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# Egypt – the revolution must go on

**M**UBARAK IS no more, relegated to “the dustbin of history”. He was blown away by one of the greatest mass movements in history. The 18-day volcano was crowned by a colossal mobilisation of six million Egyptians on the streets. Mubarak was forced to flee.

He completely miscalculated when he appeared to defy the clamour for his removal in his infamous TV broadcast on the night of 10 February. His defiance came as a surprise, not just to the masses but to his cronies in the military and the US state department who saw that he was finished. The US defence secretary Robert Gates, in close collaboration with the Egyptian army tops, dictated to the dictator that he should delay no longer in departing to Sharm el Sheikh.

Failure to leave threatened a mass insurrection which would have put in jeopardy the whole basis of the regime. Like a colossal restrained Goliath, mass anger was such that the movement began to march out of Tahrir Square in the direction of the presidential palace, crowds began to surround the parliament, the TV stations and other power points of the regime. Such a movement threatened incalculable consequences for the possessing classes.

Most ominous for the generals, the power behind Mubarak’s throne, was that their very base, the army, particularly soldiers in the square, had begun to be affected by the ‘virus of revolution’. Army officers, the junior ranks, began to march in solidarity with the revolution. The state machine, in other words, threatened to break in their hands. Also of great significance – particularly for the future of the revolution – was the mass entry of the working class onto the scene.

All the suppressed and stoked-up anger of the exploited masses flooded to the surface with demands for big wage increases, independent trade unions, etc. Up to now, what we have witnessed in Egypt – despite the massive movements – is a powerful element of political revolution. This has removed the crowning expression – the dictator – of the regime. But we have not yet had a ‘second revolution’, a social movement by the working class in particular, which would remove the power of rotten landlordism and capitalism. This is the only way to successfully conclude

the Egyptian revolution.

Wishful thinking is the most deadly mistake in politics, particularly in periods of high tension, in a revolution. While there was great joy that the dictator had been removed, the social issues which fuelled the revolution remain unresolved. The fundamental basis of the regime – particularly its monopoly of state power – remains intact. The generals, just days after Mubarak’s departure, gave a glimpse of their mailed fist.

The Egyptian masses would make a profound mistake to place any trust in those new ‘democrats’, particularly in the state machine – the army generals, their cronies, big business and the landlords – who furnish the basis of the regime. At best, these forces hanker after a ‘controlled’ democracy, something less even than the Erdogan regime in Turkey.

The army has, in effect, carried through a ‘soft coup’ following Mubarak’s demise. Elections are promised in six months but only after the military has ‘approved’ the new constitution. No trust or faith should be placed in the army tops. The independent power of the masses must be built to exert the necessary pressure.

## Free assembly

**U**NDER THE guise of a return to ‘normality’ a clean up of Tahrir Square took place. This was an open attempt to prevent the right of free assembly – as if things can return to normal when the lava from this volcano has not yet cooled. Political prisoners and detainees should be immediately released.

It must not be forgotten either that the army – particularly the tops like Field Marshal Tantawi – is bound hand and foot, as an integral part, to rotten Egyptian landlordism and capitalism. Like their counterparts in the military in Pakistan, the army tops themselves own huge swathes of formerly state-owned industries which were privatised by Mubarak in the past two decades.

They have a material interest in the maintenance of the present regime. Many of them undoubtedly hanker for a return of the Mubarak regime with power ultimately vested in their hands or their representatives in a Bonaparte ‘presidency’. They own private army golf ranges, clubs and huge gated estates which are a totally different world to the festering

slums of the mass of the Egyptian working class and poor.

The only guarantee of a consolidation of real democracy lies through the maintenance of the splendid mass movement and the pressure which this can exert in building a new Egypt. Firstly, there is the vital issue of independent trade unions through which the masses can express their views and pressure for change. It is not an accident that the army is already attempting to limit and frustrate the building of trade unions. The state trade unions at the top are made up of lackeys of Mubarak; they must be removed and representatives of the workers elected to these positions.

But this is not enough. Democratic committees of action in the workplace – already there in embryo in the occupations that have taken place in recent days in a number of factories – must be urgently built. These must be linked to the neighbourhoods – particularly to the poor, working-class neighbourhoods – in an attempt to create a real parliament of the masses from below. In all real revolutions the mass of workers and poor farmers – the real driving force in any mass upheaval – strive to build an independent means of expression and action.

Of course, the mass of the population has been without rights for decades – 60 years in the case of the Egyptian masses – so the attainment of democracy will be seen as a vital step forward in changing their lives. Therefore, the Egyptian masses must inscribe on their banner the fight for a real democratic parliament, a constituent assembly, which can draw up not just rules for elections but the programme to change the conditions of the Egyptian masses.

The parliament can only be convened – if it is really to represent the majority of the population – by mass revolutionary struggle with the programme to change every aspect of the lives of the Egyptian masses. The representatives of the workers and poor farmers should form the majority in this parliament or constituent assembly.

The masses should be vigilant not to allow latter-day converts to democracy – the ‘liberal’ capitalists like Mohamed ElBaradei, etc – to elbow them aside. The working class should build mass committees which could form the

basis for and oversee democratic elections. No president, but power vested in a single parliamentary body!

A second chamber is invariably used by the capitalists to frustrate the democratic popular will. A president is a putative dictator even in the most established ‘democratic’ parliaments, with powers to push aside the democratic will. The Egyptian revolution was above all a youth and workers’ revolution. Therefore the right to vote at 16 should be implemented as well as a series of measures benefiting women.

## Revolution just begun

**T**HE REVOLUTION is not over – it has only just begun. The Google worker – Wael Ghonim – who played a big part in mobilising people for the 25 January demos and then was arrested by the army, symbolised the stage of this revolution – its strengths and weaknesses – as soon as he was released from prison.

When confronted with the fact that 300 Egyptian youth and workers had been killed by the police and hired thugs of Mubarak he broke down in tears. This in turn was a big factor in mobilising new layers of the working class onto the street. Nevertheless, Ghonim expressed the heartfelt sentiments of Egyptians when he declared the day after Mubarak exited: “Egypt will be heaven in ten years”.

And he is right, but only if the sources of inequality and suffering of the Egyptian masses – landlordism and capitalism – are eradicated. The country, on the basis of Mubarak’s 30 years, is full of crony capitalists – which go together with an impoverished society – who enriched themselves with billions of looted state property. But an indication of how far Egypt lags behind is reflected in the level of literacy, which is no more than 66% and where “a good education for the majority remains a dream”.

Moreover, Egypt has an annual gross domestic product per capita of just \$2,270, whereas the figure for the US is \$35,000. Therefore, the Egyptian masses must also create their own power to eliminate the obstacles to realising their dreams. This will be a socialist planned economy for Egypt linked to a socialist confederation of the Middle East.

## Labour councillors’ arguments refuted at People’s Convention

**A**T THE People’s Convention on 12 February, organised by the Right to Work campaign and the Labour Representation Committee, there was a debate on how councillors could fight the cuts.

Jane James

Labour councillors tried to explain why they could not vote against the cuts. Charlyne Pullen from Islington said central government was responsible for 85% of their funding while the council could only raise 14-15% from the council tax.

So the council could not provide services alone – cuts would have to be made, she said, but they would be kinder cuts than Tories would make.

Barry Buitekant, a Hackney Labour councillor, called on council workers to ‘put pressure’ on councillors to vote against the cuts. But Socialist Party deputy general secretary Hannah Sell pointed out from the floor that Hackney council workers in Unison had already voted at a mass meeting to call on all Labour councils to pass needs-based budgets instead of voting for cuts. What more pressure did he need?

Dave Nellist, a Coventry Social-



Putting councillors under pressure in Waltham Forest. photo Senan

ist Party councillor spoke from the platform and explained that councillors do have a choice. They could return privatised services to council control, they could fund EMA, and refuse to implement housing benefit changes for example.

He called on Labour councils to follow the example of Clay Cross councillors in Derbyshire in the 1970s who refused to implement the Housing Finance Act. They even melted down the mayor’s chain to pay for services. If one council today

made a stand, the cuts could be unworkable.

The struggles fought and won by past action were often illegal. Poplar council introduced equal pay and a minimum wage. They were eventually jailed but carried on running the council from their prison cells.

Clay Cross councillors were surcharged and banned from holding office but hundreds were willing to take their place.

20 councils stood up to the Tories in the 1980s with Lambeth and Liverpool refusing to implement cuts, building houses instead.

Dave explained that councillors can’t be surcharged anymore. And if a mass movement is built, if the government attempts to send in commissioners, they would be stopped from carrying out their duties by the huge opposition.

Dave called for a one-day public sector strike after the 26 March TUC demo. And for anti-cuts candidates to stand in the May elections under the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition banner.

He finished by declaring: “We should take up the slogan of the Poplar struggle: ‘Better to break the law than break the poor’”.

The conference agreed to back the demonstrations taking place in Wales and London on 5 March. See page 1.

## Socialism Today

The Socialist Party’s magazine February 2011 issue includes:

- **A new year of struggle**  
We are now in an era of big social movements in Britain, argues Peter Taaffe.
- **The AV referendum**  
How should socialists vote in May? Clive Heemskerck looks at the issues involved.
- **Wikileaks lessons**  
Judy Beishon writes on Wikileaks, state repression, and the limits of the new media.



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