



The revolutionary wave in the Middle East and North Africa

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The revolutions and mass struggles that have gripped the Middle East and North Africa will change history - every dictator now trembles in fear at the possibility of a popular uprising against their rule. In the West the imperialist powers look on nervously as loyal regimes come under sustained protest which threatens to topple crucial allies. This resolution, adopted by the International Executive Committee of the League for the Fifth International outlines the perspectives for the revolutionary movement and the importance of the fight for working class power.

A Historic Wave of Peoples Revolutions

The year 2011 is already being compared to 1989 as a year of revolutions, a 'mad year' as reactionaries called 1848, when uprisings in one country rapidly sparked explosions in many others. Around the globe, tyrants are trembling. From Saudi Arabia to North Korea, from China to Zimbabwe, they have launched preventative actions against the threat of 'days of rage' floated on social media networks. These events are echoed by mass protests against historic attacks on workers gains in the imperialist heartlands- in Europe and in the USA Workers in Cairo and in Madison (Wisconsin) have chanted their solidarity with one another. Clearly we are in a period of historic crisis for the capitalist system within which the Arab revolutions are occupying a vanguard role. The emergence of new independent workers movements there shows the potential for the democratic revolutions to develop into social ones.

The events in North Africa and the Middle East are being likened to the collapse of the Stalinist regimes in Eastern Europe. The parallels are indeed very striking. The overthrow of Ben Ali in Tunisia immediately inspired Egyptian youth and trade unionists to launch a similar movement to get rid of Hosni Mubarak. The enormous size of the Egyptian mobilisations in turn provoked similar youth-led movements in Bahrain, Jordan, Algeria, Yemen, and a limited revival of the Green movement in Iran. Syria also saw huge demonstrations in major cities across the country.

It is not just the eyes workers and young people suffering under dictatorships across the world that are fixed on the revolutions. The rulers of the world, both politicians and captains of industry nervously get daily briefings from advisors and the secret service; they scan the newspapers for analyses. The London Economist Intelligence Unit has set up a 'revolution watch' which considers 17 countries at 'high risk' of political revolt, eleven of them in the Middle East/North Africa region. For the imperialists order and stability come before any kind of democracy. For the police and army flooded into the region from western companies.

The background to the historic nature of the Arab revolutions is crisis of the capitalist system which began in 2008 and from which most of the world has yet to emerge. The soaring food and fuel prices and declining real wages over the previous year were a major cause for the unrest in the Arab world and beyond. The three demands of the demonstrators in Tunisia and Egypt were bread, freedom and social justice. The first of these is critical as far as the impoverished masses are concerned. The unevenness and disequilibrium of the world economy have created a 'perfect storm' in the living conditions not just of the poor but of the workers and the lower middle class, exacerbating the global growth in social inequality. The perception of inequality and unfairness, of the corruption of élites, more than simple impoverishment, is a mighty impetus to revolution.

The events in Tunisia and Egypt are what Lenin called 'real people's revolutions' rather than military coups led by

progressive officers. In *State and Revolution*, Lenin describes them as occasions when; "the mass of the people, their majority, the very lowest social groups, crushed by oppression and exploitation, rose independently and stamped on the entire course of the revolution the imprint of their own demands, their attempt to build in their own way a new society in place of the old society that was being destroyed." By this standard, the revolutions in the Middle East, still far from over, are real people's revolutions. They were initiated by thousands of students and unemployed youth who, by their courage and tenacity, held the streets and squares against "normal" police repression and were then joined by the plebeian classes en masse - the workers and the urban poor.

This fulfilled the first of Lenin's conditions for a revolution "the masses should be unable and unwilling to go on living in the old way. Egypt, with over 80 million people and a large working class, huge shantytowns and a poor peasantry, has long been destined to be the crucible of revolution in the Arab world. For a third of a century it was held under a repressive pro-Western regime whose political and military elite were pensioners of the USA and formed with Israel the keystone of its domination and exploitation of the entire Middle East. The future of the unfinished revolution in Egypt is the future of liberation in the whole region, including that of the most cruelly oppressed people in the modern world, the Palestinians.

The Egyptian élite and their foreign imperialist backers, particularly the Obama administration, were deeply divided as to what to do. Should they resort to repression, which had worked many times before, or would this break the discipline of the army and win its rank and file over to the revolution thus disintegrating the whole bonapartist regime? Could they make democratic concessions in the hope of defusing the movement and preventing it from going on to challenge the power of the elite, the capitalist landlords and the military chiefs who had plundered their countries for decades? Thus, the second of Lenin's conditions was fulfilled; the ruling class was divided and could not go on ruling in the old way.

The outcome in Tunisia and Egypt is an as yet incomplete democratic transformation. Because the revolutions did not break up the repressive machinery "i.e. the army and its high command - only the dictator and his entourage, his party structure and the most obnoxious torturers of the secret police were removed or fled. The governments were simply re-staffed with more credible oppositional elements from the old elites. Both liberal figures of the opposition like Mohamed ElBaradei and conservative islamists such as the Muslim Brotherhood alike have gone along with these cosmetic changes to the old regime.

The new governments in Tunisia and Egypt represent more continuity than change, for instance they continue to seek to ban strikes and repress mass mobilisations. But the youth and the trade unionists continue to exert pressure. Meanwhile the revolutions continued in Libya, Bahrain, Yemen and now in Syria. The old regimes have resorted to bloody repression and it is plain that non-violent measures alone cannot be the strategy to overthrow them. But the youth and increasingly the workers and other impoverished classes of town and countryside have awakened to political life, have overcome the fear that atomised the masses for decades. The revolutionary people will not easily be returned to their lives or prison cells to suffer in silence.

The task now in the new phase of the revolution is to dispel the too generous illusions of the February "towards the army and its high command, to the capitalist oppositional parties both liberal and religious-conservative to develop the independent demands and mass action of the workers and the poor both to accomplish the revolutionary democratic demands and to address the material needs of the masses. Revolutionary organisations "workers and popular committees and councils, trade unions and workplace assemblies, but above all revolutionary parties will have to be built if the counter-revolution is to be defeated.

Last, but not least, the revolutions of 2011 are plainly of global significance. The comparison with 1989 is fully justified. Those revolutions destroyed the Eastern European Stalinist states and within two years the USSR itself. But because there was no political leadership in the working class to fight for genuine socialism capitalism was restored to the ex-degenerated workers states. It gave Washington two decades of overwhelming global hegemony. The revolutions of 2011 now have the potential to undermine the position of Israel, threaten western domination of the most vital region as far as oil supplies are concerned, be drawn into the sharpening rivalry between the old fat imperialist powers and the new lean and hungry ones. Despite inevitable cyclical recoveries and temporary restorations of political

equilibrium the Middle East is central to a new world disorder ? one pregnant with revolutions and possibilities for liberation.

The Counter-revolution strikes back

12. If January and February saw a seemingly relentless advance of the democratic uprisings, March and April have seen a counterattack by the dictators. Across the Arab countries - in Libya, Bahrain, Yemen Syria and Iran repressive regimes are waging a bloody civil war against the young fighters for democracy. For all their talk of democracy, human rights and humanitarian interventions the actions of the imperialist powers in Libya, whilst maintaining total silence on the harsh repression Bahrain and other parts of the Arabian peninsula loyal to the West, identifies them as a major force for counter-revolution.

This reminds us that revolution is never just an objective process which moves ever forward but a dialectic (conflict) of living social forces where defeats both tactical and strategic can and will occur. A number of contingent factors numbers of fighters, their, tactics, organisation, weapons determine the outcome, as well as courage and the will to win. For this reason after initial ?surprise? victories (comparable to the ?February Revolutions? of 1848 and 1917) a conscious discussion of strategy, tactics and organisation, becomes ever more vital to victory. That is why the revolutions of the 21st century, for all their unique features, would ignore at their peril the lessons of the revolutions of the 20th century and, indeed, of the 19th and 18th centuries, too.

Egypt and Tunisia inspired powerful mass revolutions in other Arab states but these have faced more sustained counter-revolutionary actions than Ben Ali or Mubarak were able to mount. Plainly the ?revolution has revolutionised the counter-revolution? as desperate dictators scramble to secure their rule, over the broken bodies of their people if necessary. The regimes are not only forewarned and forearmed but operate in conditions significantly different from Egypt and Tunisia.

In Algeria, Iran, Yemen, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and Syria, the rulers have shown little hesitation in massacring demonstrators. In Libya, a popular movement, which met with brutal repression, led to an uprising and the seizure of power in the east of the country. It has turned into a full-scale civil war. In Algeria Bouteflika?s military regime rests on a counter-revolutionary coup (1991) and ten year long bloody civil war with Islamist terrorists in which 200,000 people perished; thus democratic forces have not yet reached critical mass. Yet with 30 per cent unemployment amongst youth the regime would be unwise to assume it can?t happen here. In Syria, though the revolutionary insurgency was late in coming in April it has burst out with mass force. Bashar al-Assad combines empty promises of reform with bloody fusillades against demonstrators, Between 200 and 300 have died so far and tanks have battled rebels in Derraa.

The Libyan regime has not fallen so easily because it is an oil rentier state with a relatively small population still divided along tribal lines, where a huge proportion of the working class consists of foreign migrants. Because of its social structure, the decisive force of revolution in its immediate neighbours ? the unemployed youth and the working class ? constituted a less overwhelming force. Also the vast oil revenues allowed Gaddafi to maintain a more totalitarian regime, one based on nepotism and personal ties of loyalty, more than either Ben Ali or Mubarak. It is based not primarily on the army but on numerous special security battalions and tribal militias, more than willing to shoot down demonstrators and butcher civilian populations.

The outbreak of a full scale civil war in a vital oil producing state has triggered military action by the US, Britain and France in the name of the UN. Hypocritically they claimed that they were intervening solely in order to protect the civilian population. In fact, realising that neither their post-2003 ally Gaddafi nor the rebels in Benghazi could stabilise things for the western oil companies, France and Britain ? with Saudi support - pressed for a ?humanitarian intervention.? However both have now espoused ?regime change?, and British advisers are being sent to aid the rebels. Two US drones will also be deployed. However without more substantive US participation the aerial attacks are proving militarily ineffective in halting Gaddafi?s offensive. Thus there could be further so-called mission creep ? to an on-the-ground intervention. But the US is at present, unwilling to take on the occupation of another Arab-Muslim state. In addition UN Security Council members with a veto - Russia and China - and regional powers like Turkey, are

unwilling to back a full-scale occupation too.

What the fractious imperialist powers can agree on is that the popular uprising and its young fighters must be eventually suppressed and the ex-regime figures in the Benghazi leadership, fully incorporated into whatever solution they decide on. These could include a ceasefire, some form of temporary division, maybe leading to elections UN observers or even the stationing of NATO 'peace keepers.' The upshot would be the suppression of the democratic revolution in Libya. For this reason – as well from intransigent opposition to any increase in France and Britain's control over the country's oil wealth, revolutionaries must totally oppose the UN-Nato no fly zone and all other forms of imperialist intervention. However Gaddafi's resistance is motivated solely by the determination to crush the democratic uprising not by any genuine anti-imperialist defence of Libya. If he stopped his murderous attacks on his own people Nato would have no pretext for the air attacks.

Uneven and Combined development in the Revolution

The revolutionary developments are the result of decades of imperialist dominance and several attempts to divide and rule the region because of its crucial geo-strategic and economic role for today's world order. They show that – even begging the question of whether there is an Arab nation that has been artificially divided by imperialism and Zionism – there are profound common political and economic experiences as well as the Arabic language, which unites them. The latter viewpoint has been amplified by the web and the satellite TV.

But the revolutions have also highlighted the unevenness between the countries in the region. Some, like the rentier states of the Gulf Monarchies and Libya have regimes which are based on control of the main source of national income, the revenue from the oil industry. This allowed the incorporation of a significant proportion of relatively small populations and maintenance of a huge state apparatus. Meanwhile, the workforce for the oil fields and the service sector was composed of migrant labourers who were denied basic rights and could be deported at will. This allowed a rich ruling class to emerge living parasitically off a small, atomised working class.

This differs from the situations in the populous oil producing countries such as Iran and Iraq. These have large urban, working and middle classes as well as peasantries. Their rulers could not possibly reproduce the social structure of the petro-monarchies. In the 1970s they tried to escape total domination by imperialism via state capitalism and extremely repressive dictatorships – whether bourgeois nationalist (Ba'athist) or theocratic. As a result they became prime targets of the US attempt to install a 'new world order', the victims of blockades and even wars and occupation.

Egypt, Syria and Algeria fall into a different category. They are countries that tried to overcome imperialist domination via state capitalist regimes, state sponsored industrialisation and economic development. However, to a greater or lesser degree, they have moved towards closer collaboration with the West in the past decades and introduced neo-liberal reforms. Obviously, this is least the case with regard to Syria which is why the West still considers it as something of a rogue state.

What is important is that these countries, like Iran and Iraq, have developed sizeable working classes that have played an important role in political life and have tried to build up significant political and trade union movements. In these countries, the land question and the struggle for an agrarian revolution continues to be an important issue.

Despite this unevenness of economic and social development, there is a remarkable uniformity across the whole region in one respect; the impossibility of achieving balanced and sustained economic growth in the interests of the whole population within a world economy dominated by imperialism, has resulted in repressive authoritarian regimes in all these countries.

This is equally true of regimes that are, or have been, opposed to imperialism's control of the region and of pro-imperialist regimes themselves. Although the pro-imperialist regimes have ensured decades of relative stability, they also created a uniformity of conditions facing the masses throughout the region. Paradoxically, the combination of stability and unbalanced economic development also produced a new and powerful destabilising force; a rapidly

growing generation of educated but unemployed youth. In the aftermath of the global crisis, in the age of global communication and shared values of democratic rights and aspirations, this proved to be an explosive combination.

Imperialism: the dividers of the Middle East divided

The US, a major oil producer, has become more and more dependent on imports: these accounted for 50 per cent of oil consumption in 2000 and by 2020 the figure is projected to rise to 66 per cent. 25 per cent of the oil comes from the Middle East. In 1998, former CIA Graham E. Fuller stated:

"Democratization is not on the American agenda in the Middle East. The reason? Because Washington finds it more efficient to support a range of dictators across the Arab world as long as they conform to U.S. foreign policy needs. Oil is... the source of huge profits for energy corporations, construction firms, arms producers, as well as petrodollars recycled to US treasury, etc.?"

The Egyptian military regime performs a vital service for the USA and Israel, for which it is rewarded with \$1.5bn military aid per annum. At the beginning of the revolutionary situation, the overwhelming priorities for the USA, the European Union and Israel, were stability and order. But as the revolution gained in mass force and the determination of the Egyptian people did not diminish but grew stronger, the US administration, with the EU leaders following on behind, decided Mubarak had to go. His presence was clearly provoking a revolution which could go beyond the democratic question, threatening the entire power structure in Egypt.

It was not a love of the people or their right to demonstrate but fear of what would happen if the army were ordered to open fire on the people that led the US to pressure the army not to resort to serious bloodshed. Doubtless the army also received signals through its colonels and junior officers that such action would indeed threaten mutinies from troops who were already fraternising with the demonstrators. Once the army became unreliable, Mubarak turned to the violent thugs and street fighters that had been mobilised by his ruling party in previous elections. But they were not strong enough to clear out the thousands of people from Tahrir square and were beaten back. Once the regime lost the monopoly of force in Egyptian politics Mubarak's days were numbered.

The unfolding of the revolutions, however, also revealed the differences between the imperialist powers. The US is clearly fighting to maintain its dominance in the region. Its aim, despite the different forms the struggle has taken, is to install regimes in Egypt, Tunisia, Libya and any other countries where monarchs or dictators might fall, that meet two conditions: firstly, to secure control by the US and western allies, even if this might be in a less overt and more 'democratic' form, and to ensure de facto toleration of Israel's oppression of the Palestinians and its strategic and economic strength.

The real problem for the US is that, whilst it is still the only power that can actually exercise a policy for the whole region and force international institutions like the UN to back it, the social system that it implements causes the underlying social and economic problems which gave rise to the revolutions in the first place. Indeed, its effective aim of 'containment' of the revolution will inevitably clash not only with the social demands of the workers, peasants and poor, but also the fight for democracy. Britain has a similar political agenda as the US but has over the past eight years re-established major economic ties to Libya. Having made a u-turn from hosting banquets with Gaddafi, France like all major political powers shares the objective of beheading the revolution. But it also has a specific objective with regard to North Africa. It sees that part of the Mediterranean as one of the few remaining parts of the world where it can aspire to act as a dominant imperialist power.

Germany, China, Russia and the advanced semi-colonies like Brazil, India and Turkey hope for a sustained weakening of US-dominance in the region whilst sharing the anti-revolutionary aim. That is the main reason why they did not vote for the air-strikes against Libya in the UN. Indeed, they hope that a failure of the air-strikes to remove Gaddafi and his backers might allow them to come in as 'mediators' of a new order, presenting themselves as 'neutral' parties. This way they can build lucrative relationships with the oil rich state and muscle in to the geo-strategic region of the Middle East and North Africa.

Israel's approaching Nemesis

The explosion of Arab militancy and revolutionary energy is a direct threat to the Zionist project. Israel's borders have been protected by client regimes in Egypt and Jordan and, though more unstably, by pro-US coalitions in Lebanon. Mubarak's Egypt helped materially in supporting Israel's 2009-10 campaign in Gaza and provides half of the natural gas imports to the expansionist settler state. In an Israel Radio interview deputy Israeli prime minister Silvan Shalom during the Tunisian uprising said that 'if regimes neighbouring the Israeli state were replaced by democratic systems, Israeli national security might significantly be threatened since the new systems would defend or adopt agendas that are inherently opposed to Israeli national security.' At least on this occasion, Shalom must be praised for his honesty. He expresses the views of not only the Zionists in Tel Aviv but the imperialists across the EU and in Washington. He also points to the real contradiction at the heart of the democracy question in the Middle East, for the much vaunted 'only democratic country' to remain secure its neighbours must rule their people with an iron fist. The privileged existence of Israel is maintained by the brutal repression of the Arabs, both within Israel's borders and outside of them.

The fears of the Zionists are reflected in a catastrophist think piece in Haaretz which concludes 'The consequences of the West's betrayal of Mubarak will be no less severe (than Carter's of the Shah - ed). It's not only a betrayal of a leader who was loyal to the West, served stability and encouraged moderation. It's a betrayal of every ally of the West in the Middle East and the developing world. The message is sharp and clear: The West's word is no word at all; an alliance with the West is not an alliance. The West has lost it. The West has stopped being a leading and stabilizing force around the world. The Arab liberation revolution will fundamentally change the Middle East. The acceleration of the West's decline will change the world.'

Far from Israel being 'the only democracy in the Middle East' it is a racist settler state and is moving further to the right in its attitude and outlook, perhaps best expressed by the anti-Arab outbursts of Avigdor Lieberman the deputy prime minister who explicitly said he wanted to drown Palestinian political prisoners in the Dead Sea. The recent moves to force Israelis to pledge an oath of loyalty to the state or lose the right to vote is another worrying trend in the consolidation of racist and extreme nationalist politics in Israel.

Strategies good and bad

At the end of April the balance sheet of the revolutionary wave reveals that in 14 of the 23 member states of the Arab League (plus Iran) there have been major upheavals. Two revolutions have ousted the dictator and led to a major expansion of de facto democratic rights, transitional governments, but behind this faced a continued military regime. In four or five the revolutions for democracy are ongoing. In Tunisia and Egypt a 'democratic counterrevolution' is the main danger whereas in the rest the tasks remains a mass insurrection or ongoing civil war. In states like Bahrain and Iran the movement has been driven underground again. The need for a thorough debate of revolutionary strategy and tactics - already taking place in the blogosphere does need to take place in real time and a real place and a meeting of the Cairo-conference in June/July could be critically important.

Many on the European and North American Left have claimed the successes in Tunisia and Egypt for the strategy of peaceful revolution, and non-violent direct action (NVDA), claiming they were bloodless, despite the fact that over 200 people were killed in the former and 840 in the latter and that these revolutions are far from over. The western media has widely publicised the ideas of Gene Sharp, the so-called father of non-violent revolutions, whose books (including from Dictatorship to Democracy) are said to have acted as manuals for the colour revolutions across the world in the 1990s and early 2000s. Sharp's draws on historical examples of people like Gandhi or Martin Luther King and the civil rights struggle in the USA, but his portrayals are historically inaccurate, omitting massive strikes or militant demonstrations which contributed more to the struggle for liberation. Neither the end of colonialism in India or the civil rights victories in the US can be put down primarily to NVDA. We are informed that today we should model ourselves on the pious practitioners of turning the other cheek instead of the revolutionary struggles of Marx, Lenin and Trotsky.

But a revolution can only be as peaceful as the rulers and their control over the repressive forces allow it to be. Revolutionaries make no cult of violence for its own sake and have pointed out time and again that events like the

October Revolution were ? though acts of force ? relatively bloodless. The Russian revolution should be contrasted to the counter-revolutions, capitalist wars and imperialist ?humanitarian interventions? which are always far bloodier. Events in Libya and Syria prove that when the very existence of a regime or political order is threatened it will use the maximum violence to preserve itself. In Libya where a powerful repression machine has been constructed totaling 119,000 personnel in a country of only six million people, the unarmed demonstrators at a high cost in terms of lives had to win over sections of the troops and seize the arsenals in order to establish popular power in the east of the country. Syria with a murderous secret police (Mukhabarat) fully the equal of any in the Arab world and a standing army of 220,000 has in a relatively short space of time killed upwards of 300 protesters. Massive repression in Bahrain has seen torture and murders carried out by the security forces. The idea of a peaceful revolution is a fallacy. Of course, it is possible to overthrow a government using mass demonstrations and strikes alone, but even here it is a question of the degree of force, the level of attacks from the police force and the army and the resistance from below.

It is no surprise that the NVDA propagandists find their theories publicised in the Economist and Newsweek and their institutes sponsored by US government agencies. It is good that the Egyptian activists (with one or two exceptions) rebuffed the overtures of imperialist pacifism. Propaganda telling the pro-democracy movements not to be violent is designed to frustrate the crystallisation and development of a revolutionary leadership capable not just of overthrowing a government but of smashing the dictatorial regimes and moving on to establish working class power. It is sheer nonsense to believe that Facebook and Twitter and the blogosphere have made non-violent, spontaneous, non-ideological revolutions the norm. There must be a struggle to bury these frivolous post-modern ideologies before they do any real damage.

Another even more widespread false strategy argues that the revolutions ought to limit themselves to installing a ?normal? bourgeois democracy on the European and North American model. The initial character of these revolutions is indisputably democratic, centring on the demolition of their dictatorial military regimes, whether these are disguised as republics or monarchies. Revolutionaries have no reason either to deny or bemoan this fact. We reject with contempt the arguments advanced by some populists, Islamists and post-modernist ?theorists? that the democratic freedoms (including women?s liberation, trade union rights, etc) are a western import, unsuited to the indigenous culture of the region and a Trojan Horse for Western influence and super-exploitation by its multinationals. We do warn that the ?actually existing bourgeois democracy? in America or Europe is far from being ?the rule of the people? ? that its is prevented from ever being truly democratic by the control over all aspects of economic life by capitalist monopoly, by control over the media by billionaires, by legal straight jackets on the trade unions and by provisions in the constitutions which limit rights and freedoms. If these unspoken about elements of really existing democracy are installed in the Middle East then millions of workers and peasants will experience no great change in their everyday lives and will become disillusioned and prone to religious or bonapartist demagogy again.

That is why the democratic revolutionary tasks cannot be abandoned or skipped over; they have to be fulfilled whilst at the same time the immediate socio-economic demands are brought to the fore. The masses by using their democratic freedoms will never willingly let go of them again. This is a stage that can only be completed through militant mass action in which the working class must play a leading role if they are to succeed. But revolutionary socialists do not believe it is either possible nor desirable to halt the revolution even with the completion of this democratic stage. On this question the Stalinist Communist Parties worldwide have left us a disastrous legacy, which nevertheless is still sadly influential. This stages theory, taken over from classical Menshevism, means limiting and containing working class struggles to the democratic stage, allowing the supposedly liberal democratic capitalists to take power. This has always led to supporting the bourgeois forces' attempts to 'restore order,' that is, to crush the struggles of the masses for major economic and social gains with the accusation that these demands alienate the liberal bourgeoisie, are ?utopian?, are fomented by ?anarchists? and ?Trotskyites? who are tools of the counter-revolution.

But the bourgeois opposition forces that supported the revolutions, be they secular liberals or Islamist conservatives like the Muslim Brotherhood, are not sincere or reliable champions of democratic demands,. They have not fought for the purging of all the top figures and the spies and torturers of the old regime from the state apparatus, they have not demanded that the high commands appointed by the old regime be sacked, they have not fought for a sovereign

constituent assembly to draft a new constitution. They want experts to amend the old constitution and parliamentary elections in 6 to 9 months, after they have deployed their riches to build party machines built on clientelism and got control over large parts of the media. Likewise, they will reject the economic demands of the masses, such as higher wages or access to land, as premature or selfish when all should be 'making sacrifices for democracy?'. The revolutionary youth based on the exploited classe must resist this democratic counter-revolution, which becomes more of a danger under the new Egyptian prime minister, precisely because of his links to the anti-Mubarak movement. No support must be given to the interim government.

Bourgeois figureheads like Mohamed ElBaradei who emerged from relative obscurity to become a prominent leader-in-waiting during the opposition movement perfectly represent western interests. ElBaradei has been critical of the Iraq war and the Iranophobia of the west for some time, which seems to indicate he is a critical and independent thinker. However, his calls for the army to take power to ensure an 'orderly transition?' and his commitment to a liberal democratic regime make him a perfect candidate for the imperialists, he is certainly not a dangerous radical who will 'go too far?' and empower the people. Politicians like ElBaradei know the importance of populist rhetoric whilst concentrating power in the hands of the ruling elite.

Permanent Revolution

The vital question now being posed to the huge numbers of revolutionary and the substantial existing groups of political and trade union activists youth by four months of revolution and counter-revolution is how to complete the democratic tasks and increase the size of the social mobilisations to meet the burning needs of the masses. The February revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt are far from complete, even in terms of introducing a bourgeois democratic regime. The military remain in power, although they have been compelled to tolerate strikes and demonstrations. Acts of repression continue, even in central Tunis or in Cairo's Tahrir Square. Threats are repeatedly made to ban strikes. In short, even in its heartland, the Arab Spring has not yet demolished the military-secret police regime. At most it has checked its operations with mass mobilisations.

To take the revolution forward requires an open assault on the wealth and privileges not just of the old elite but also of the capitalist class and the imperialist investors. The revolutions must become anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist in their objectives, openly and unashamedly so. To achieve this the independent trade union militants of recent years will have to transcend the horizons of pure-and-simple trade unionism, raising the struggle to a higher political level. The young intellectuals and students, on the other hand, must transcend their privileges and the sphere of individual rights and solidarise wholeheartedly with the workers and the shantytown poor against the rich.

For the masses to achieve their demands, economic, political and social, will require a struggle for leadership by the working class and poor peasants and therefore of that section of the youth and the intelligentsia that adopts their class standpoint. The revolutionaries of the Middle East urgently need to work out the strategic orientation and the slogans that address the key conflicts ' an April Theses of the Arab revolutions.

But if the masses should become disillusioned with a situation which brings them no concrete gains, then elections which sideline the working class and the revolutionary youth ' who as yet have no powerful party to truly represent their aspirations ' could be used to install a reactionary government which would turn on the most radical driving force of the revolution, the youth and the workers as the French ruling class did in 1968. Only the most powerful development of the class struggle here and now and an uncompromising drive for the complete demolition of the old regime can drive the revolution forward to lasting achievements and establish the power of the working people, fighting for socialist goals and the ousting of western imperialism from the region. This requires the creation of political instruments; first and foremost parties pledged to these goals, militant trade unions, workers' and peasants' councils in every workplace and village. It also requires an international organisation to link together the forces of revolution in every country in the Middle East.

47. Measures must be demanded to protect the masses against inflation; the raising of the minimum wage, wage demands by all the unions to compensate for inflation and protection of wages by a sliding scale of wages, that is, an

automatic one per cent rise for a one per cent rise in an accurate popular cost of living index. The unemployed must be offered work in a programme of public development to replace the crumbling shantytowns with decent housing, sanitation, schools, and clinics. The ill-gotten gains of all the top figures of the regimes, of the super rich, must be seized and used for this reconstruction. Wherever industries and services have been privatised, they must be renationalised without compensation to those who plundered them. The revolution must spread to the countryside where large parts of the population still live. Small farmers' debts must be cancelled, large farms and agribusinesses must be expropriated and put under their workers' control and life in the villages must be transformed by improved provision of jobs, healthcare, education and housing.

In each country, the international character of the revolution must be recognised ? not simply by imitating of the successes of others but by actively assisting those at an earlier stage. There must be active support for popular uprisings and revolutions against the ruling tyrants in all the countries of North Africa and the Middle East and presently in Libya, Syria, the states of the Arabian peninsula and Algeria. If the counter-revolution triumphs or forces a rotten compromise on the insurgents, this would be a blow to the entire international movement. For example, in Egypt and Tunisia, the youth organisations and the workers' unions must fight for arms and - if the Libyan people ask for them - volunteers to be sent to help crush Gaddafi. Clearly, soldiers, with artillery and aircraft would be best able to do this. But they would have to act under the complete control of the Libyan insurgents.

A massive campaign must be launched to force the Arab governments to break with complicity in the oppression of the Palestinians, to declare solidarity with the Palestinians and follow the example of Egypt in actively working to break the blockade of Gaza, allow freedom of movement for Palestinians, abrogate all treaties with Israel and block all trade and fuel supplies to the Zionist oppressors.

There is a huge danger of demobilising the workers' struggles, demoralising their hopes for the revolution and succumbing to a 'democratic' counterrevolution against the working class. The best and clearest guide to action is the successful policy adopted by the Bolsheviks between February and October 1917, embodied in Lenin's April Theses and but most clearly theorised in Trotsky's Permanent Revolution. This means continuing the strikes and mass protests, pushing the democratic demands as far as they can go, fighting for working class control of workplaces and production, demanding nationalisation of the large scale sections of economy, the banks etc, to take them out of the hands of foreign capital. This alone will guarantee the maximum gains of the democratic revolution and prepare and focus the working class for the next phase of the struggle when capitalist rule and its exploitative system is called into question and the possibility of a socialist seizure of power becomes concrete reality.

This is all part of the Trotskyist strategy of permanent revolution. This is not a purely objective, automatic, unconscious or a spontaneous process. The clearly linked outbreak of the revolutions of 2011, the use of satellite TV, of the Internet and the social media have indeed spread the revolution but this is possible only whilst it is a general movement of all classes apart from the capitalist oligarchs and their military hirelings. The struggles of workers and the poor to use democracy for their own liberation will not be benignly facilitated by all the forces who supported the first stage of the revolution ? or came on board when it seemed unstoppable, For this reason, the most advanced sections of the workers and youth need to gather their forces and to form a revolutionary party, on the genuine model of Lenin's Bolshevik party, aiming to fight to stop the bourgeoisie, the generals and the Islamists wresting control of the revolution, and instead directing it towards its true historic goal: working class power and socialism.

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