

The freeing of Hosni Mubarak and the lessons of the Egyptian Revolution

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25 March 2017

Former Egyptian dictator Hosni Mubarak was officially released from prison yesterday. His lawyer provocatively informed the public that the 88-year-old had left the military hospital in the Cairo district of Maadi and had breakfast at his family's home in the east of the Egyptian capital with some friends.

The ruling of the court of appeals is final. In early March, Egypt's supreme court cleared Mubarak of any responsibility in the deaths of 800 demonstrators who were killed by his security forces in the first days of the Egyptian revolution. Before Mubarak was ousted on February 11, 2011, after 18 days of mass protests, he had ruled the country with an iron fist with the full support of the imperialist powers for thirty years.

The freeing of Mubarak is symbolic of the counterrevolution that has developed since the bloody military coup of July 3, 2013 against Islamist president Mohammed Mursi of the Muslim Brotherhood. Less than four years later, the new military rulers in Cairo, with the encouragement of the Western powers, have fully rehabilitated their former leader and are suppressing the Egyptian masses with even more brutal methods.

The junta led by the US-trained General Abdel Fatah al-Sisi has incarcerated more than 40,000 opponents of the regime and condemned more than 1,000 to death. Shortly after the coup, according to Human Rights Watch, the "worst incident of extrajudicial mass killings in Egypt's modern history" took place. The army and police stormed two protest camps set up by regime opponents and killed over 1,000 people, including women and children.

How is it possible that six years after the Egyptian revolution nothing appears left of it, and Mubarak, the ugly face of the old regime, is once again free to show himself in public? Who bears political responsibility for this, and what are the political lessons for the coming class conflicts?

The key to answering these decisive questions, which

confront the working class in Egypt and internationally, is to be found in a study of the Russian revolution. In his lecture "Why study the Russian Revolution?," David North, chairman of the *World Socialist Web Site* International Editorial Board, explained the decisive precondition for the victory of the working class:

"The movement of the Russian working class, supported by a revolutionary uprising of the peasantry, assumed gigantic dimensions in 1917. But no realistic reading of the events of that year permits the conclusion that the working class would have come to power without the leadership provided by the Bolshevik Party. Drawing the essential lesson of this experience, Trotsky later insisted: 'The role and the responsibility of the leadership [of the working class] in a revolutionary epoch is colossal.' This conclusion remains as valid in the present historical situation as it was in 1917."

The Egyptian revolution was without doubt a gigantic uprising, and the working class was its driving force. On January 25, 2011, tens of thousands of people flooded the streets of Cairo and other major industrial cities. On January 28, the "Friday of anger," ever-growing numbers of demonstrators beat back Mubarak's notorious security forces in street battles. In the days that followed, millions demonstrated throughout Egypt. On February 7 and 8, a wave of strikes and factory occupations, which broke out across the entire country, delivered the decisive blow to Mubarak.

The working class continued to develop as the decisive revolutionary force after February 11. In the days immediately following Mubarak's overthrow, there were between 40 and 60 strikes per day. More strikes occurred in February than in all of 2010. Strikes and social protests continued to increase during 2012 and 2013. However, what was missing in Egypt, unlike Russia, was a political leadership with a revolutionary program.

The WSWS warned workers from the outset of the

revolution against any illusions in the democratic character of the bourgeoisie. David North wrote in a February 1, 2011, perspective: “As always in the opening stages of a revolutionary convulsion, the slogans that predominate are of a generally democratic character. The ruling elites, fearing the approach of the abyss, seek desperately to maintain what they can of the old order. Promises of ‘reform’ slip easily from their lips...

“However, the sort of democratic unity proposed [...] will offer nothing of substance to the working class, the rural poor and broad sections of the youth who have come out into the streets. The vital needs of the broad masses of Egyptian society cannot be realized without the most far-reaching overturn of existing property relations and the transfer of political power to the working class.”

The strategic perspective that guided the Russian working class’s seizure of power in October 1917 was the Theory of Permanent Revolution developed by Leon Trotsky. It stated that in countries with a belated capitalist development, the democratic revolution could only be realized through the conquest of power by the working class and as a product of the socialist revolution. And it further stated that the victory of a revolution in one country was only possible based on an international strategy to unite workers around the globe.

The Egyptian revolution confirmed the perspective of permanent revolution in the negative. Every section of the bourgeoisie proved itself to be a counterrevolutionary force at every stage of the revolution by collaborating with imperialism and defending the same essential class interests as the military. This applies equally to the now outlawed Muslim Brotherhood as well as “liberal” bourgeois parties. Examples of this are Mohammed El Baradei’s National Association for Change or the Nasserite Popular Current of Hamdeen Sabahi.

The most treacherous role was played by petty-bourgeois pseudo-left groups like the Revolutionary Socialists (RS), which is aligned internationally with the International Socialist Organization in the United States, the Socialist Workers Party in Britain and sections of the German Left Party. In every phase of the revolution, they worked to subordinate the working class to one or another faction of the bourgeoisie.

Immediately following Mubarak’s overthrow, they boosted illusions in his generals and claimed that the military, under the leadership of Mohamed Tantawi, would implement social and democratic reforms. As mass opposition to the military increased, they backed the Muslim Brotherhood. RS proclaimed the Islamists to be

the “right-wing of the revolution” and called for the election of Mursi in the presidential election. When Mursi won, they celebrated this as a “victory for the revolution” and a “great success against the counterrevolution.”

When mass protests then broke out against Mursi in 2013, the RS swung back behind the military. They described the Tamarod alliance, which was financed by the military and intelligence services, as the “road to the accomplishment of the revolution.” The military coup, which was the basis for al-Sisi’s counterrevolutionary regime of terror, was described initially by them as a “second revolution.”

RS now fears that the junta’s repression and the mounting social catastrophe could provoke a new revolutionary upsurge of the workers. In a recent statement, RS declares, “We need to rebuild the social and political opposition to the regime and its policies, through political organizations, workers’ unions, youth and student organizations and political fronts that can unite the forces of the 25 January revolution.”

In other words, they are persisting with their disastrous policies, subordinating the working class to “unity” with the parties and organizations of the bourgeoisie.

The key question of the Egyptian revolution remains the construction of an Egyptian section of the International Committee of the Fourth International and the anchoring of the perspective of permanent revolution in the Egyptian working class. The study of the Russian Revolution must serve as the preparation of revolutionary struggles by the working class in Egypt and around the world.

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