

Egypt's “second revolution”

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Demonstrations last Friday in Egypt were among the largest since the revolutionary movement of workers and youth forced out the longtime dictator Hosni Mubarak on February 11. Hundreds of thousands gathered in the capital of Cairo and other cities to denounce the policies of the military government established after Mubarak's downfall.

Among the slogans raised by the protesters was the call for a “second revolution.” Contained in this phrase is a critical understanding, namely that the fall of Mubarak three-and-a-half months ago has not solved the basic democratic and social aspirations of the mass protests.

On democratic rights, the military regime has kept in place the emergency laws, the abolition of which was a central demand of the revolution. In March, the military implemented a new law banning strikes or demonstrations that affect the economy. The military maintains a stranglehold on discussions over constitutional changes and will closely control any elections, if they are ever held.

Already, the military has brutally attacked youth demonstrators in Tahrir Square. Its methods of repression, however, are aimed at all sections of the working class, which was the basic social force that drove the Egyptian revolution. The strikes that erupted in the days leading up to February 11 continued and expanded afterwards, as workers sought to realize their demands for greater equality, improved wages, the reversal of privatizations and the democratic right to resist the dictates of the corporations. Recent weeks have seen an expansion of struggles, including factory workers and doctors.

In addition to repression from the state, the Egyptian working class now faces a deepening economic crisis. Unemployment has jumped to nearly 12 percent. The Egyptian ruling class will use mass joblessness to beat back demands for improved wages and conditions.

On foreign policy, the new government has maintained the cornerstone of the Egyptian state for decades: its alliance with the United States. The government has played a critical role in aiding the imperialist intervention

in neighboring Libya. As for Israel, the limited measures taken, such as the partial opening of the Rafah border crossing with Gaza, have been aimed at containing domestic opposition and preserving Egypt's strategic alliance with Israel.

The United States is playing a critical role in bolstering the military regime. For decades, the American government backed the Mubarak dictatorship, providing billions of dollars every year to finance the military-police apparatus. As demonstrations grew early in the year, the Obama administration first openly backed Mubarak, then worked behind the scenes to organize an “orderly transition” that would keep Mubarak in power for an extended period of time. Eventually forced to give up its client, the US is now working with the military to preserve its interests.

The US and the European powers are seeking to exploit the situation to open up the Egyptian economy even further to foreign penetration. It is this market liberalization that fueled the social inequality that helped produce the revolution in the first place.

In his speech on the Middle East earlier this month, Obama insisted that “America’s support for democracy” will be conditioned on “ensuring financial stability, promoting reform, and integrating competitive markets with each other and the global economy.” These are code words for breaking up nationalized industries and offering up the Egyptian working class for exploitation by transnational corporations. The G8 summit last week reiterated this point, linking paltry aid through the IMF and other institutions to “market reform.”

As the *World Socialist Web Site* warned on February 10, on the eve of Mubarak’s ouster, “The greatest danger confronting Egyptian workers is that, after providing the essential social force to wrest power from the hands of an aging dictator, nothing of substance will change except the names and faces of some of the leading personnel. In other words, the capitalist state will remain intact.”

New and explosive class conflicts are on the horizon. For these struggles to be successful, it is necessary to

draw the lessons of the first stage of the Egyptian revolution. The course of the revolution is another powerful confirmation of Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution, which holds that the democratic aspirations of the masses in an oppressed former colonial country like Egypt, and their liberation from imperialist domination, can be realized only through the conquest of political power by the working class on the basis of an internationalist and socialist program.

In the absence of an independent political program and party of the working class, the early stages of the revolution in Egypt have been dominated politically by the parties of the bourgeois "opposition." The essential role of the Muslim Brotherhood and the layers around Mohammed ElBaradei during the events of January and February, which initially developed outside of their control, was to act as a brake on the revolutionary strivings of the masses. They promoted illusions in the military as an "army of the people," the better to disarm workers and head off a decisive struggle against the regime.

This role has been continued after the downfall of Mubarak. The Muslim Brotherhood openly backs the military government, denouncing the protests of this past Friday while attacking "secularists and communists" for organizing them. As for ElBaradei, in the pre-revolutionary days he warned that "Egypt is about to explode," and that the "army must intervene to save the country." Now, he is raising warnings of "another revolution, the revolt of the poor." His aim is to counsel the United States and the military government as to the best way to head off such an uprising.

In the orbit of the official opposition forces are the various pseudo-left groups and "independent trade unions." Groups like the Revolutionary Socialists and the Egyptian Socialist Party in Egypt, along with their international allies, including the Socialist Workers Party in Britain and the International Socialist Organization in the US, promoted ElBaradei and the Muslim Brotherhood as progressive agents of change before the departure of Mubarak.

Now, these groups have come together on the basis of a common platform whose essential purpose is to prevent an independent socialist movement of the working class. Earlier this month, the various "left" groups in Egypt united to form the so-called Socialist Front, which proclaims its aim to "cooperate with all progressive and democratic powers to achieve common national goals." In other words, they will continue to work to subordinate the

working class to the bourgeois opposition.

The basic task facing the Egyptian workers is the building of a new revolutionary leadership, which aims to mobilize the working class in the struggle for power and put an end to capitalist rule. However, the struggles unfolding in Egypt cannot be successful within Egypt alone, and the lessons of Egypt are not only lessons for Egyptian workers.

Two-and-a-half years into the financial crisis that began in the fall of 2008, workers have begun to fight back on a mass scale. The ruling class and its political representatives are engaged in a worldwide drive to turn back the conditions of workers gained through struggle over generations. The war in Libya and the efforts of the US to bolster the military regime in Egypt are part of a global process that includes historic cuts in social programs in Europe and the United States.

The February events in Egypt and the uprisings in the Middle East and North Africa were the beginning of a working-class counteroffensive. They resonated powerfully throughout the world. They gave impetus to the struggles of workers in the US state of Wisconsin, only the beginning of the reemergence of American workers into open struggle. Now in Europe, workers and youth are demonstrating in the tens and hundreds of thousands against an historic attack on every gain won during the course of the 20th century. The European continent teeters on the edge of a new economic crisis, coinciding with clear signs of a new downturn in the world economy as a whole.

In each country and in every struggle, the basic task presents itself: the building of a new revolutionary leadership, the International Committee of the Fourth International.

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