

The Egyptian coup and the tasks facing the working class

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The July 3 military coup in Egypt and the subsequent repression have starkly revealed the principal problem facing the working class internationally: the crisis of revolutionary leadership.

More than two years after the upheavals that forced out longtime US-backed dictator Hosni Mubarak, the military—headed by its US-educated commander, General Abdel Fatah al-Sisi—is seeking to restore the political setup that existed prior to February 2011.

Following the ousting four weeks ago of Muslim Brotherhood (MB) President Mohamed Mursi, the military is moving ruthlessly to reestablish the apparatus of terror. Hundreds of Mursi supporters have been slaughtered in cold blood and thousands have been jailed.

As the *Wall Street Journal* noted in an article published Monday, “Egypt’s interim civilian government moved toward reviving the police state that characterized the widely hated regime of longtime former President Hosni Mubarak. On Sunday, the government granted soldiers the right to arrest civilians, reviving sections of an emergency law under Mr. Mubarak. A day earlier, Interior Minister Mohammed Ibrahim said he planned to reconstitute a secret police unit that was responsible for decades of oppression under Mr. Mubarak.”

While the immediate focus of the repression is the MB and its supporters, the ultimate target is the working class.

What is the significance of the counterrevolutionary coup, and where do we stand in the development of the Egyptian revolution?

The Egyptian revolution is not a one-off event. Like all great revolutions, especially those so profoundly rooted in complex national and international processes, it unfolds not only over weeks and months, but over

years. A revolution is a field of battle in which successive political forces come to the fore and reveal the class interests they represent.

From this standpoint, the events of June-July 2013 represent not the end of the revolution, but only of its initial stages.

In the initial period of the revolution, diverse social and political forces rallied around the demand for the removal of Mubarak. Everyone claimed to be on the side of democracy and the masses—liberal-minded businessmen such as Google Middle East manager Wael Ghoneim; bourgeois politicians such as former UN official Mohamed ElBaradei; members of the MB, the biggest but officially banned opposition group under Mubarak; representatives of the affluent middle class; and even the military itself.

The working class was not yet conscious of the vast class gulf that separated it from these forces. In the course of the revolution, however, the political factions of the Egyptian ruling elite have been weighed and tested.

First, the military junta that took power after Mubarak’s ouster was exposed as a counterrevolutionary force that wanted to preserve as much as possible of the old order. It quickly banned strikes, cracked down on protests, continued the torture tactics of the Mubarak era and sentenced thousands of civilians in military trials.

The exposure of the military was followed by the exposure of the MB, the main organized political opposition under the Mubarak regime. The MB sought to reshuffle the ruling personnel and called for modifying Egypt’s legal and political institutions to secure a greater share of political power for itself and those sections of the Egyptian bourgeoisie for which it spoke. However, it defended the same basic class

interests as the military.

The MB government continued the anti-working class, pro-imperialist policies of the previous regimes. Soon after his election, Mursi entered into talks with the International Monetary Fund to further liberalize the Egyptian economy along free market lines and cut vital bread and fuel subsidies. Above all, he continued to defend the interests of US imperialism in the region, most prominently the US-led proxy war in Syria.

Then came the mass struggles that exploded against Mursi and the Muslim Brotherhood, culminating in the protests involving millions of people on June 30 of this year. Petrified by the radicalization of the working class since 2011 and the specter of proletarian revolution, the military intervened directly. The coup was supported by the bourgeois and middle class groups that had sought to put themselves forward as “the real revolutionaries” and a “democratic” alternative to the Mubarak and Mursi regimes.

Included in the new military-backed government are figures such as ElBaradei and the president of the US-backed Egyptian Federation of Independent Trade Unions, Kamal Abu Eita.

The most corrupt and rotten of the groups lining up behind the military is the Revolutionary Socialists (RS), which hailed the military coup as a “second revolution.” In each stage of the revolution, the RS, speaking on behalf of more privileged sections of the upper-middle class, sought to block an independent political movement of the working class by subordinating it to the Egyptian bourgeoisie—first the military, then the MB, then the military once again.

Underlying the political bankruptcy of all these forces is the fact that none could implement a program to solve the problems facing the Egyptian masses: the dominance of imperialism in the Middle East, mass poverty, and the absence of democracy. All the forces of the Egyptian bourgeoisie and privileged middle classes defend capitalist property relations and are tied to imperialism and international finance capital. They are organically hostile to the interests of the working class—the driving force behind the Egyptian revolution—and far prefer a military dictatorship to a social revolution of the working class.

The counterrevolutionary coup of June-July 2013 is no doubt a defeat for the masses. Yet, while the military, its imperialist backers, the liberals and the

pseudo-left may hope the revolution is over, the working class will have its say on the matter.

From the beginning, the Egyptian Revolution has been driven by deep objective processes: first, the explosive contradictions in Egypt itself and throughout the Middle East. These contradictions are themselves inextricably tied to and intensified by the crisis of the world capitalist system.

The entire course of the revolution has confirmed the basic conceptions of Trotsky’s Theory of Permanent Revolution—that there is no faction of the capitalist class or its political representatives capable of playing a progressive role; that only the working class can implement a democratic program as part of a fight for socialism and workers’ power; and that the victory of the revolution in any single country is possible only on the basis of an international strategy to unite the world working class.

The fight for this program raises the central problem of political leadership. The new epoch of world socialist revolution that is anticipated by the convulsive events in Egypt requires new mass revolutionary parties of the working class. This means the building of sections of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) in Egypt and internationally.



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