

The Egyptian coup

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16 June 2012

The military coup carried out by the ruling military junta before the run-off of the Egyptian presidential election is a serious threat to the Egyptian revolution and to the working class.

It has exposed the “democratic transition” promoted by the junta as a fraud. With the support of its imperialist allies in the US and Europe, the ruling Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) has eliminated all the institutions it initially created to give the illusion of a transition to democracy.

After the Supreme Constitutional Court (SCC) found the parliamentary electoral law unconstitutional on Thursday, SCAF dissolved the Islamist-dominated parliament. The junta tightened security in Cairo, and police and military forces took over the parliament on Friday, barring MPs from entering the building.

The junta also announced it would dissolve the constituent assembly elected by the parliament on Tuesday. It plans to issue a constitutional declaration, unilaterally determining the composition of the new assembly and outlining the powers of the new president.

Under these conditions, the run-off between Ahmed Shafiq, the last prime minister under Mubarak, and Mohammed Mursi, the candidate of the Islamist Muslim Brotherhood, is a travesty. The army clearly intends to control whatever powers the president will have. Either candidate, if elected, would be a SCAF figurehead, tasked with defending the political and economic interests of the military and suppressing any movement of the working class.

The SCAF junta is openly asserting its full control of Egyptian political life. It is seizing the legislative and budgetary powers it handed over to the Islamist-dominated parliament in January and taking over the drafting the constitution. Only one day before the coup, the junta issued a decree allowing the police, the military and state intelligence forces to arrest civilians.

These measures show that the “democratic transition” was a ruse to hide the army’s dominant role in defending the social privileges of the ruling elite—first and foremost, Egypt’s generals. The goal from the day of dictator Hosni Mubarak’s resignation was to defend Egyptian capitalism and imperialist rule in the Middle East against the threat posed by the most powerful revolutionary movement of the working class in decades.

With the coup, the generals are trying to create an atmosphere of unchallenged military authority and avoid a repetition of the situation in the early weeks of the revolution, when they felt they could not rely on the soldiers to obey orders to crush mass protests of the working class.

The main target of the coup is not the official political opposition—neither the Islamists, who dominated the dissolved parliament, nor the liberal and petty-bourgeois “left” groups—but the main force behind the Egyptian revolution: the proletariat.

The generals will deal ruthlessly with renewed strikes and protests by the working class. The coup sets the stage for a confrontation between the junta and the working class, which can defend itself only on the basis of a struggle to overthrow the junta and the capitalist class whose interests it serves.

The pseudo-left forces like the Socialist Popular Alliance (SPA), the Egyptian Socialist Party, the Communist Party of Egypt, and the Revolutionary Socialists (RS) stand exposed as tools of US imperialism and the junta. They insisted that workers could fight for the basic demands of the revolution within the framework of the institutions created by the junta. They opposed the development of a revolutionary struggle by the working class to overthrow the junta and fight for socialism.

After SCAF took power, they claimed, in the words of RS member Mustafa Omar, that Mubarak’s generals

would “reform the political and economic system, allowing it to become more democratic and less oppressive.” When the working class moved against SCAF and raised the popular demand for a “second revolution,” they opposed it.

Most of the pseudo-left parties signed the so-called “pledge document” presented to the presidential candidates, which swore allegiance to the 1971 Egyptian constitution and explicitly endorsed the army’s role in the country’s political life. These parties gave their imprimatur to the underpinnings of the junta’s rule only days before the coup.

To fight the counterrevolution, the working class must take the road of mass political struggle against the Egyptian capitalist state, in opposition to all attempts to conciliate with the coup plotters in the Egyptian army staff and their imperialist advisors. This entails a determined political struggle for Marxism to shatter the influence of the pseudo-left apologists for the junta’s “democratic transition.”

The military coup poses most clearly the question of state power. None of the demands that impelled the Egyptian working class onto the road of revolution in January last year—for political freedom, social equality, and an end to poverty—can be satisfied without smashing the power of the junta and replacing it with a state power controlled by the working class itself.

Events have vindicated the perspective of Permanent Revolution fought for by the Trotskyist movement, the International Committee of the Fourth International, which insists that basic democratic rights can be secured only through socialist revolution and the establishment of workers’ power, as part of the fight for the United Socialist States of the Middle East. These events have underscored that the central issue confronting the Egyptian working class is the building of a new, revolutionary leadership based on this perspective, i.e., an Egyptian section of the ICFI.

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