

Revolution in Sudan

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After months of revolutionary upheaval and the siege of the military and presidential headquarters in Khartoum, hundreds of thousands celebrated the arrest of the brutal dictator Omar Hassan Ahmad al-Bashir. The arrest of a man who has ruled Sudan with an iron fist since seizing power in a coup in 1989, is certainly a cause for relief and celebration for millions.

When he came to power he ended four years of relative democratic freedoms after a revolution in 1985 and suppressed political parties and independent trade unions and introduced a repressive ?Islamic? constitution. In his thirty years in power, he drowned a whole country in war and misery. Between them, the secret services, the police and prison guards killed thousands and many more were humiliated, tortured and terrorised by his regime.

It was the defence minister, Ahmad Awad Ibn Auf, who announced the end of al-Bashir?s rule on national TV. However, he also announced that a military council intends to assume political power in the country for the next two years. Only then will there be new elections. In the meantime, the arch-reactionary constitution will be suspended but the military council will impose a state of emergency for three months, with a curfew every evening from 10 pm.

This announcement, however, was clearly not the result of any ?democratic? conversion by the high command that served al-Bashir for decades. By arresting the dictator they want to disguise themselves as friends of the people in order to regain control and then smother the revolution, which has mobilised millions of workers, peasants, the urban poor and middle classes.

Revolutionary situation

For four months, Sudan has been in the midst of a profound revolutionary situation. Vast crowds have engaged in massive demonstrations every Friday calling first for the resignation of Omar al-Bashir, then for the downfall of the entire National Congress Party, NCP, regime.

The immediate trigger was the announcement of increases in the price of bread and gasoline. The background is rampant unemployment, soaring inflation, and crippling food and fuel shortages. Some 80 per cent of the population lives on less than US\$1 per day and nearly 2.5 million children are suffering from severe malnutrition.

The secession of South Sudan in 2011 deprived the country of three-quarters of its oil revenues and triggered a prolonged economic crisis. Yet the regime continued to spend an estimated 70-80 per cent of remaining revenues on internal security forces and the military. The regime is totally corrupt, and the masses know it.

Though food and fuel shortages spurred the movement, the demonstrators were soon raising political

slogans - 'Freedom, Peace, and Justice!' and 'Revolution is the People's Choice!'

Young people and women have been at the heart of the movement, with a campaign called 'No To Women's Oppression' playing a leading role. The centrality of women in the protests has come to be symbolised by the figure of Alaa Salah, a woman who recited a poem in praise of the movement from the top of a car during a sit-in at the military HQ, interjecting between its lines the cry 'thowra!'- revolution!

The protesters are demanding a complete break with the culturally and educationally stifling Islamist regime, that is particularly harsh on women, and are very wary of any simple replacement of al-Bashir with a military council.

The uprising started in cities to the north of the capital, Khartoum, in places like Atbara, a railway manufacturing centre and the cradle of Sudanese trade unionism. The street protests on Fridays were swelled by occupations of universities and schools, and strikes by public and private sector workers, including those at Port Sudan on the Red Sea. The Sudanese labour movement's strong tradition of workers' organization was demonstrated in nationwide strikes on March 5 and 13.

The liberal opposition and the role of the Communist Party

The rallies have been organised by the Alliance for Freedom and Change, which includes professional associations, trade unions, and opposition parties; meetings of the coordinating body have been held at the headquarters of the Sudanese Communist Party, SCP, which seeks to, 'build the broadest possible alliance of political parties, armed groups, mass democratic organisations, professional unions, workers' and peasants' movements, as well as students' and women's unions'.

The SCP, founded in 1946, was a powerful force in the country and in the army up until its participation in the failed 1971 coup, which ended with the victory of general Jafaar am-Nimeiry and the execution of the SCP's principal leaders. Underground for many years and with the trade unions it influenced disbanded, the party has more recently re-emerged, though a number of its leaders including 16 of its central committee members are still in jail.

It must be expected that the SCP, which has had a continuously Stalinist past, will adopt the strategy of the People's Front, that is, pushing for a government which combines representatives of both the possessing and the exploited classes. This would be, as it always has been, a recipe for disaster and the working class and the poor being robbed of the fruits of their revolutionary struggle.

The critical question, as in any profoundly revolutionary upheaval, is whether the working class plays an independent role in it. Only if the workers take the leading role that their place in production enables them to, can the goals of democracy be assured, let alone the social needs of the workers, peasants and the poor be met.

The Professional Association has played a prominent role as spokesperson for the movement. It has, for example, repeatedly called for the army high command to intervene to remove al-Bashir, a wish that has now been granted. Thus far, its aspirations are admirably clear as to the need for a radical demolition of the old regime. Their statement issued on April 11 states:

'We assert that the people of Sudan will not accept anything less than a civil transitional authority composed of a patriotic group of experts who were not involved with the tyrannical regime. The leadership of our people's armed forces ought to hand over power to the people, according to what was expressed in the declaration of freedom and change.'

Even a 'government of patriotic experts', however, whatever its members' democratic aspirations, will undoubtedly find itself obliged to guard the interests of big capital and foreign imperialism for as long as the machinery of repression, standing above the popular masses and not answerable to them, exists and monopolises real power.

Sudanese revolutionaries will doubtless be thinking of the fate of the Arab Spring of 2011 in Egypt, Syria, Yemen, and Libya where, despite the courage of the young revolutionaries, their movements were crushed by a brutal return of the old regime. As long as the army high command, the Islamist parties, and the state bureaucracy remain intact, even if their present leaders step down or step aside, the danger of counterrevolution will remain. The only answer is a revolution that goes all the way, breaks up the repressive power of the state, takes control of the economy from the corrupt capitalist class and puts power in the hands of working people.

Predictably, the regime, responded to the developing movement with repression, including live fire from the special security forces and the militias of the Islamist movement, in which anything between 30 and 60 protesters have been killed. The army's chief of staff, Kamal Abdelmarouf, warned in January: "We will not allow the Sudanese state to collapse or fall into chaos."

Special courts have already sentenced hundreds to harsh sentences, including nine women to twenty lashes each. Opposition newspapers have been prevented from publishing since January. The Sudanese Journalists' Network reports around 90 of their journalists have been arrested. A one-year state of emergency was declared on February 22.

Willow Berridge, the author of *Civil Uprisings in Modern Sudan* (2015), has written:

'Al-Bashir's regime clearly learnt from the mistakes of its predecessors. It has created a much stronger National Intelligence Security Services, NISS, as well as a host of other parallel security organisations and armed militias that it uses to police Khartoum instead of the regular army. This set up, combined with various commanders' mutual fears of being held to account for war crimes if the regime falls, means an army intervention will not occur easily as in 1964 or 1985. This is one reason the current uprising has already lasted longer than its precedents.'

So far the repression has neither ended nor intimidated the movement, indeed it has escalated it. Thousands of protesters, defying the police tear gas, rallied outside the army's headquarters in the capital on April 6 calling on the soldiers and the high command to support their demands that al-Bashir resign. The huge complex also houses Bashir's official residence and the defence ministry. They soon won the open sympathy of sections of junior officers, NCOs and the rank and file, who defended the demonstrators against attacks by the regime's Islamist militias and NISS thugs. On the same day, a statement was issued by a shadowy grouping called "The Honourable of the Armed Forces" threatening that the army rank and file and junior officers would go over to the movement if the army high command did not openly support their demands.

What Now?

The future advance of the movement depends on two things. Firstly, the workers must answer any crackdown, any attempt to install a new military regime, with an all-out and indefinite general strike; secondly, the soldiers, naval ratings and air force personnel must be won to actually joining the masses on the streets, bringing their arms with them. The masses should remember the deception practiced by the high command of the Egyptian armed forces that deposed Mubarak and claimed to side with the people, only to install a vicious counter-revolutionary dictatorship within a year.

It is quite obvious, that the Sudanese army intends to learn from its Egyptian counterpart in order to get the revolution under its control. At the moment, it is unclear who will participate in the 'military council' and what its policy towards the opposition will be. One tactic could be the involvement of prominent bourgeois or even trade union or reformist leaders under firm military control. Such a government would be a fatal trap for the mass movement, a means to get it off the streets and deprive it of the fruits of its struggle by securing the continued rule of the military and the economic elite of the country.

The response of the revolutionary movement must be to reject such a brazen deception, to continue to work to win the rank and file soldiers, police etc., to the side of the revolution and to demand, instead of a military council, a provisional government based on, and answerable to, its own mass forces organised in workers', soldiers' and peasants' councils. Only such forces can organise and ensure the democratic accountability of a sovereign constituent assembly.

Real security for the people will only be assured if the rank and file of the armed forces join the workers, the students, the youth in electing revolutionary councils of delegates. Their first priority should be to ensure that the army high command do not resort either to repression or to installing a duplicate of the old regime, but these councils themselves should go on to create a republic based on their own power that can address the urgent needs of the poor in city and countryside at the expense of the rich and corrupt élite, the big employers etc. In short, the democratic revolution must be transformed by the action of the working class, the women, the youth, and all the exploited and oppressed in city and countryside, into a social revolution.

The International Response

Mohamed Hassan, a Sudanese MP from the bourgeois Popular Congress Party, PCP, has expressed disappointment at the silence of Western leaders on the movement. 'We expected more support, but we recognise that international politics is guided by its own interests' he said. Indeed!

Al-Bashir had the support of Egypt's dictator, President Abdel Fatah al-Sisi (friend and ally of Donald Trump) who stated in January: 'Egypt fully supports the security and stability of Sudan, which is integral to Egypt's national security.' And integral not only to Egypt's 'security' be it said. Mohammad Bin Salman, the murderous Saudi Crown Prince, has paid, it is reported, a cool US\$2.2bn for 10,000 Sudanese troops to join his horrific war in Yemen, which, despite Congressional votes to end support for it, is quietly backed by Donald Trump and by Benjamin Netanyahu, too.

Nor should it be forgotten that the European Union's plans to stem refugees from crossing the Mediterranean is called the 'Khartoum Process' and the EU has a regional operations centre in the Sudanese capital to coordinate its enterprise. Perhaps these facts account for the remarkable silence of the Western governments and media on the popular uprising in Sudan. We can also add Vladimir Putin to the imperialist thieves' kitchen backing the Sudanese repression. There are credible reports that the Russian 'defence contractor' Wagner, an outfit close to the Kremlin, is helping the Sudanese authorities control the streets.

For all these reasons, socialists and trade unionists and the women's and youth movements around the world should raise their voices loudly in support of the working people and youth of Sudan and demand their governments stop supporting a military regime against the people. With Algeria still in revolutionary turmoil, a vital task will be to spread the uprising into one against all the dictatorial regimes in the Arab world, and in sub-Saharan Africa, too.

Solidarity with the Sudanese revolution!

No to a military take over in the shape of the ?military council?! No to the state of emergency and curfew!

For a democratic all-civilian provisional government, not under the tutelage of the generals!

Form workers', soldiers' and peasants' councils!

For a sovereign constituent assembly under the protection and control of the mass organisations!

For a workers' and peasants' government in Sudan, based on workers' councils!

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