

# The Egyptian Revolution

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As mass protests, factory occupations and calls for an indefinite general strike spread against the dictatorship of President Hosni Mubarak, the working class is emerging as the driving force of the Egyptian revolution. While news is limited, it is clear that strikes and protests are sweeping cities and towns throughout this country of 80 million people.

The demonstration of the working class's immense social power has shaken the ruling class and its spokesmen in the mainstream media. As the *New York Times* decried that the protests are becoming "open class warfare," CNN explained the collapse in stocks of US oil companies with investments in Egypt by fears that "a new government could expropriate their land concessions."

The financial aristocracy, however, fears far more than the loss of an oil field—or even of a sea-lane like Egypt's Suez Canal, which is critical to world commerce. More fundamental political issues are at stake.

The Egyptian revolution is dealing a devastating blow to the pro-capitalist triumphalism that followed the Soviet bureaucracy's liquidation of the USSR in 1991. The class struggle, socialism and Marxism were declared irrelevant in the modern world. "History"—as in "The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles" (Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels)—had ended. Henceforth, the only revolutions conceivable to the media were those that were "color-coded" in advance, politically scripted by the US State Department, and then implemented by the affluent pro-capitalist sections of society.

This complacent and reactionary scenario has been exploded in Tunisia and Egypt. History has returned with a vengeance. What is presently unfolding in Cairo and throughout Egypt is revolution, the real thing. "The most indubitable feature of a revolution is the direct interference of the masses in historic events," wrote

Leon Trotsky, the foremost specialist on the subject. This definition of revolution applies completely to what is now happening in Egypt.

This revolution is only in its early stages. The class forces unleashed by the explosion are only beginning to define themselves in terms of distinct demands. Programs have hardly been formulated. Emerging from decades of repression, the working class has not yet formulated its own program. In these opening moments of the unfolding struggle, it could not be otherwise. Again, to quote Trotsky, "The masses go into a revolution not with a prepared plan of social reconstruction, but with a sharp feeling that they cannot endure the old regime... The fundamental political process of the revolution thus consists in the gradual comprehension by a class of the problems arising from the social crisis—the active orientation of the masses by a method of successive approximations."

As always in the opening stages of a revolutionary convulsion, the slogans that predominate are of a generally democratic character. The ruling elites, fearing the approach of the abyss, seek desperately to maintain what they can of the old order. Promises of "reform" slip easily from their lips. The upper layers of society desire change only to the extent that it does not threaten their wealth and social status. They ardently call for the "unity" of all democratic forces—under the political control, of course, of the representatives of the capitalist class. The personification of this "unity"—at least for the moment—is Mohamed ElBaradei.

However, the sort of democratic unity proposed by ElBaradei will offer nothing of substance to the working class, the rural poor and broad sections of the youth who have come out into the streets. The vital needs of the broad masses of Egyptian society cannot be realized without the most far-reaching overturn of existing property relations and the transfer of political power to the working class.

The *New York Times*, in one of its rare instances of political lucidity, called attention to the underlying social conflict in Egypt: “The widening chasm between rich and poor in Cairo has been one of the conspicuous aspects of city life over the last decade—and especially the last five years... But as the Mubarak administration has taken steps toward privatizing more government businesses, kicking off an economic boom for some, rich Egyptians have fled the city. They have flocked to gated communities full of big American-style homes around country clubs, and the remoteness of their lives from those of average Egyptians has become starkly visible.”

But is this state of affairs a purely Egyptian phenomenon? The *New York Times*’ description of the social chasm in Cairo could apply just as well to virtually every major city in the capitalist world, including the United States. Consider, for example, the situation in New York City. According to a recently released report of the Fiscal Policy Institute, the richest one percent of New York City residents received 44 percent of the total income paid to all residents.

Throughout the world social inequality has reached staggering proportions. Indeed, according to some reports, income inequality in the United States is greater than that which exists in Egypt and Tunisia. Moreover, throughout Europe and the United States, governments are demanding and implementing massive cuts in social expenditures. Ever-wider sections of the working class are falling into poverty.

The political regimes that exist in the advanced capitalist countries—though doubtlessly equipped with more sophisticated propaganda agencies—are as ossified and impervious to the discontent of the broad masses as the Egyptian government. Only last week, the president of the United States delivered a “State of the Union” address in which he failed to mention that nearly 10 percent of the country’s population is unemployed. For Mr. Obama, a more important indicator of the State of the Union is the “soaring” share values on Wall Street.

What is unfolding in the streets of Cairo, Alexandria and throughout the country is of world historical significance. The events in Egypt reveal the form that social change will take in every country, including the most advanced. We are witnessing in this ancient land the first stirrings of a new epoch of world socialist revolution.

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