

Two years of the Egyptian Revolution

Johannes Stern
25 January 2013

Two years ago today, masses of workers and youth took to the streets in Egypt to protest against the regime of President Hosni Mubarak. Inspired by their Tunisian class brothers, who had overthrown President Zine Abedine Ben Ali only 11 days before, Egyptian workers and youth began a heroic struggle. They brought down one of the longest-ruling US-backed dictators in only 18 days.

The decisive role of the working class in toppling Mubarak was an unanswerable refutation of the pro-capitalist triumphalism about an “end of history” that prevailed after the Stalinist bureaucracy dissolved the USSR. It also dealt a shattering blow to fashionable post-modernist theories that deny the leading role of the working class in revolutionary struggle.

Mass strikes—stretching from the textile mills in the Nile Delta, to the Suez Canal, to factories run by the military, as well as the public sector—brought the country to a halt, forcing Mubarak to resign. The working class was the decisive force in toppling Mubarak, vividly confirming the *Communist Manifesto*’s assertion: “The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles.”

Two years later, the immense challenges posed to the working class by an age of explosive class struggles, wars and revolutions have become clearer. There was great sympathy and enthusiasm for the ouster of Mubarak internationally, with protests stretching from Israel and Europe to the United States. However, this could not by itself resolve what Leon Trotsky, the great Marxist opponent of Stalin, pointed to as the decisive feature of the present epoch in *The Transitional Program*: the historical crisis of leadership of the proletariat.

In the absence of a mass revolutionary party in the working class, the Egyptian bourgeoisie had a free hand in bringing the right-wing Muslim Brotherhood (MB) to power, with Mohamed Mursi as president, in order to

maintain the super-exploitation of the Egyptian workers and continue Cairo’s collaboration with US imperialism.

This process was facilitated by the politics of organizations representing the interests of affluent layers of the middle class—such as the Revolutionary Socialists (RS) in Egypt, the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) in Britain, the New Anti-capitalist Party (NPA) in France and the International Socialist Organization (ISO) in the US.

Terrified by the upsurge of the working class, all these forces reacted with a further shift to the right.

Within Egypt itself, the RS opposed any struggle based upon the independence of the working class and socialist policies. After initially backing the military junta, they promoted the right-wing MB to replace Mubarak’s dictatorship. The RS backed Mursi as the “revolutionary candidate” in the presidential elections, and RS leader Samah Naguib celebrated Mursi’s election as “a real victory for the Egyptian masses.”

The reactionary implications of these anti-socialist politics soon became apparent. While, like Mubarak, he imprisons and tortures workers and youth who protest his policies, Mursi is seeking a new deal with the IMF to prepare new attacks on the working class on a scale not even Mubarak dared to carry out. The working class now faces new struggles against plans to slash vital subsidies for bread, fuel and other key commodities on which the impoverished Egyptian population depends.

Internationally, the rightward trajectory of the affluent middle class layers was no less pronounced. The NPA, the ISO and the SWP all functioned as assistants of imperialism as it set out to impose neo-colonial shackles on the people of Africa and the Middle East by destroying any regime in the region that did not completely submit to its demands.

The pseudo-left groups cynically backed the sectarian proxy wars carried out against Libya and Syria by Al

Qaeda-type Islamist brigades assisted by US-NATO bombers and imperialist intelligence agencies, going so far as to promote them as revolutionary struggles for democracy and human rights.

The class character of these wars is symbolized by the major Western banks' decision to freeze hundreds of billions in Libyan oil money. By military force, the imperialists are essentially carrying out the same anti-working class agenda that the IMF and Mursi are pursuing in Egypt: the looting of society in the interest of finance capital.

These imperialist interventions represent a qualitative escalation by the Western powers of their counter-revolutionary strategy to pillage the whole region. France is currently expanding the imperialist war drive against its former colony, Mali, and the attempt to oust Syrian President Bashar al-Assad is part of wider imperialist war plans against Iran.

The eruption of counter-revolutionary imperialist violence against the working class, assisted by the Arab bourgeoisie and the pseudo-left tendencies, confirms the insistence of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) on a Marxist program for the working class.

Two years after the initial struggles of the Egyptian working class, the ICFI's defence of Trotsky's Theory of Permanent Revolution against the pseudo-left tendencies is entirely vindicated: only the international working class armed with a socialist perspective can lead the struggle against capitalism and imperialism.

After the fall of Mubarak, the *World Socialist Web Site* laid out its program for the working class:

“The continuation of the revolution and the fight for its interests is bringing the working class and oppressed masses into ever more direct conflict with the military, the official opposition, and US imperialism.

“To carry forward this struggle requires the building of independent organs of workers' democracy, in opposition to the military-police state, to lay the groundwork for a transfer of power to the working class. It requires the fight to unify the workers of Egypt with the working class of the entire region, along with workers in the advanced capitalist countries—above all the United States. The revolutionary uprising in Egypt is part of a global struggle of workers and oppressed around the world against a common assault of the corporate and financial elite.”

As the Egyptian revolution enters its third year, this internationalist and socialist perspective must guide the renewed mass struggles of the Egyptian and international working class.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact