

10 years since the military coup in Egypt

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This week marks the tenth anniversary of the military coup in Egypt. On July 3, 2013, the then military chief General Abdel Fatah al-Sisi took power with the support of the imperialist powers and established one of the most brutal and bloodiest regimes in the entire globe.

Sisi's coup culminated in a bloodbath. On August 14, 2013, army and police units under his command destroyed two protest camps of coup opponents in the Egyptian capital of Cairo, murdering more than 1,000, including many women and children. Human Rights Watch called it a "massacre," the "worst event of unlawful mass killings in Egypt's modern history."

Since then, hundreds more protesters have been killed by the regime's henchmen. Tens of thousands of political prisoners vegetate in the country's torture dungeons. Protests and strikes are banned. Independent media are censored and banned, as are parties and organisations that even criticise the regime. Use of the death penalty rises constantly in Sisi's Egypt. In 2020, the number of executions—mostly by hanging—tripled to an official total of 107.

Sisi's coup was not simply directed against the then-President, Islamist Mohamed Mursi, and the Muslim Brotherhood of which he was a member. He aimed to crush the Egyptian revolution. In early 2011, millions of workers and youth had brought down the Western-backed longstanding dictator Hosni Mubarak through mass strikes and protests, shaking Egyptian capitalism and imperialism's domination of the region to its foundations.

With Sisi's coup, the military tried to stop the mass movement, which had not subsided even under Mursi, once and for all. In the first half of 2013, workers organised more than 4,500 strikes and social protests against the Islamist government. When mass protests were called at the end of June 2013, millions participated across the country to protest against Mursi's pro-capitalist policies, his support for Israel's attack on Gaza and the imperialist regime-change war in Syria.

As with the overthrow of Mubarak in 2011, the protests showed the tremendous power of the working class. At the same time, the coup once again put into sharp focus the

fundamental problem of the Egyptian revolution: the lack of a political perspective and leadership. In the absence of a revolutionary party to mobilise the working class for the struggle for power on the basis of an international socialist programme, the military was able to dominate in the end.

A central role in disorienting the mass movement and ultimately delivering it to Sisi's tyranny was played by the Egyptian pseudo-left. Forces such as the Revolutionary Socialists (RS), which maintains close links with the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) in Britain and the Left Party in Germany, among others, declared that the working class could not play an independent role but had to subordinate itself to one wing or another of the bourgeoisie.

Immediately after Mubarak's fall on February 11, 2011, the RS spread illusions in the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF), which took power under the leadership of Mubarak's former Defence Minister Muhammed Tantawi. In Britain's *Guardian*, RS activist and blogger Hossam el-Hamalawy celebrated "young officers and soldiers" as "our allies" and declared that the army "will eventually engineer the transition to a 'civilian' government."

As the military revealed its true character and violently suppressed strikes and protests, calls for a "second revolution" were raised among workers and youth. The RS explicitly rejected this and instead promoted the Muslim Brotherhood as the "right wing of the revolution." They supported Mursi in the run-off of the 2012 presidential election and subsequently celebrated the Islamist's victory as a "victory for the revolution" and a "great achievement in pushing back the counterrevolution."

The role of the RS in the military coup then fully exposed its counterrevolutionary character. The RS dubbed it a "second revolution" and again fanned illusions in the military leadership. In a statement on July 11, it called for pressure to be put on the coup regime "to take measures immediately for achieving social justice for the benefit of the millions of poor Egyptians."

The RS support for the coup was not limited to words. It had actively prepared the way for it. The RS was among the most active supporters of the Tamarod Alliance—a

hodgepodge of pseudo-lefts, “liberals” (Mohamed El-Baradei), Egyptian billionaires (Naguib Sawiris) and former representatives of the Mubarak regime (Ahmed Shafiq)—whose mission was to turn popular resistance into grist for the mills of the military.

When Sisi announced the takeover on state television on July 3, Tamarod leaders Mahmoud Badr and Mohammed Abdel Aziz stood by his side. Only a few weeks earlier, on May 28, 2013, the two had been received and celebrated at RS headquarters in Giza. Earlier, the RS had issued a statement calling Tamarod “a way to complete the revolution” and declaring its “intention to fully participate in this campaign.”

Ten years later, the RS is at pains to cover its tracks. In his article on the anniversary of the coup entitled “Egypt: A Decade of Counterrevolution,” Hamalawy notes that “Egyptian workers’ frustration with Morsi’s rule was ultimately channelled into a reactionary position thanks to the influence of labour movement leaders from various camps.” Hamalawy passes over the fact that he himself and the RS were among these “leaders” and “camps.”

One person Hamalawy names is the “independent” trade union leader and first minister of manpower in Sisi’s coup cabinet, Kamal Abu Eita. As minister, he had played “a central role in defusing industrial actions.” Under his rule “industrial organizers were sacked, victimized, or arrested in dawn raids. Independent unions were strangled, and strikes were banned.” Again, Hamalawy fails to mention that Nasserite Abu Eita was one of the RS’s closest allies for many years.

That Hamalawy, the RS and their international allies are unwilling to admit their political line has led to disaster allows only one conclusion: The pseudo-left—pro-capitalist currents articulating the interests of wealthy middle class layers—fears an independent revolutionary movement of the working class more than any counterrevolution, no matter how bloody.

Workers and youth must draw the necessary political conclusions from this experience. To succeed in their struggle for democratic and social rights, they need their own independent revolutionary leadership and an international socialist perspective. The *World Socialist Web Site* and the International Committee of the Fourth International—based on Leon Trotsky’s perspective of Permanent Revolution—have fought for this orientation at every stage of the revolution.

The day before Mubarak’s overthrow by the working class on February 10, 2011, David North, the chairperson of the International Editorial Board of the *World Socialist Web Site*, wrote:

The responsibility of revolutionary Marxists is to develop among workers, as they pass through colossal political experiences, an understanding of the necessity for an independent struggle for power. The revolutionary Marxists must counsel workers against all illusions that their democratic aspirations can be achieved under the aegis of bourgeois parties. They must expose ruthlessly the false promises of the political representatives of the capitalist class. They must encourage the creation of independent organs of workers’ power which can become, as the political struggle intensifies, the basis for the transfer of power to the working class. They must explain that the realization of the workers’ essential democratic demands is inseparable from the implementation of socialist policies.

Above all, revolutionary Marxists must raise the political horizons of Egyptian workers beyond the borders of their own country. They must explain that the struggles that are now unfolding in Egypt are inextricably linked to an emerging global process of world socialist revolution and that the victory of the revolution in Egypt requires not a national, but an international strategy.

Under conditions in which the class struggle is escalating worldwide and workers are revolting against the pro-war and austerity policies of their governments, it is necessary to strengthen this Marxist offensive. In Egypt, a revolution developed quite objectively. What was missing was the subjective factor: a revolutionary party anchored in the masses and fighting for the perspective of international socialism. The crucial lesson of the revolution and counterrevolution in Egypt is the need to build such a revolutionary leadership in time.



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