

One year of the Egyptian Revolution

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One year ago today, millions of workers in cities throughout Egypt took to the streets on the first day of protests against President Hosni Mubarak. Energized by the overthrow of Tunisian President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali by working class protests eleven days before, Egyptian workers began eighteen days of revolutionary struggle that put an end to Mubarak's 30-year rule.

Despite assistance from US envoy Frank Wisner and police violence against protesters that cost some 840 lives, Mubarak stepped down in disgrace on February 11, handing power to a US-backed military junta. The governments in the US, Europe and Israel were stunned by the collapse of a valued ally, who for decades had helped strangle workers' opposition to poverty and the imperialist oppression of the Middle East.

The initial victory against Mubarak—20 years after the ruling classes had claimed that the Stalinist bureaucracy's liquidation of the USSR meant the “end of history” and the definitive triumph of capitalism over the class struggle and socialism—electrified the working class internationally. Celebrations and strikes for better wages and conditions continued for weeks in Egypt. Protests spread throughout the Middle East, ultimately including Israel, as well as to the US, where workers fighting Wisconsin Governor Scott Walker's social cuts vowed to “walk like an Egyptian.”

The initial victory set the stage for a year of wars and bitter class battles. One year on, despite the removal of Mubarak, the military dictatorship remains in place, imprisoning and torturing thousands and consigning masses of workers to poverty wages of \$2 per day. Notwithstanding its boundless courage and determination, the working class could not simply leap over the historic problems of political perspective, program, and leadership posed by a struggle to overthrow the Mubarak regime.

In the initial days of the revolution last February, the *World Socialist Web Site* explained: “The 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... Emerging from decades of repression, the working class has not yet formulated its own program. In these opening moments of unfolding struggle, it could not be otherwise.”

The International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) fought to articulate an independent political perspective for the working class, distinct from other class tendencies that emerged in the initial protest movement. Basing itself on Leon Trotsky's theory of Permanent Revolution, the ICFI sought to explain that the bourgeoisie and petty bourgeoisie, fearful of the working masses and dependent on imperialism, could not produce a democratic regime. Instead, democracy could come about only as a result of a revolutionary struggle for socialism, led by the working class, to place all the resources of the national and international economy under the control of the workers and oppressed masses.

The ICFI sought to clarify the deepening antagonisms between the workers and sections of other classes thrust into public life by the revolution: bourgeois layers—Islamist parties partially illegalized by Mubarak, sections of the liberal bourgeoisie backing Mohammed ElBaradei—and especially “left” sections of the affluent middle class.

The bourgeois parties sought to reach an accommodation with the military to rule Egypt. The middle-class “left,” such as Egypt's misnamed Revolutionary Socialists (RS) and their international co-thinkers, sought to work with Washington to manipulate and control popular protests—creating an “enlarged democratic space” under military rule in which they could prosper.

These forces gave a slightly “left” coloration to the propaganda claims of US imperialism: that Washington, by funding political groups and so-called

“independent” trade unions, was helping the Arab Spring protests to carry out a transition to democracy in the entire Middle East.

A critical feature of the past year was the deepening conflict between this reactionary layer and the revolutionary struggles of the working class. When in the spring, rising popular discontent with the army led to calls for a “second revolution,” the RS opposed this demand. Instead, they helped organize a united campaign of “opposition” parties, including ultra-right Islamist forces like Gamaa Islamiyah, alienating popular support and ultimately allowing the army to crush the renewed June-July protests in Tahrir Square.

Strikes grew again in the fall, exploding in late November just before Egypt’s parliamentary elections began, reflecting growing popular anger at a bogus “democratic transition” carried out under martial law. The elections, marked by indifferent voter turnout despite massive pro-election propaganda, handed the balance of power in parliament to the Islamists. This reflected not so much the Islamists’ role in the revolution, which was marginal, as the support they received from the middle-class parties and the financing they enjoyed from the ruling classes of Egypt and the Persian Gulf sheikhdoms.

Nonetheless, the RS is now pressing for a handover of power to a civilian regime that would be led by Islamist forces such as the Muslim Brotherhood and far-right Salafists.

Such a government, elected at bayonet point and hostile to the social aspirations that drove the workers into struggle against Mubarak, could be nothing other than a violently counter-revolutionary regime serving as a front for the army’s continued rule. Islamist officials recently claimed that the army “has the right to enjoy a special position in the upcoming constitution, more than in previous ones.”

The middle-class “left” is equally hostile to the interests of the working class outside Egypt. The RS and its international affiliates, such as Britain’s Socialist Workers Party (SWP) and France’s New Anti-Capitalist Party (NPA), claimed to oppose NATO intervention, but backed the pro-Western Transitional National Council (TNC), which served as a political cover for the NATO bombing campaign and infiltration of Western special forces and Arab military proxies. NATO seized upon this opening to begin a war

in Libya and a broad intervention throughout the Middle East.

In October, NATO-led forces finally toppled the Libyan regime in a war that cost at least 100,000 Libyan casualties, solidified Western corporate control of Libyan oil fields, and ended in Gaddafi’s murder. US imperialism went on to stoke a civil war in Syria and a military standoff with Iran in the Persian Gulf that threatens to explode in a devastating regional or even global war. World imperialism and its middle-class allies stand before the working class drenched in oil and blood.

Today, as the Egyptian junta considers a “partial” lifting of martial law for fear of a revolutionary explosion by the masses, the theory of Permanent Revolution stands vindicated by the watershed developments of 2011 in North Africa and the Middle East. US imperialism, the Egyptian bourgeoisie and their middle-class allies have failed to create democracy in the Middle East or answer the workers’ pressing social demands. The future belongs to the international working class and its continuing revolutionary struggle against capitalist oppression and imperialist war.

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