Egyptian economy which meets their basic need, as well as the democratic lawyers and intellectuals. This must be one based on social ownership and democratic workers and peasants control not one open to the US and EU multinationals and banks or the property of Egyptian or Saudi millionaires. The revolution is not over ? indeed it is only just beginning. It must march on ? via the full achievement of democratic freedoms ? to workers power and socialism.

But the first step along this road ? right now- is to meet and defeat the attack of the counterrevolution. This can only be done by a general strike and mass mobilisations which can go on to drive Tantawi and the generals from power. To organise the strike and self defence workers councils and a militia will be needed. Only after victory for these forces will a democratic transition be possible.

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