

# The Egyptian Revolution and the crisis of revolutionary leadership

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Nearly two-and-a-half years after the ouster of long-time dictator Hosni Mubarak, Egyptian workers and youth are again taking to the streets in mass protests, this time demanding the ouster of Islamist President Mohamed Mursi and the Muslim Brotherhood.

The demonstrations which are now unfolding are amongst the largest in history. According to the Egyptian military, 17 million protesters took to the streets and squares on Sunday, the first anniversary of Mursi's inauguration.

After only one year in power, the reactionary character of the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) has been exposed before the Egyptian masses. Despite the attempt to cloak his right-wing program in Islamic demagoguery, Mursi's rule has witnessed ever-growing working class resistance. According to a report published by the Egyptian Center for Economic and Social Rights (ECESR), strikes and protests doubled under Mursi and increased sharply in the first quarter of 2013, with 2,400 protests or strikes.

In response, Mursi has sought to align himself more closely with US imperialism. In the weeks before the outbreak of mass protests, Mursi threw his support behind US imperialism's on-going proxy war in Syria, aimed at ousting President Bashar al-Assad and preparing for war against Iran. At a "Support for Syria" rally, Mursi declared that he would back a no-fly zone against Syria and "materially and morally" support the Western-backed Islamist opposition in Syria.

This has further inflamed popular hatred against his regime. As mass protests against Mursi's policies explode, the problem of revolutionary leadership emerges ever more urgently as the crucial question of the Egyptian Revolution.

The protests are politically dominated by the "Tamarod" ("rebel") platform, which is backed by various liberal, Islamist and pseudo-left parties and remnants of the Mubarak regime. It is supported by

Mohamed ElBaradei's National Salvation Front, the Islamist Strong Egypt Party, the April 6 Youth Movement, the misnamed Revolutionary Socialists and Ahmed Shafiq, the last prime minister under the Mubarak dictatorship.

"Tamarod" is calling upon the Egyptian army to replace Mursi with a "technocratic" government, which would be a pro-capitalist regime directly controlled by the Egyptian military. On Monday, "Tamarod" issued a statement calling upon all "state institutions including the army, the police and the judiciary to clearly side with the popular will as represented by the crowds."

For its part, the US-funded Egyptian military does not yet feel itself strong enough to directly suppress the protests. It therefore prefers to play the role of kingmaker and arbiter, working out its strategy in close coordination with the US. On Monday General Martin Dempsey, the chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff, reportedly spoke to his Egyptian counterpart, General Sedki Sobhi.

The very same day, the Egyptian Armed Forces issued a statement giving the political parties a 48-hour ultimatum "as a last chance to bear the historical burden that the nation is currently facing" to "reconcile and end the current crisis."

The all-party coalition envisioned by the military—bringing together the Muslim Brotherhood, the main liberal parties, former Mubarak officials and possibly some minor pseudo-left groups as a fig-leaf—would serve to delegitimize protests and give the military time to prepare a more violent crackdown.

These aims are shared by Washington. US imperialism is frightened by the prospect that the Egyptian working class will emerge in an open confrontation with the weakened Egyptian state, threatening to undermine the entire imperialist set-up in the Middle East—in which Egypt, with its deep ties to the US and Israel, plays a crucial role.

The struggles of the working class must find politically independent expression, breaking free from all the bourgeois parties, which have repeatedly frustrated its democratic and social aspirations.

The bitter experiences of the past revolutionary struggles have revealed that no faction of the Egyptian bourgeoisie—neither the military, nor the Islamists, nor the liberals led by ElBaradei—has anything to offer to the working class. Lacking any mass base, they rely entirely on support given to them by the imperialist powers. Underlying the bankruptcy of all existing political forces in Egypt is their defence of capitalist property, their ties to imperialism, and their defence of the bourgeois Egyptian state.

A clear revolutionary program can be developed only on a Marxist basis. Today this means the struggle for the theory of Permanent Revolution which, as Trotsky wrote, holds that “only the proletariat, allied with the poor peasants and urban poor, can solve the problems of society by taking power into its own hands, expropriating the imperialists and the bourgeoisie, and beginning the task of transforming society on socialist lines.”

In order to overthrow Egyptian capitalism and replace it with a workers’ government fighting for socialist policies, the working class must create its own genuine organs of working class struggle, modelled after the Soviets (workers councils) that laid the basis for the conquest for power by the working class in the October Revolution in 1917 in Russia.

The only political tendency defending and advancing such a perspective is the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI). Workers must take up the fight to build a section of the ICFI in Egypt, to link the Egyptian workers’ struggles with those of their class brothers and sisters in the Middle East and internationally, and to unite the working class in a common revolutionary struggle against dictatorship, capitalist exploitation and imperialist war.



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