

Israeli workers and the Egyptian revolution

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The Egyptian Revolution has sent shock waves throughout the Middle East. In the capitals of every Arab state, despotic rulers and corrupt governments are discussing how to prevent the spread of mass revolt emanating from Cairo. Nowhere are the implications of this popular upsurge of the Egyptian people feared more acutely than in the Israeli ruling class.

The Israeli government of Binyamin Netanyahu, the high command of the Israel Defense Forces and the Mossad intelligence agency all made clear their hostility to the movement against the regime of President Hosni Mubarak. They praised Mubarak as a guarantor of regional stability, invoking the danger of Islamic extremism to justify support for the regime—including practical assistance on taking down the Internet, and agreeing to the deployment of Egyptian troops in Sinai.

Mubarak's downfall was for them an occasion for unconcealed mourning. Zvi Mazel, Israel's former ambassador to Cairo warned *YNet*, "Israel is now facing a hostile situation. We may see a series of upheavals in the region now. Mubarak's downfall supports revolutionaries everywhere, from Yemen to Algeria."

The Israeli state is supporting the military regime led by Field Marshal Muhammad Sayyid Tantawi, insisting that no "hasty moves" be made towards elections. Meanwhile, it is preparing for war, including possibly with Egypt itself.

Retiring IDF Chief of Staff Gabi Ashkenazi gave the most revealing insight into the nature of these discussions. Speaking to participants at the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations in Jerusalem Monday, he said, "Mubarak, with all the criticism during the last three decades, was an anchor of stability in the region. We should admit it." Should a new regime rescind the 1979 peace agreement with Israel, "we have to be ready for that, and we have plans

for this situation," he added.

Speaking at a ceremony to hand over IDF command to Lt.-Gen. Benny Gantz, Ashkenazi told his successor, "I am handing you the book with the list of targets in the Gaza Strip."

The IDF is not just intent on targeting Gaza. Ashkenazi has publicly insisted that the IDF must be ready to fight different kinds of warfare simultaneously on several fronts. This strategy is described as a Revolution in Military Affairs, which centres on training for "classic conventional warfare." "It poses the biggest challenge, and from it we can make adaptations to other forms of warfare," he said.

Israel's response to the strivings of the Egyptian masses to throw off their shackles and secure democracy is to work with their military oppressors, while preparing for a possible war that would have devastating consequences for Arabs and Jews alike.

This is a devastating indictment of the Zionist project—of creating a state based upon religious exclusivity and the forcible expulsion and suppression of the Palestinians. From its inception, Israel was placed into conflict with its neighbours and made dependent on US imperialism for its survival.

The 1979 Camp David Accords normalised relations with the Egyptian regime and subsequently other Arab states. But it did not bring peace. Instead, the Israeli regime worked with the corrupt and increasingly sclerotic Mubarak regime to suppress opposition by the working class and oppressed masses in Egypt. This not only allowed Tel Aviv to pursue its military ambitions—extending its grip on Jerusalem and the West Bank through the brutalisation of the Palestinians, and waging repeated wars on Gaza and Lebanon—but to confuse social and political opposition in the Israeli working class.

For Israel's elite, cultivating a fear and hatred of the Arab masses is a policy of divide and rule—a vital

political tool in forestalling a political challenge from the working class. The creation of an illusion of national unity, of whipping up a siege mentality, is essential in concealing the real and widening conflict of interests between workers and their exploiters.

In reality, the deep class antagonisms that produced the revolt in Egypt are present in Israel, not just for the Palestinians and Arab Israelis but for Jewish workers as well. Israel is a social powder keg, characterized by growing social inequality and poverty. It is governed by a dozen families who control nearly half of the companies listed on the Tel Aviv stock exchange.

Wages are falling and there is acute social anger, which the trade union federation Histadrut is trying desperately to control. In seeking an agreement with Netanyahu, the chairman of Histadrut, Ofer Eini, urged him not to let Israel turn into Egypt. “We are not in Egypt,” he told Army Radio. “Let’s find a way together to help the citizens who cannot make ends meet... Make this country just slightly more social.”

There is no way for Israeli workers to combat the appalling social conditions they face, or of opposing the slide towards war, outside of a political rejection of the nationalist and chauvinist poison being spread by the ruling class. This includes its agencies such as Histadrut.

Responsibility for determining the future course of development of the Middle East now rests with the working class. There is a great deal of sympathy within Israel for the struggle being waged by the Egyptian working masses. But workers must go further, embracing the emerging revolutionary movement in Egypt and the rest of the region as their own, by making Arab-Jewish unity their strategic orientation.

Achieving such unity is the very opposite of endorsing official efforts to cultivate relations with the region’s despots, including support for Egypt’s de facto military junta. It means holding out the hand of friendship to the Arab working class and poor farmers by waging a joint struggle against their common oppressors—the Egyptian military regime and its backers in Tel Aviv.

The necessary political response in Israel to the revolutionary movement now emerging in Egypt is for workers and intellectuals in Israel to struggle to build a unified revolutionary movement of the working class on a socialist basis. Forming a political leadership of

such a movement means building an Israeli section of the International Committee of the Fourth International—fighting for the unification of the working class across national boundaries in the struggle for the United Socialist States of the Middle East and the world socialist revolution.

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