



Victory to the Egyptian Revolution!

Dave Stockton Mon, 31/01/2011 - 16:31

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Egypt is aflame with revolution. The world has watched with bated breath as millions of Egyptians, led by young people and joined by factory workers, rapidly drawing in the poor from the slums, have shown that they will not be intimidated and coerced any longer. A general strike has been proclaimed with calls for a million strong demonstration in Cairo demanding Hosni Mubarak's departure.

His dictatorial regime, its 330,000 strong police force, its networks of torturers and spies, cannot keep them in a state of fear any more. For over a week now in 'days of anger' hundreds of thousands have braved the riot police and their batons, tear gas, water cannon, buckshot and live bullets. The numbers killed in Suez, Alexandria, Cairo and other cities has undoubtedly topped the 100 mark. Thousands have been injured by the police and gangs of thugs, using shotguns, knives and iron bars. Yet the vast Tahrir (Liberation) Square remains packed with demonstrators chanting, "Down, Down, Mubarak" and 'Mubarak! Saudi Arabia is waiting for you?.

The hated police have now been withdrawn from the streets and the army with tanks and armoured troop carriers has been deployed. Yet the crowds have surrounded them and fraternised with the soldiers. Mubarak's stern broadcasted warning of chaos and attempts to defuse the movement by changing the government and making the chief of the security services vice president were greeted by contempt on the streets.

The uprising was unleashed on 25 January, dubbed the "Day of Anger", by Egyptian youth opposition groups such as 'April 6', using Twitter and Facebook to mobilise. April 6 was actually formed as a Facebook group in 2008 to mobilise support for a strike by workers in the northern industrial town of Mahalla al-Kubra. But it was the Tunisian movement, also launched by youth using the new social media, which brought down the dictator Ben Ali, inspiring Egyptian youth to imitate them.

Egypt faces the same problems as Tunisia ' mass unemployment, soaring inflation and a stifling of all dissent. So they set out to unleash a similar uprising in Egypt, with similar slogans: 'bread, freedom, social justice.?

The revolution spread like wildfire. Demonstrations reached vast proportions. The soldiers have been subjected to days of friendly contact with the demonstrators. To order them to open fire on the people could prove a fatal step for Mubarak. It seems even the Army High Command is unwilling to resort to a massacre. They must fear that if they ordered it rank and file soldiers might well refuse to do so and would go over to the people. If the generals cannot order brutal repression, then sooner or later they must force the President to go, hoping to put together some sort of interim government to defuse the situation, as the army did in Tunisia.

Workers enter the battle

A crucial point has been reached where, as in Tunisia, the working class is entering the fray. In Tunisia it was the calling of a general strike that broke the dictator Ben Ali's will and forced him to flee. In Egypt now sections of militant trade unionists and unemployed youth already have taken part in the demonstrations and steel workers in Suez have come out on an open-ended strike until Mubarak resigns. There are reports that workers in Mahalla al-Kubra ' an

industrial city of over 500,000 inhabitants joined the demonstrations en masse. On 31 January the call for a general strike went out and it was announced that a new federation of independent trade unions had been formed.

What is crucial is an all out indefinite general strike. Like in Tunisia this would threaten to bring the whole country to a halt, choking off the profits of the rich and breaking the will of the regime to stay; it would stop the army and the police resorting to more repression and bloodshed; it would show Mubarak, the Egyptian people and whole world who is really master of the situation. Mubarak's regime was only too well aware of this danger. From day one it got its stooge trade union leaders in the Egyptian Trade Union Federation ETUF to order workers not to demonstrate, just as it got the state appointed imams in the mosques to tell people not to join the protests.

But this was in vain. The protests not only grew, but at the height of the revolutionary days the people began to organise self-government. On 29 and 30 January the BBC reported the formation of local mass committees and popular militias patrolling the streets with sticks to maintain order. Civilians are directing the traffic. After four days of repression and resistance the police had disappeared from the streets, with reports that they had to be withdrawn because they were beginning to desert in significant numbers. Many of the looters, whose exploits have been used to try to terrify the crowds into halting the movement, have turned out to be 'off-duty' policemen!

In just over a week the revolution has achieved what 30 years of bargaining and begging could not. Terrified of losing everything, Mubarak cynically offered sudden concessions. He sacked his government but stayed in power himself. He offered social and economic reforms but did not stipulate details of what they were or how they'd be paid for. He appointed a deputy president but gave no details of his powers...and named his intelligence chief Suleiman for the post.

The masses are not fooled and have shifted their cry from 'The regime must go' to the even more explicit and unambiguous 'Mubarak must go!'

If the general strike is to have its full effect its democratic self-organisation by workers and youth will prove essential. It can make sure that the regime cannot take away the de facto freedoms that the street protests have secured so far the right to demonstrate, to assemble, to speak freely.

The formation of councils of delegates from the factories, shops and offices, in the popular quarters, in the colleges can ensure that not only Mubarak goes but that he is not replaced by an openly military regime or a civilian government of experts. The rank and file soldiers and their NCOs should be encouraged to form democratic committees too. And a general strike that succeeded not only in getting rid of Mubarak but any permutation of the old regime, would open up an extended revolutionary period a period of dual power where the old state forces are confronted by new popular mass organisations.

And it is just such organisations that could rapidly establish the order that the people need, releasing the prisoners, controlling prices, putting the unemployed to work, feeding the hungry, housing the homeless. The working class and the youth could take charge.

Mass working class democracy would also be the best way to stop the National Association for Change, headed by capitalist politicians like of Mohamed ElBaradei, or the conservative Muslim Brotherhood, from reaping the fruits of the people's revolution.

ElBaradei initially stated that he hoped "change will come in an orderly way and not through the Tunisian model", before he jumped on board. Likewise the Muslim Brotherhood took little part in the whole uprising ... until it took on mass proportions and they realised they had to be seen to back it or they would be swept away by events.

Hunger and neoliberalism

The explosive material of this revolution was poverty and hunger: rising food prices, unemployment (especially for the young), dreadful housing conditions in the slums around Cairo and the other big cities. In the words of UK journalist Robert Fisk: 'The filth and the slums, the open sewers and the corruption of every government official, the bulging

prisons, the laughable elections, the whole vast, sclerotic edifice of power has at last brought Egyptians on to their streets.?

Officially unemployment is 12 per cent but the real figure is twice that. About 40 per cent of Egypt's 80 million people live on around \$2 a day. The UN says between 20 and 30 percent live below the official poverty line and the living standards have fallen steadily since the 1990s.

Over the past two decades Egypt experienced its version of the pro-market neoliberal 'revolution'. The state capitalist measures introduced by Gamal Abdel Nasser in the 1950s (misnamed 'Arab Socialism?') were step by step dismantled under the pressure of the IMF and the USA, which is Egypt's biggest aid donor. In the mid-1990s the regime cut subsidies to small farmers, repealed protective laws and promoted the interests of large landowners. By the late 1990s Mubarak began privatising industries ? by the early 2000s the education and health services had been sold off.

Factories were bought by foreign investors, including from Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States, squeezing high returns from a workforce unprotected by effective labour laws, policed by state controlled unions, and subject to vicious police repression if they tried to strike. No wonder Egyptian textile workers earn on average less than half that of their equivalents in Turkey and other Mediterranean countries.

The way out

In the local committees and the councils of war of the revolutionary movement, the workers and the young activists need to draw up an emergency programme to meet the burning social and economic needs of ordinary Egyptians:

? Prices must be slashed. Immediate distribution of food to the poor and unemployed. Wages must be raised to compensate for the inflation and protected by a sliding scale

? The unemployed must be offered work in a programme of public development to replace the crumbling shantytowns with decent housing, sanitation, schools, clinics

? The ill gotten gains of all the top figures of the Mubarak regime, of the super rich, must be seized and used for reconstruction

? The privatised industries and services must be renationalised without compensation

? The revolution must spread to the countryside where half of all Egyptians still live. Small farmers' debts must be cancelled, large farms and agribusinesses must be expropriated and put under workers' control, life in the villages must be transformed by improved provision of healthcare, education and housing

?The freedom, dignity and human rights that people are demanding on the streets must be firmly established and protected against any return of the old regime

? The 12,000 or so political prisoners in Mubarak's jails must be released and all exiles given the right to return

? The police chiefs and torturers must be arrested and their crimes exposed and punished

? The secret police and the paramilitary squads must be disarmed and disbanded, a workers' and youth militia must keep order, soldiers' democratic rights must be protected by establishing soldiers' committees and the election officers so that they cannot be used again as blind tools of coups and dictatorship

? The ruling party must be dissolved, its property confiscated and its officials and ministers punished for their corruption

? There must be complete freedom to form political parties, to demonstrate, to meet, to have unfettered access to the broadcast media and to publish newspapers

? Elections must take place to a sovereign, revolutionary constituent assembly under the control and protection of workers' and popular committees and militia

? 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

? Renounce Mubarak's treacherous complicity in the oppression of the Palestinians - declare solidarity with the Palestinians break the blockade of Gaza from the Egyptian side

Make the revolution permanent

What sort of government is needed to carry out these demands? What government should the masses on the streets ?

the youth, workers, and unemployed of the Egyptian revolution ? be aiming to bring to power?

No intelligence chiefs, no army generals, no businessmen or Nobel Prize winners with the blessings of the USA can meet the people?s need for ?bread, freedom and social justice.? The privileged elite, the landowners, capitalists, financiers and their cronies are too tied to the US order in the region, too bound by a thousand ties of wealth and patronage to the old system, to be able to make permanent the de facto democratic rights and economic concessions achieved by the revolution so far. Only a government of the workers and small farmers can do it.

That means utterly destroying the institutions of the old regime and putting power in the hands of the most democratic organisations of the masses ? councils of workers, peasants and soldiers.

With power in the hands of the workers and poor, what side would the new government take in conflicts between capitalists and workers, between landlords and peasants? It would have to take the side of the poor, or it would become just another tool of the rich and neoliberalism. So the workers? and peasants? government would have to start the process of breaking with capitalism and socialising the economy ? the factories and all the large-scale workplaces would be nationalised without compensation and the land brought under cooperative and communal ownership. This must not be the bureaucratic control from above that failed under Stalinism, but the democratic direction and planning of workers and peasants themselves.

This is the Trotskyist strategy of permanent revolution. It does not, as its Stalinists of the old Communist Parties lied, mean skipping over the democratic demands of the revolution but fulfilling them, making them permanent. To carry this out the most advanced sections of the workers and youth, the most farsighted and determined fighters, need to convene in the heat of the struggle to form a new revolutionary 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.

The revolution in the Arab world has begun. It is shaking the whole world. Rulers are trembling at the power of the masses revealed, not just in Arab capitals but in Tel Aviv, not just in America but in China too.

Victory can be a beacon to masses struggling everywhere against repression, against poverty, against the global capitalist crisis. It gives the lie to those who say revolution is a thing of the past ? it opens the broad vista of world socialist revolution in the 21st century.

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