

The Israeli protests and the reemergence of the working class

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Saturday's mass demonstration in the streets of Tel Aviv powerfully illustrates the fundamental feature of the developing international situation—the reemergence of the working class as the most important force in world politics. Called against low salaries and rising living costs, the march of over a quarter million working people was the largest social protest in Israel's history.

It came amid a new stock market crash that threatens to return the world economy to the conditions of slump that emerged following the financial meltdown of September 2008.

For weeks, tent cities have occupied Rothschild Boulevard in Tel Aviv, inspired in part by the mass protests in Cairo's Tahrir Square that led to the resignation of Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak. Doctors and public sector workers have mounted strikes to protest underfunding and poor working conditions. Israeli demonstrators carry signs written in both Hebrew and Arabic, some of them exhorting fellow protesters to "walk like an Egyptian."

The eruption of mass revolutionary struggles against US-backed dictatorships in Tunisia and Egypt has galvanized political opposition in the working class internationally. This has now spread to Israel, long presented as the homeland of the Jewish people. As the protests reveal, however, Israel has not provided a way forward for the Jewish people, but rather a garrison state that serves the interests of a bourgeois elite and oppresses both Jewish and Arab workers.

The ruling class tells Jewish workers their political duty is to prepare for fratricidal wars against their class brothers in the Israeli-occupied Palestinian territories, Lebanon, Syria, Egypt, Iran and beyond. As for Israeli Arabs, they are second-class citizens who are exploited, together with much of the Jewish working class, as

cheap labor. On this basis Israel has served as a key outpost of US imperialism.

The Israeli ruling elite has for years pursued free-market policies that enrich the country's 16 billionaires, who control roughly half the country's stock. Privatizations, corporate deregulation and the financial drain from Israel's military-industrial complex have bled the workers white. Since 2008, surging prices have devastated even better-off layers of the working class. House prices are up 55 percent, rent is up 27 percent, and prices for key food staples have surged 40 percent.

As protests continue to spread internationally, masses of people increasingly understand that class, not religion, nationality or ethnicity, is the central question of political life. The deepening exploitation of the working class—in Israel as well as in the United States and Europe—is objectively laying the basis for unified revolutionary struggles by the international proletariat.

The experience of the Egyptian revolution—which middle-class forces are trying to derail and defeat by negotiating agreements with the ruling military junta—is critical for Israeli workers. They cannot fight the causes of their oppression by seeking to pressure the ultra-right regime of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, any more than Egyptian workers can build democracy through appeals to the junta. The proletariat in Israel must build a new, politically independent movement fighting to bring down the Netanyahu government and implement socialist policies.

In contrast, Ofer Eini, the leader of the Histadrut trade union federation, says that although he may announce token strikes in support of the demonstrations, he has no intention of "bringing down the government." Eini is encouraging working people to rely on the tender mercies of Netanyahu and the 16-minister "dialog

team” that is being formed to negotiate with protesters.

What a fraud! In line with union bureaucrats and their pseudo-left allies throughout the Middle East, Eini is revealing himself to be an agent of the financial aristocracy, assigned the task of containing and defusing the struggles of the working class.

As secret US cables published by WikiLeaks and *Haaretz* show, Eini supports Netanyahu’s policies. In a May 2009 meeting with US diplomats, Eini said his approval of Netanyahu’s budget and economic policy was the “kosher seal” necessary to guarantee that the Knesset (the Israeli parliament) would approve it. US diplomats concluded that Eini is a “key power broker” in negotiating the right-wing measures to be imposed on Israel’s population.

The eruption of mass protests in Israel, shaking the government and demonstrating the possibility of uniting Jewish and Arab workers, will encourage workers all over the world to take the path of struggle and overcome all attempts to divide them along religious, ethnic or national lines.

The central question facing working people is how to turn this instinctive sentiment into a politically conscious and worked out strategy to defend their interests. The only perspective that provides a basis for this is the program of world socialist revolution, advanced only by the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI).

As struggles in Israel, Egypt and other Arab countries make clear, the conditions for a common struggle of the Middle Eastern proletariat are emerging amid a historic crisis of capitalism. In their struggles, Middle Eastern workers will find allies in the workers of Europe, America and Asia, who face draconian attacks on their living standards at the hands of financial parasites who have looted their countries for decades.

The critical issue is the building of a new revolutionary leadership in the working class and the establishment of new organizations of mass working-class struggle. The rising tide of workers’ protests is a powerful confirmation of the ICFI’s perspective. A section of the ICFI must be built in Israel to unite Jewish and Arab workers in the struggle for a Socialist Federation of the Middle East as part of the fight for world socialism.

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