

# Egypt: Counterrevolution consolidated ?

Tobias Hansen, Gruppe Arbeitermacht, Berlin Wed, 05/02/2014 - 08:51

Tobias Hansen, Gruppe Arbeitermacht, Berlin

Three years after the fall of Mubarak, even the bourgeois media are asking whether anything has really changed in Egypt, or whether the current military interim government is trying to bring about a return to the old conditions.

The latest step towards the "restoration" of military rule was the constitutional referendum of 15-16 January, which was called by the current civilian government under Adli Mansur. The military's election campaign made sure that, reportedly, 95% of the votes cast were in favour of the new constitution.

The military's posters showed the army chief, General Sisi, with the slogan "The people have given you the order. Answer! The homeland is bleeding!" Under this motto, the military forced through a referendum that will secure, and extend, the rights of the military. For example, it gives Sisi, the Acting Chief of Army Staff, the option of standing in the presidential elections. Under the new Constitution, the privileges of the military will be strengthened, the media will be brought into line and criticising the transitional government will be synonymous with "contact with terrorists". The control of the military over large parts of the economy will remain unchanged.

Regarding the turnout, there are conflicting messages. Observers think that it varied between 30-55 percent. The military's claim of an overall 55 percent is certainly exaggerated. The banned Muslim Brotherhood, as well as the not yet banned Salafists, called for a boycott of the referendum. In clashes between the police and the army and the protesters, nine people died during the vote, nearly 500 were arrested.

General Sisi is expected to stand in the next presidential and parliamentary elections in June 2014 and he is likely to win under present circumstances. That would give the military "democratic" legitimacy to take power again.

The army presents itself as the guarantor of "order and security". Neither the Muslim Brotherhood nor the liberals around El Baradei were able to stabilise the situation after the fall of Mubarak. Both failed to establish themselves as champions of the interests of the Egyptian bourgeoisie and imperialism, in spite of their pro-capitalist politics and their subordination to the requirements of the IMF and other international agencies. In particular this was because they were unable to integrate the masses mobilised by the revolution into a new "democratic" order.

Each turn of the political situation, revealed the lack of social support for the "liberal" faction of the Egyptian capitalist class, which is itself anything but democratic. While they wanted to play the role of "leader" of the movement, they were actually nothing more than a mouthpiece for U.S. imperialism and more or less useful idiots for the military.

Of course, it was not only in response to the most reactionary dictatorial and anti-worker aims of the

Muslim Brotherhood, their attacks on religious minorities and the rights of women, that they failed. They were also unable to stop the further sharp deterioration in living conditions, mass unemployment and price increases that resulted from the crisis and led to a massive increase of democratic and trade union protests in the first half of 2013.

It was the democratic youth and the workers on the streets who were the active driving force of the movement opposing both the establishment of the poorly veiled dictatorship of the Muslim Brotherhood and the reimposition of military rule. However, at no stage in the movement did they have their own political forces or a programme for the reorganisation of the country, independent of the bourgeois and petty-bourgeois parties. Their own "vision" remained within the framework of the bourgeois order.

So, because of the lack of a mass political alternative and a certain exhaustion, the military were able to present themselves as a force for "order", apparently standing above all factions. It was not only the Western media who transformed the generals' coup into the "last defence against Islamism", large parts of the Egyptian left also talked of it positively, allowing themselves the illusion that the re-establishment of military rule was impossible because of the level of mobilisation of the masses.

The workers and the youth are now paying a bitter price for this deception and self-deception. For months now, a state of emergency and curfews has reigned in Egypt. The military have used the time to ban, imprison and persecute the Muslim Brotherhood. This was a very vivid demonstration of what the military thinks of democratically elected governments and how they deal with them when they no longer suit their purpose.

## Anniversary

On January 25, the third anniversary of the uprising against Mubarak, there were protests and militant clashes in Cairo and other major cities. According to various reports, up to 50 people were killed and about 250 were injured. Police and elements of the military came down massively on the supporters of the Muslim Brotherhood, while organising and protecting their own rallies for General Sisi. Tahrir Square, since 2011 a symbol of the protests, was kept free for Sisi's supporters as they celebrated the military's return to power. Thus it was that the military celebrated at the very place where, three years before, the army had brought to an end the rule of Mubarak and the control of the generals over the armed forces.

Three years ago, the masses on Tahrir Square fraternised with the soldiers, now the military, with the support of the so-called liberals, are leading the battle against the other bourgeois faction, the Muslim Brotherhood. The appointment of General Sisi as Field Marshal, on January 27, sums up the new situation; the military feels safe in its victory over the Muslim Brotherhood and over the revolution itself.

## What now?

The rise of the counter-revolution and its momentary success, however, does not constitute the end of the Arab Spring or the Egyptian Revolution.

In contrast to January and February 2011, when the High Command no longer had full control and the troops and soldiers in Tahrir Square allied with the protesters, they are now able to grab back the power. Now the military will try again to function as the "ideal collective government", it will stir up nationalism, discipline society and dismantle democratic rights.

However, while their rule may look very secure, it is not. Just as was once the case with Mubarak, they also will not be able to solve the social problems, in particular, they will fail to offer any future prospects to

young people. The new military junta will try to secure the lion's share of the profits. They will try to incite religious conflict to divide the masses. However, the Egyptian working class and the youth have made an important historical experience: they saw the police state of Mubarak collapse and felt the power that was generated by their revolution.

As in other countries in the region, the question arises, where and when the next revolutionary wave will form, and what political conclusions will be drawn from those first revolts. In Syria, there is an open civil war, in Libya and Yemen a partly hidden one. In Tunisia, one transitional government after another has collapsed. The uprisings, and thus the Arab Spring, are not over, they are entering a new phase of development.

The impasse in which the revolutionary movements find themselves, and the defeats they have suffered are, above all, a result of the fact that the working class has not been an independent, let alone a leading, political force and the movements were always guided by this or that wing of the (small) middle class. If the revolution is to go forward, that must change. This means that workers and their organisations, especially the trades unions, must be made into effective means of struggle and revolution. They must combine with the workplace and urban rank and file structures that organise protest and resistance.

The re-establishment of military rule in Egypt means that tactics such as demonstrations or the occupation of squares have little chance of success, as the desperate actions of the Muslim Brothers are now showing. Instead of that, the focus must now be on strikes, up to the general strike. A common candidacy of left forces in the upcoming elections could also be an intermediate step in the assembling of forces.

However, all these activities must be linked to the building of workers' parties representing their class interests in alliance with the peasants and youth, neither a union nor rank and file organisation can take over that role and be effective on a general political and state level.

---

**Source URL:** <https://fifthinternational.org/content/egypt-counterrevolution-consolidated>