

The United States, Egypt and the fight for socialist revolution

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Mass demonstrations of workers and youth throughout Egypt shook the regime of US-backed dictator Hosni Mubarak on Friday. Hundreds of thousands poured into the streets to demand the president's resignation, denouncing mass unemployment and poverty, clashing with police, and burning down the headquarters of the ruling National Democratic Party.

The protests came just two weeks after demonstrations forced another US-backed dictator, Zine El Abidine Ben Ali of Tunisia, to flee. Significant demonstrations have spread to other countries in the region, including Yemen, Jordan and Algeria.

Like all revolutionary upheavals, the developments in Egypt are serving to clear away hoary myths and lies, including the American ruling elite's pretensions of support for democracy around the world. These events are exposing the role of the US government as the lynchpin of reaction throughout the Middle East and North Africa.

From the beginning of the unrest, the Obama administration has made clear its support for Mubarak and the Egyptian regime, a critical US ally.

President Obama devoted his remarks Friday evening to defending Mubarak in the face of the mass popular revolt. On a day in which Mubarak's police killed at least a dozen people, injured hundreds more and arrested an untold number of demonstrators, Obama cynically proclaimed that the US was "calling upon Egyptian authorities to refrain from any violence against peaceful protesters."

Obama spoke as if he were an innocent observer. But the truncheons, guns, tear gas canisters, water cannons and tanks used by the Egyptian government to suppress the people all bear the stamp, in some cases literally, "Made in the USA." The US provides Egypt with \$1.5 billion a year to finance its apparatus of repression, making it the second largest beneficiary of US aid after Israel.

Obama lectured Mubarak about respecting human rights on the very day that WikiLeaks posted US State Department cables showing that his administration was aware of and complicit in Mubarak's use of torture and assassination against his political

opponents.

Obama reiterated the position expressed by other US officials that "those protesting in the streets have a responsibility to express themselves peacefully," as if there could be any comparison between the state violence meted out by Mubarak and the attempts by workers and youth to defend themselves.

The main aim of Obama's remarks was to make clear the administration's continued backing for Mubarak. Obama spoke shortly after the Egyptian president appeared on television to declare that he would not step down and warn that he would enforce "security" against "chaos." Mubarak's announcement that a new cabinet would be formed and his empty promises to make democratic reforms and expand economic opportunity only increased the popular outrage, spurring more people to pour out into the streets in defiance of the military-imposed curfew.

The real attitude of the US to the events in Egypt was revealed in Obama's statement: "The United States has a close partnership with Egypt, and we have cooperated with each other on many issues."

In other words, the United States views the Egyptian government, despised by its population, as a key strategic ally. These remarks echo those of Vice President Joseph Biden, who said on Thursday, as Mubarak moved to shut off the Internet and deploy special operations forces, that the president "has been very responsible... relative to (US) geopolitical interests in the region."

By "geopolitical interests," the administration means the determination of the United States to maintain its hegemony over the Middle East and North Africa, including the region's vast oil and gas reserves. With military aid and training, the US has propped up corrupt and dictatorial regimes from Egypt to the sheikhdoms in Saudi Arabia and other oil producing Gulf States.

Through covert and overt military operations, the US has worked systematically to undermine any government that posed a potential challenge to its interests. Over the past ten years alone the United States has launched bloody colonialist wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Egypt has played a critical role in maintaining US domination, particularly since Anwar Sadat, Mubarak's predecessor, signed the Camp David accords with Israel in 1978. In 1979, the US lost a key ally with the downfall of the Shah in Iran. Since that time, the Egyptian military and intelligence apparatus has worked closely with both the US and Israel in the suppression of the masses throughout the region.

The entire approach of the American government to the events in Egypt is guided by its immense fear that the resurgence of the class struggle in the region will deal a major blow to its geo-strategic interests.

While the administration may be considering whether it can do without Mubarak, replacing him directly by the military or by one or another of the "opposition" figures, it also knows that the fall of Mubarak, coming after the flight of Tunisia's Ben Ali, threatens to unleash a wave of popular revolt that could sweep through the entire region.

Workers in the Middle East and the Maghreb have demonstrated immense courage and heroism. The struggle, however, is still in its initial stages. The critical question facing the working class is the development of a new revolutionary leadership and program. Absent this, the ruling elite of the region, in alliance with US imperialism, will regroup either to maintain the existing tyrants or impose new governments equally committed to the defense of the existing political order.

To carry forward the struggle, certain basic issues must be clarified. First, absolutely no confidence can be placed in any of the oppositional groups, including the Muslim Brotherhood and Mohamed ElBaradei, who recently returned to Egypt with the express intention of preventing the protests from getting out of hand. All of these forces, as well as the rotten, state-controlled trade unions, are absolutely committed to the defense of Egyptian capitalism and its relationship with imperialism.

Second, the expansion of the struggle requires the independent mobilization of the entire working class, leading behind it all the oppressed masses of the region. The form of the initial upheavals has already demonstrated that class, not religion, nationality, race or ethnicity, is the fundamental social division in every country.

It is necessary to reject all those who counsel restraint and seek some deal within the existing anti-democratic social and political structure, and who make their appeals to US and world imperialism. The aim must be to replace the existing state with a workers' government, controlled by new institutions of popular democracy. Such a government will be the basis for carrying through socialist measures, including the nationalization of all major corporations and banks.

Finally, the struggle of the Egyptian workers must be consciously linked to the struggles of workers throughout the region and internationally. As Trotsky explained in his theory of

permanent revolution, there can be no solution to even the most basic democratic demands, including an end to dictatorship, within the framework the nation-state system and the rule of the national bourgeoisie. The downfall in the past century of so many popular movements throughout the Middle East, including Egypt, was their subordination, often through the betrayals of the Stalinist organizations, to the national bourgeoisie.

The social conditions that have set off these protests are universal: the accumulated anger over mass unemployment and poverty, disgust over the corruption and obscene wealth of a narrow ruling elite, pent-up rage against a repressive political system unresponsive to the basic needs of the population as a whole. These conditions prevail not only in the Middle East and former colonial countries, but in the major capitalist countries as well.

The bourgeoisie in every country—first and foremost the United States—is responding to the global breakdown of capitalism by ruthlessly attacking its "own" working class. This means the objective conditions exist as never before to unite the workers and oppressed in the former colonial countries with their class brothers in the imperialist centers.

The role of the United States in buttressing the Mubarak government underscores the fact that any resolution of the struggles of the Egyptian masses is not possible without the defeat of imperialism itself. In this task, the greatest ally of the Egyptian people is the American working class.

The speed with which the mass revolts have developed, calling into question the viability of pillars of US imperialism for decades, is testament to the explosive state of social and class tensions all over the world. The crisis of world capitalism that erupted in 2008 is deepening, and it is already clear that 2011 will usher in a new period of revolutionary upheavals.

To carry forward these struggles, a new leadership must be built, consciously rooted in the lessons of the twentieth century and the perspective of international socialist revolution—a perspective defended today only by the International Committee of the Fourth International. We call on all those seeking to put an end to dictatorship, unemployment and exploitation in Egypt, Tunisia and throughout the region to take up the fight to build sections of the ICFI today.

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