

Convulsions in Egypt signal new era of world revolution

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This week's convulsive events in Egypt, culminating in the military coup that ousted President Mohamed Mursi, have immense significance for the working class all over the world.

The most striking feature of these events is the sheer scale of the outpouring of social opposition to Mursi's Islamist regime. The crowds flooding city centers numbered not in the tens or hundreds of thousands, but in the millions. Across the whole of the country, tens of millions participated.

"Together with the thoroughness of the historical action, the size of the mass whose action it is will therefore increase," wrote Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels in 1844 on the eve of the first great revolutionary struggles of the European working class (in 1848-49). The new "historical action" that is drawing tens of millions into struggle is the emerging international working class revolution against globally-integrated capitalism.

Recent years have seen mass strikes and protests worldwide—in European countries devastated by austerity such as Greece, Portugal and Spain; in industrial regions of Asia such as China and Bangladesh; in the Middle East, including mass working class protests in Israel; and more recently in Turkey and Brazil. The successive waves of mass struggles in Egypt are the most intense expression of an international process.

Claims that the collapse of the USSR in 1991 signified the end of history and the final triumph of liberal democracy are being exploded by the global economic crisis and the new upsurge of the working class. The Egyptian upheaval gives a sense of what is to come: the entry of hundreds of millions of workers and oppressed people into revolutionary struggles that will dwarf the revolutions of earlier periods.

The driving forces behind the upsurge in the class struggle are the contradictions of the world capitalist system. The problems driving workers into struggle in any given country are primarily of an international rather than a national character. The globalization of economic life within the constraints of capitalist private ownership of the means of production and the nation-state system has produced ever greater financial parasitism, social inequality, poverty, war and the breakdown of democracy.

These conditions are a historical verification of the characterization of the epoch provided by the greatest revolutionary figure of the 20th century, Leon Trotsky, who wrote of the "death agony of capitalism" in the founding program of the Fourth International, the *Transitional Program*. Writing in 1938, one year before the eruption of World War II, Trotsky explained that the objective preconditions for socialist revolution had matured. The historical crisis of mankind, he declared, "is reduced to the crisis of the revolutionary leadership."

At the time, Trotsky was writing against the Stalinist, social democratic and labor bureaucracies that devoted all their energies to blocking socialist revolution. The result of their betrayals was a series of devastating defeats of the working class, fascism and world war.

The mass struggles of today have once again brought to the fore the crisis of revolutionary leadership in the working class. The objective conditions for socialist revolution are emerging rapidly. But the problem of political leadership equal to the demands of a new revolutionary epoch remains to be solved.

In Egypt, mass uprisings have toppled individual rulers and destabilized the political elite, but they have not succeeded in overthrowing the military, ending capitalist exploitation and oppression, or putting an end

to the capitalist state.

Waves of mass mobilizations in Egypt ousted Mubarak in 2011, but there was no party that was prepared to lead a socialist revolution. Instead, there were bankrupt bourgeois parties tied to US imperialism and the austerity policies of the International Monetary Fund, and a swathe of petty-bourgeois pseudo-left parties based on the narcissistic perspectives of identity politics and hostile to any independent movement of the working class. None of these organizations had any popular program to address the needs of the masses, and so power fell into the hands of a military junta.

Mass opposition to the junta, spearheaded by the working class, mounted throughout 2011 and into 2012. But the bankruptcy of the bourgeois opposition and its pseudo-left appendages enabled the right-wing Muslim Brotherhood to take the initiative and capture state power. The misnamed Revolutionary Socialists hailed the Brotherhood's triumph in the June 2012 elections as a victory for the revolution.

Only one year later, a mass nationwide movement, going far beyond Tahrir Square, emerged in opposition to the Brotherhood and President Mursi, whose regime was no less dictatorial than that of the junta. In the absence of a revolutionary working class party, however, the military and the bourgeois and petty-bourgeois parties, in a series of frantic negotiations, agreed on the ouster of Mursi and the formation of a new junta, fronted by a coalition of bourgeois figures. This was a pre-emptive strike against the emergence of a revolutionary movement of the working class.

Feeling itself too weak to launch a direct assault on the masses in revolt, the army is working behind the façade of a coalition to prepare a war of attrition against the working class. While it prepares for mass repression, it will seek to wear down opposition in the working class to social austerity policies and the Egyptian army's collaboration with US imperialism. It is not difficult to predict that masses of Egyptian workers and urban and rural poor are headed for a new confrontation with this ramshackle regime.

The lessons of these critical experiences must be drawn not only in Egypt, but throughout the world. In the struggle to develop a genuine revolutionary leadership in the working class, basing itself on the historical lessons of the 20th century and the opening years of the 21st century, certain basic conceptions of

Trotsky's Theory of Permanent Revolution must be stressed:

* There is no country in the world, least of all the oppressed ex-colonial countries, where any section of the capitalist class or its political representatives has a progressive role to play.

* The fundamental revolutionary force in all countries is the working class, which alone can fight without compromise to implement and defend a democratic program. The fight for democracy merges with the revolutionary struggle for socialism and workers' power.

* The struggle in any country must be guided by an international strategy. For the Egyptian workers, revolution can be victorious only to the extent that it draws the working class of the entire Middle East, including the Israeli proletariat, into a common struggle against regional ruling elites and their puppet masters in the United States and Europe.

Imperialism will stop at nothing to impose its will on the masses of the Middle East. The bloody wars launched in Libya and Syria in the aftermath of the outbreak of revolution in Egypt are a warning. The alternatives are either socialist revolution or a new carve-up of the Middle East by the imperialist powers and the enslavement of the working class.

The implementation of a socialist strategy is inconceivable without the formation in the Middle East and internationally of new Marxist working class parties based on the Trotskyist perspective of Permanent Revolution.



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