

The Egyptian revolution and the struggle for workers' power

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The weak popular response to calls for a strike last Saturday, the one-year anniversary of the resignation of US-backed dictator Hosni Mubarak, marks a turning point in the revolutionary struggle in Egypt. It poses the need for a conscious break by the working class with the petty-bourgeois layers that have politically dominated the protests against the military junta which replaced Mubarak, and the development of an independent struggle for the overthrow of the Egyptian bourgeoisie and establishment of a workers state.

In recent months, workers in Egypt have intensified their struggle for the removal of the junta. Before the November parliamentary elections, mass protests and street battles erupted throughout Egypt. On January 25, the one year anniversary of the Egyptian revolution, millions of workers took to the streets demanding a continuation of the revolution and the fall of the junta.

Saturday's general strike, on the other hand, was called by US-backed "independent" trade unions and petty-bourgeois "left" groups on a bankrupt, essentially pro-government perspective—pressuring the junta to cede somewhat more power to civilian officials.

A strike call issued by the misnamed Revolutionary Socialists (RS) called for "the resignation of [Prime Minister Kamal] Ganzoury's government" and "the immediate opening of nominations for the presidential elections." It denounced anyone not participating in the strike as a "coward."

The working class largely ignored the protests. Some thousands of students marched in their universities, but little industrial action took place.

This response in the working class signals an important development: millions of workers have begun to sense the class gulf separating them from the petty-bourgeois "left." While the petty-bourgeoisie wants to profit from a rearrangement of power within

the Egyptian political establishment, the working class strives to overthrow the regime.

This fundamental class antagonism has been present ever since the junta took power a year ago, as forces like the RS strained to contain and halt the revolution. They worked with the Islamists of the Muslim Brotherhood as well as Washington, opposing calls for a "second revolution" when mass protests against the junta erupted last spring. Their aim was to pressure the junta for an "enlarged democratic space" in which more affluent layers of the middle class could achieve a greater political voice and accumulate increased wealth.

This basic antagonism is now coming to the fore as it becomes ever more obvious that a civilian government formed under the junta would be a reactionary, anti-worker regime. Led by Islamist forces, who dominate parliament after elections held under martial law, it would be tasked with the suppression of the working class, working hand in hand with the military.

Only recently, Islamist members of parliament declared that the army "has the right to enjoy a special position in the upcoming constitution, more than in previous ones." Last Thursday, the deputy supreme guide of the Muslim Brotherhood, multi-millionaire tycoon Khairat El Shater, called for "the formation of a coalition government immediately, to deal in particular with the economic situation and the state of lawlessness in this homeland."

Behind such comments lies the realization in the ruling class that deeper class struggles are to come. Last week, Standard and Poor's downgraded Egypt's debt as its foreign currency reserves continued to plunge, and the entire Middle East stands on the edge of war as the United States, the European imperialist powers and their Middle Eastern allies intervene in Syria and threaten to attack Iran.

The central problem that has emerged in a year of bitter struggles is that the junta cannot be overthrown by sheer force of will. Workers need a political perspective and their own organizations of struggle in the factories and neighborhoods to replace the Egyptian bourgeois state with a state based on the working class.

The task of these organizations would be to coordinate the workers' struggles, developing in the course of these struggles into organs of political power. They would thus serve as the foundations of a government democratically controlled by the working class and fighting for socialist policies—the only viable perspective to end poverty, social inequality and the dictatorship of finance capital.

The classic example of this was the *soviets* (workers councils) that emerged in 1917 and overthrew the bourgeois provisional government in the October Revolution, bringing to power the Bolshevik Party of Vladimir Lenin and Leon Trotsky.

In the October revolution, the Bolshevik Party based itself on Trotsky's theory of Permanent Revolution, which holds that in a backward country such as Russia or Egypt only the working class, leading all of the oppressed sections of society, can put an end to dictatorship and poverty by taking power into its own hands and beginning to implement socialist policies, such as the nationalization of the corporations and the banks under the democratic control of the working people. Such a struggle can be carried out successfully only as part of a conscious fight to unite the working class throughout the Middle East and internationally against imperialism and the native ruling classes.

While the bourgeoisie and petty-bourgeoisie are politically and economically dependent on imperialism, the international working class is the only force able to place the national and world economy under the control of the workers and oppressed masses.

Only this international socialist perspective—which the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) has defended over decades against the betrayals of Marxism by Stalinism, social democracy and various renegades from Trotskyism—offers a way forward for the working class in Egypt. It is the basis for a powerful appeal to the class brothers of Egyptian workers in the Middle East, Europe, America and internationally for a common struggle against imperialism.

The critical question in this struggle is the formation of a new revolutionary party to provide the leadership and program through which the working class will establish its political independence from all sections of the bourgeoisie and petty-bourgeoisie. Workers in Egypt should make the decision to forge that leadership by building a section of the ICFI.

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