



Egypt: the revolution confronts the Junta

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The Egyptian revolution is fighting back against the military government, as fierce battles rage again in Tahrir square

The Egyptian revolution has given notice to the world that it is still alive and fighting. Moreover it is fighting the same enemy - the military dictatorship ? which did not perish in February, but Hydra-like replaced its head. It is plain for anyone who might have doubted it that a ?revolution? necessitates the forcible wrenching of the power to repress the people from the hands of the generals and the military élite.

Over the weekend of 19/20 November ? when a few hundred demonstrators were brutally attacked by riot police after they tried to set up camp in Tahrir Square after Friday Prayers, thousands more protesters arrived and eventually retook and occupied Tahrir Square against the full might of the police. The police then counterattacked driving demonstrators from the square, but again they returned in tens of thousands.

At least thirteen people have been killed so far and hundreds injured in the fighting; with stones and Molotov cocktails used by demonstrators and rubber bullets, buckshot and live rounds by the police. Many youth were hospitalised with head or severe eye injuries.

Similar events took place in Suez, Alexandria, in the industrial centres of Mansoura and Mahalla al Kubra in the delta, and in the south of the country. Egyptian newspapers are already calling it ?the second revolution.? " One protester Ahmed was quoted by AFP; ?we have a single demand: The Marshal must step down and be replaced by a civilian council.??

He was referring to Field Marshall Hussein Tantawi head of the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF). Egypt's supposed reformist Prime Minister Essam Sharraf and his civilian cabinet have proved over the past months to be a mere puppet show: the hands that pulled their strings hardly attempted to stay out of view.

The repressive actions of the military over the past weeks and their blatant attempts to constitutionally entrench their power have reunited the mass forces that made up the February revolution. The youth on the streets include many young Islamists as well as the liberal and socialist left. Overnight on 20/21 ever fiercer attempts were made by paramilitary, joined by the army, to clear the square

At the beginning of November the government released draft proposals for the new constitution, which would guarantee a supervisory role for the military whatever the outcome of elections; that the armed forces and its budget would be completely exempted from civilian control.

This is what sparked protests not only from the labour movement and the left but from the Muslim Brotherhood (MB), alienated by the sudden prospect of a fully blown counter-revolution which might rob them of the influence and power they hope to win by elections.

The reaction has been particularly strong from the Islamist youth movements ? a number of which have been expelled from the MB during the pre-election process for daring to demand more youth candidates on the lists. This radicalization of the Islamist youth around democratic slogans is an important development which the left need to take full advantage of, not by adapting to their backward religious-political ideas but by winning them to united front in

defence of democratic rights for all (for women, for Christians) and for the interest of workers and peasants.

It is now plain to millions that the February revolution did not in fact overthrow the military dictatorship but simply pressured the generals to replace its head- Hosni Mubarak and his family clique. The SCAF under Tantawi retained the real reins of power.

The limited expansion of democratic freedoms in Egypt have existed solely due to repeated waves of mass mobilisations and workers strikes which greeted every attempt to shut them down. However even this freedom has come at a high price. More than 12,000 civilians have been dragged before military tribunals since the fall of Mubarak - more that the total who faced such tribunals during Mubarak's 30-year dictatorship. Many are still languishing in prison camps. The call for an end to the tribunals and release of the prisoners has been a constant campaign for many months.

A sinister development is the fomenting of religious hatred against Egypt's Coptic Christian community. There are good reasons to believe the military ? not just extreme fanatical Salafists ? are behind this.

On 9 October, during a mass demonstration by Copts against the burning of a church in Upper Egypt, security forces using armoured personnel carriers crushed several people to death underneath their massive wheels, live bullets were used. In the end 25 demonstrators were dead and 300 injured. State-run television also organized a pogrom in support claiming that ?The army is under attack by Copts.? As a result gangs from nearby working-class districts armed themselves with clubs and knives and participated in beating up and even killing protesters.

Voting in a ridiculously complicated parliamentary election system is due to begin on 28 November, with a huge number of parties, and will take three months to complete. Meanwhile the SCAF refuses to say when it will step down, despite having repeatedly promised that it would. A mysterious well-funded political movement has also appeared calling on Tantawi to run for president in 2013.

The concerted and brutal attempt by the military to abort the democratic revolutionary process and return to ?guided democracy? under the field marshal's baton can badly misfire if the masses come onto the streets. In these conditions the left and the workers movement need to develop the mobilizations of tens of thousands of courageous youth into a mass movement of millions to oust Tantawi and the SCAF.

Working class action needed

This necessitates the working class unleashing an all out general strike. The 1.4 million strong Egyptian Federation of Independent Trade Unions has called on workers to join the protests in Tahrir Square. But many workers are still in the official unions or none so the union and democracy activists need to go to every workplace, calling on workers to hold mass meetings, vote to strike and join the demonstrations and elect factory councils,

Clearly this is just what the generals fear. A member of SCAF, General Mohsen el-Fangari, was interviewed on the popular al-Hayat TV channel, "What is the point of this strike, of the million marches? ? The aim of what is going on is to shake the backbone of the state, which is the armed forces."

Yes indeed: the aim must be to break the backbone of the dictatorship before it can break the back of the revolution. This can only be done by winning over the rank and file soldiers so that, alongside the workers and peasants, they can democratically share in shaping a new Egypt and helping the spread of the revolution to the many remaining dictatorships.

The ?second revolution? must aim for a thoroughgoing democratic clear out ? of not only the Field Marshall and his generals, but for the election of all officers by rank and file soldiers, for the election of recallable delegates to a sovereign Constituent Assembly, for satisfying the most burning economic and social needs of the working population.

To mobilize and sustain a general strike, one growing into a mass popular insurrection also requires the creation of the type of organization that has historically proved capable of this? workers?, soldiers and farmers councils. It requires a

mass workers and youth self-defence organisation.

All these demands need to be popularised and codified into an action programme around which a revolutionary party can be assembled from the militants of the democracy movement and the trade unions.

Events unfolding in Cairo show that a democratic revolution that does not destroy the main bastion of dictatorship ? the military high command and the police repressive forces, that does not arm the people and address the demands of the workers, the peasants the poor is not only unfinished but runs the deadly danger of counterrevolution. Indeed only when the great mass of ordinary Egyptians experience the revolution as the road to a solution to their daily social, economic as well as political needs will the revolution be truly unstoppable. The revolutionary vanguard forces have to reflect this in a programme for making the revolution permanent until power is in the hands of the workers and poor. Only then will the revolution be safe from the military-dictatorial counterrevolution that has reared its head in the last few weeks.

Internationally it is vital that protests against the Army repression be launched, in solidarity with the brave demonstrators in Egypt whose struggle in February inspired the many occupy movements around the world. A further and decisive victory for the Egyptian revolution will give a mighty impulse to the revolution against global capitalism and its vicious austerity drive.

Long live international solidarity

Victory to the Egyptian Revolution

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