

Sisi's sham election and the fate of the Egyptian Revolution

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Polls closed Wednesday in Egypt's three-day sham election convened by the US-backed dictatorship of General Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, who seized power in a bloody 2013 coup.

While official results have yet to be released, the outcome was never in doubt. Sisi is reported to have won over 90 percent of the vote, with his lone opponent, the little known pro-regime politician Moussa Mostafa Moussa receiving barely 3 percent.

Moussa had publicly supported Sisi's reelection until he was drafted to run in a bid to lend the electoral farce a veneer of legitimacy. Prospective candidates that could have mounted a genuine challenge to Sisi, including leading figures within the Egyptian armed forces, were threatened, intimidated and, in at least one case, jailed to prevent them from running.

While the dictator received virtually all the votes cast, the turnout in the election was significantly lower than in the last such vote, held in 2014. While the government claimed that it expected it to top 40 percent, other sources indicated that it was likely closer to 30 percent, with younger people staying away in droves. By all accounts, less than 25 million of the 60 million registered voters turned out.

Polls were largely empty on Wednesday, the third day of balloting, as the regime staged an extraordinary campaign to threaten and bribe voters into casting ballots. Government officials threatened to impose fines on registered voters who failed to vote, and employers bused their workers to the polls and, in some cases, threatened to fire those who did not cast ballots. On the other hand, sound trucks were sent into poorer neighborhoods promising cash payments and food rations for those who voted. In some areas, officials promised to carry out public works projects in districts with a turnout topping 40 percent.

The mass abstention of Egyptian voters under these conditions is a reflection of the seething anger and hatred among broad sections of the population toward the regime.

Since coming to power four years ago, Sisi has carried out savage police-state measures. The Egyptian general consolidated power through the overthrow of the elected president backed by the Muslim Brotherhood, Mohamed Mursi, and the massacre of more than 1,600 of his followers on the streets of Cairo in 2013.

Since then, some 60,000 people have been rounded up and imprisoned for political reasons. Thousands have been forcibly disappeared, and torture is rampant in the regime's jails. Oppositional websites have been shut down, including alternative media, and the major media have been thoroughly intimidated into echoing official propaganda.

Repression today is worse than it was under the 30-year, US-backed dictatorship of Hosni Mubarak, which was overthrown by the mass uprising of the Egyptian working class in February 2011.

Meanwhile, Sisi's dictatorship has implemented sweeping "reforms" to meet conditions imposed under a \$12 billion International Monetary Fund agreement signed in 2016.

Big business—including the army, which controls up to 40 percent of Egypt's economy—has seen its profits rise, while the working class has suffered a severe cut in its living standards as a result of currency devaluations, inflation, cuts in subsidies and increased taxes. Some 40 percent of Egypt's nearly 100 million people are forced to live on less than \$2 a day, while unemployment remains rampant, particularly for the youth. According to official statistics, 26.7 percent of people aged 18-29 are unemployed; the real figure is no doubt far higher.

The same US officials who denounced the recent Russian elections as illegitimate and condemned a planned vote in Venezuela as a sham before it has been held, have cast a benevolent eye on the rigged vote in Egypt.

On Monday, the US Embassy in Cairo tweeted a photo of Chargé d'Affaires Thomas Goldberger at a polling station along with the message: "As Americans we are very impressed by the enthusiasm and patriotism of Egyptian voters."

And in Washington on Tuesday, the State Department spokesperson affirmed US support for a "transparent and credible election process" in Egypt, while declining to comment on the character of the corrupt and contemptible process actually unfolding in the country on the grounds that it had yet to be completed.

US imperialism fully backs the Sisi regime, continuing to supply it with \$1.3 billion in military aid annually, an amount that is second only to that given to Israel. Token human rights and democratization conditions placed upon this aid by Congress are routinely brushed aside in the name of national

security, with no protest from either Democrats or Republicans. While justified in the name of the “war on terror,” the US arms are themselves being utilized in a reign of terror against the Egyptian people.

That Washington backs Sisi, while at the same time waged bloody wars for regime change in Libya and Syria in the name of “human rights” and “democracy,” exposes not only US imperialism’s hypocrisy, but its counterrevolutionary strategy throughout the Middle East.

Both the US backing for Sisi’s coup and its military interventions in Libya and Syria were aimed at crushing the revolutionary upheavals that shook the region in 2011 in what was dubbed the “Arab Spring,” while furthering the drive to impose the undisputed hegemony of American imperialism over this oil-rich and strategically vital region.

The counterrevolutionary plans of Washington’s strategists, however, are inevitably running up against a resurgence of class struggle throughout the region. The past months have seen mass protests in Tunisia and Iran, as well as strikes by doctors and teachers in Algeria. The simmering discontent of the Egyptian working class will inevitably erupt once again into revolutionary struggle.

This threat was indicated by *Der Spiegel* in Germany, whose government has also backed Sisi. “Police arbitrariness, rising food prices, youth unemployment and a president increasingly losing contact with the people—all these factors that triggered the uprising against Mubarak seven years ago are once again present in Egypt,” the magazine warns. “Therefore, the [German] federal government should not be blinded by Sisi’s promise of stability, but look closely, at what happens in Cairo.”

It is vital under these conditions that the lessons of the betrayal of the Egyptian Revolution of 2011 and the broader upheavals throughout the region be studied and assimilated by class-conscious workers and youth coming into struggle.

The mass demonstrations—and, above all, the mass strikes of the Egyptian working class—were able to topple the US-backed dictator and shake the country’s political establishment to its foundations. However, without establishing its political independence and without a revolutionary party to lead it, the Egyptian working class was not able to overthrow the capitalist state and lay the foundations for achieving its social and democratic aims by ending capitalist exploitation and imperialist oppression.

Again and again, the Egyptian national bourgeoisie, with the backing of its imperialist patrons, sought to throw up replacements for Mubarak with the aim of subordinating the working class to capitalist rule and imperialist domination. In this operation, it enjoyed the politically critical collaboration of the pseudo-left representatives of privileged layers of the Egyptian middle class organized in the Revolutionary Socialist (RS) group.

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in the US, the Socialist Workers Party in Britain and elements of the Left Party in Germany, the RS, in each phase of the revolution, worked to channel the revolutionary striving of the Egyptian workers behind one or another faction of the bourgeoisie, first promoting illusions in the military, then backing the Muslim Brotherhood as “the right wing of the revolution” and, as popular opposition to the Mursi government grew, aligning itself once again with the generals and hailing Sisi’s coup as a “second revolution.”

The bitter lesson for the working class in Egypt and workers throughout the world is that the victory of the revolution is impossible outside of establishing the political independence of the working class, in opposition to every faction of the bourgeoisie and their accomplices among the pseudo-left forces in the middle class, who are hostile to a social revolution.

The outcome of the Egyptian Revolution confirms a central tenet of the Theory of Permanent Revolution, developed by Leon Trotsky: that in oppressed countries only the working class can lead the fight for democracy and against imperialism, and that this struggle can be completed only through the overthrow of the capitalist system as part of an international socialist revolution.

The new wave of struggles that is breaking out across the Middle East, and which will inevitably crash down upon the crisis-ridden regime of General Sisi, is intersecting with a far more advanced development of the class struggle internationally than existed in 2011, with mass struggles of teachers and other sections of the working class breaking out in the United States, Europe, Latin America and the Middle East itself.

The decisive question is the building of a revolutionary party of the Egyptian working class, a section of the International Committee of the Fourth International, fighting for workers to take power in Egypt and throughout the Middle East as part of the world socialist revolution.



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