

Five years of the Egyptian Revolution

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Five years after the eruption of mass revolutionary struggles in Egypt that led to the ouster of long-time dictator Hosni Mubarak, the counterrevolutionary military junta headed by General Abdel Fatah al-Sisi fears another social explosion.

In the lead-up to today's anniversary of the Egyptian Revolution, the regime intensified its brutal crackdown against workers and youth. According to the Associated Press, police raided 5,000 apartments in downtown Cairo in recent days as a "precautionary measure" to ensure that Egyptians do not return to the streets. Throughout the country, hundreds of thousands of heavily armed security officers, police and soldiers will be deployed.

In a rare show of political insight, the *New York Times* pointed to the underlying social conditions that once again threaten to drive the Egyptian masses into struggle. "The sense of panic has been attributed to concerns that the public is losing patience with the government amid high unemployment, rising prices and a persistent militant insurgency that, among other things, has devastated Egypt's tourism industry," the newspaper wrote.

It added: "But those factors alone were not sufficient to explain the overheated response... From the perspective of the security services, the date—Jan. 25—was itself a danger, as a reminder of their catastrophic, if momentary, loss of control."

Al-Sisi, a US-trained general and former head of Mubarak's military intelligence service, has ruled Egypt with an iron fist since he took power in a bloody coup against the elected president, Mohamed Mursi, and the Muslim Brotherhood in July 2013. On Saturday, he delivered a threatening speech at the police academy in Cairo. Marking Egypt's National Police Day, al-Sisi hailed the security forces that have been killing and torturing people by the thousands, and asked "all Egyptians, for the sake of the martyrs and the blood, to take care of their country."

Obviously shaken by the events in Tunisia, where renewed mass protests erupted last week and a nationwide state of emergency was declared on Friday, al-Sisi issued the very same threat to the Tunisian masses, who had toppled Tunisian autocrat Zine El Abidine Ben Ali only weeks before Mubarak's ouster in February of 2011. "I do not mean to interfere in the internal affairs of our neighbouring country Tunisia," he declared, "but I call on all Tunisians to take care of their country."

According to *Al-Ahram*, Egyptian ~~the~~ daily warned that "the economic situation all over the world is 'deteriorating' and that no nation could endure any more unrest."

Al-Sisi and his bloody regime are terrorizing all opposition and seeking to rewrite the history of the Egyptian revolution. The Egyptian state media are portraying the revolution as a foreign plot aimed at undermining and destabilizing the great Egyptian nation. Nevertheless, the memory of the historic 18-day uprising that inspired workers and youth all over the world will not be erased so easily.

The Egyptian Revolution, following the mass upheaval in Tunisia, represented without question the resurgence of revolutionary struggle. It was a harbinger of growing struggles by the working class internationally. In its immediate aftermath, workers and youth around the world—including workers in Wisconsin who carried signs with the slogan "Walk Like an Egyptian" in protests against the hated governor Scott "Hosni" Walker—were stirred by the monumental struggles in Egypt.

On January 25, 2011, tens of thousands for the first time took to the streets in Cairo and other important cities such as Suez. Despite ruthless repression by the US-backed dictatorship, even more turned out on January 28, the so-called "Friday of Anger," to engage in pitched battles against Mubarak's notorious antiriot police. In the ensuing days, millions took to streets all over Egypt. Cairo's Tahrir Square was occupied and became the symbol of the Egyptian Revolution.

As always in a revolution, the efforts of the besieged regime to intimidate protesters only sparked greater resistance. Following the infamous "Battle of the Camels" on February 2, when Mubarak's thugs attacked workers and youth on Tahrir Square, ever greater numbers of people entered the square to defy the dictator, whom the imperialist powers sought to defend till the last.

As dramatic as the events on Tahrir Square were, even more important was the intervention of the working class, which dealt the final blow to Mubarak on February 11. The wave of strikes and occupations sweeping factories all across Egypt both before and after Mubarak's ouster had been prepared over many years by the Egyptian working class.

Especially after 2005, strikes and protests had increased dramatically. What began on January 25 was in many respects

the culmination of a long period of anger and resistance building up among Egyptian workers against social cuts, privatizations and the looting of state funds by a criminal and corrupt ruling elite.

In the wake of Mubarak's ouster, the working class emerged even more powerfully as the decisive revolutionary force. In the days immediately following the fall of the dictator, there were between 40 and 60 strikes per day, and in February 2011 alone there were as many strikes as during all of 2010.

Strike action continued to escalate in the ensuing years despite the repressive measures adopted by the regime. According to a report by the Egyptian Centre for Social and Economic Rights (ECESR), 3,817 strikes and social protests took place in 2012, a higher figure than all the protests recorded by the ECESR between 2000 and 2010. From January to May 2013, the Egyptian Centre for International Development counted 5,544 strikes and social protests.

After 30 years of the Washington-backed Mubarak dictatorship, this represented an immensely significant upsurge of the working class with vast international repercussions. However, from the start of the revolution, the basic problem of the Egyptian working class was and remained the absence of political leadership.

The day before Mubarak's ouster, the chairman of the *World Socialist Web Site* International Editorial Board, David North, warned in a Perspective column that "the greatest danger confronting Egyptian workers is that, after providing the essential social force to wrest power from the hands of an aging dictator, nothing of political substance will change except the names and faces of some of the leading personnel."

The article continued: "In other words, the capitalist state will remain intact. Political power and control over economic life will remain in the hands of the Egyptian capitalists, backed by the military, and their imperialist overlords in Europe and North America. Promises of democracy and social reform will be repudiated at the first opportunity, and a new regime of savage repression will be instituted.

"These dangers are not exaggerated. The entire history of revolutionary struggle in the Twentieth Century proves that the struggle for democracy and for the liberation of countries oppressed by imperialism can be achieved, as Leon Trotsky insisted in his theory of permanent revolution, only by the conquest of power by the working class on the basis of an internationalist and socialist program."

The basic problem of the Egyptian Revolution was to establish the political independence of the working class from all of the different bourgeois forces. That meant overcoming illusions in the supposedly "progressive" character of the military led by Mubarak's generals and rejecting any adaptation to the bourgeois Muslim Brotherhood or so-called "liberal" bourgeois movements such as Mohamed El Baradei's National Association for Change.

In this situation, the petty-bourgeois pseudo-left played a

sinister and thoroughly reactionary role. It is beyond the scope of this commentary to analyse in detail all the twists and turns in the policies of the Revolutionary Socialists (RS) grouping and similar outfits, which never represented anything more than the outlook of reactionary and affluent middle-class layers and the machinations of the US State Department.

Initially, the RS claimed that the SCAF military junta led by Tantawi, which replaced Mubarak, would grant social and democratic reforms to the Egyptian workers. Then, as working class opposition to the military mounted throughout 2011, the RS promoted the Muslim Brotherhood as "the right wing of the revolution," and in 2012 hailed Mursi's election as "a victory for the revolution."

When working-class opposition to Mursi and the Muslim Brotherhood rose in 2013, the RS promoted the pro-military Tamarod campaign as "a road to complete the revolution." It thus helped pave the way for the July 3, 2013 military coup (which the RS initially welcomed as a "second revolution") and the counterrevolutionary terror that has gripped Egypt ever since. Now, driven by the fear that the junta's repression could spark a new revolutionary explosion in the working class, the RS is seeking to renew its alliance with the Muslim Brotherhood.

With the emergence of new stirrings of working-class opposition both in Egypt and internationally, basic lessons have to be learned. The fundamental question is the building of a revolutionary party on the basis of Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution. Only on this basis can the unequivocal political independence of the working class from the bourgeoisie and its allies in the middle class be established and an internationalist socialist program elaborated. The International Committee of the Fourth International sees as one of its fundamental tasks in the coming period the construction of such a party, as a section of the international movement, in Egypt.



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