

Egypt: despite the constitution fraud, Morsi can still be stopped

Dave Stockton Thu, 03/01/2013 - 18:49

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President Mohammed Morsi's December referendum victory for a constitution he rushed through a puppet Constituent Assembly does not have a shred of democratic legitimacy.

Results show that, out of a total of 51.3 million registered voters, only 17 million (32 per cent) actually voted. Of these, 6.5 million, about 36 per cent, voted "no". Taken overall, that means that only 10.5 million Egyptians, approximately 20 percent of the population, actually voted for the constitution. Moreover, there were majorities against the constitution in the important provinces of Cairo, plus Monufia and Gharbiya in the Nile Delta, including the working class stronghold of Mahalla El-Kubra.

Morsi certainly plans to press ahead on the basis of this "victory", calling parliamentary elections in two months' time in the expectation of a Muslim Brotherhood and Salafist majority. However, the referendum could prove to be a Pyrrhic victory for Morsi if the working class knows how to activate those four fifths of population who do not trust him, making them a majority actively supporting his ousting. This means a struggle in the workplaces, on the streets and at the ballot boxes, too. It is now vital to drive the Islamists from power before they complete a counterrevolution which will wreck all the hopes of 2011.

There is another weakness in Morsi's position, apart from his sham mandate; in the coming months he will be obliged to inflict savage austerity and massive privatisations on the working population as the price of the \$4.8 billion loan he is seeking from the International Monetary Fund. The IMF is also demanding cuts in corporate taxation and an agrarian (counter) revolution. On 19 December, under pressure from the mass mobilisations against his constitution, Morsi delayed acceptance of the IMF's terms but, without this loan, Egyptian capitalism faces a tremendous crisis.

The country's budget deficit increased to \$13 billion during the first five months of the 2012/13 fiscal year, whilst foreign reserves have dwindled by more than half since January 2011. The central bank has already used some \$20 billion to prop up the Egyptian pound. Without massive loans from Qatar and Turkey he would not have got thus far. Standard & Poor's has just cut Egypt's bond rating to B-, thus making it even more expensive to borrow. All this has undermined the state's continued ability to import essential food and petroleum products.

Morsi will undoubtedly pull all the strings he can to postpone the final reckoning before the parliamentary elections. But, assuming he wins a majority, massive subsidy cuts and price hikes are inevitable. Right across the Arab world, such measures light the fuse for mass protests.

Morsi's main strength now is his secret deal with the army high command, by which they are allowed to continue their looting of a huge segment of the economy and are guaranteed the Ministry of Defence in any cabinet. He can also rely on the support of the US imperialists in return for his services in stabilising

the situation in Gaza last year. Both of these forces will support his dictatorial actions and repression ? so long as they are aimed at the working class and the democratic youth.

To combat Morsi will mean going beyond occupying squares ? a necessary but, at critical moments, far from sufficient tactic. The key task is to mobilise the working class and the urban and rural poor. It was the threat, indeed the beginning, of a general strike in 2011 that brought down Mubarak, not just the occupation of the squares. But democratic slogans alone will not be enough to mobilise the working class in an all-out general strike. This requires the revolutionary groups, the independent unions and the youth organisations to launch powerful agitation against Morsi's deal with the IMF and the economic and social suffering this will bring. This struggle can drive a wedge into Morsi and the Salafists' remaining base amongst workers, peasants and urban poor.

Two other fronts are also crucial in the campaign to resist Morsi. One is against his takeover of the official unions, a struggle already launched by the independent unions and some within the official unions, too. Related to this is the fight against new anti-strike laws and restrictions announced at the time of Morsi's constitutional coup.

The other is defence of the rights and social position of women; the Islamist agenda, enshrined in the new constitution, represents a serious threat to women and mobilising them to deny a parliamentary majority to the Brotherhood and the Salafists is an equal priority.

In two months, Morsi hopes to underpin his power with an Islamist majority in parliament. At the same time, for all its democratic talk, the liberal opposition in the National Salvation Front will support any deal he does with the IMF and any restrictions he puts on the militant unions.

Therefore, it is an urgent task to create a political representation for the working class. How can this be done? By creating a workers' party which can unite both the revolutionary socialist left and the new independent unions on an action programme of vital measures which constitute the programme for a workers' government. The aim is, as a minimum, to win some seats for real tribunes of the workers and peasants in the new parliament and for them to "speak out of the window", that is, to the mass demonstrations and picket lines as well as in the chamber.

Such a party must have an international perspective of solidarity with the Palestinians and with the revolutions across the Arab world. It must be anti-imperialist not only in the sense of opposing US and Zionist domination and division of the region, but also of fighting the IMF's dictates and the opening up of the country to big corporations from the USA, the EU or China. It must put forward a bold, anticapitalist and socialist programme for Egypt and the whole region: a Socialist United States of the Middle East.

The future of the entire ?Arab Spring? ? its defence against the gathering forces of internal and external counterrevolution will depend centrally on events in Egypt in the coming year. A second revolution is, as many young demonstrators say, a necessity. But it must be a workers' revolution- a socialist revolution.

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