



## *Upheaval in The Arab World*

# **A CHANCE TO WIN A FUTURE BUT BEWARE OF THE WESTERN IMPERIALISTS DON'T LET THEM ESTABLISH NEW "DEMOCRATIC" HENCHMEN!**

**26 February** - The masses in the Arab world are quickly losing their fear. They have been brutalised for decades by corrupt regimes. Regimes that robbed from the poor to satisfy the rich and their U.S., British, French and Italian masters. Regimes that ensured that a good chunk of the region's oil wealth was plundered by the wealthy owners of Western oil corporations. Yet now the masses have had enough. They have seen the back of the former Western-backed ruler of Tunisia, Ben Ali. Meanwhile next door in Libya, strongman Gaddafi - who once pretended to be an anti-imperialist but has shown his true colours over recent years by signing on to Washington's ghastly "War on Terror" - is on the ropes.

Dictator Hosni Mubarak is already gone. The forces supporting this long-time U.S. puppet killed nearly 400 people in their final bid to cling on to power. But still they did not prevail. And it was not just the brave people gathered in Tahrir Square who were responsible for Mubarak's demise. Since an April 2008 textile workers revolt in the city of Mahallah, Egyptian workers have engaged in courageous strike struggles in defiance of murderous repression. The last few days of Mubarak's reign saw Suez Canal port workers and tens of thousands of factory workers down tools. Many of the workers' demands were for things like increased wages. You see, despite the Western media's best efforts to portray every Arab protester as a fan of Western-style capitalist "democracy," the main cause of the revolts is that these governments could not provide food on the table and jobs for the masses. Indeed, partly inspired by events in the Arab world, Greek workers and youth held a general strike and mass rally on Wednesday against capitalist austerity measures targeting the poor. Chanting "Don't Obey the Rich – Fight Back", thousands of protesters occupied Syntagma Square in front of the parliament building in Athens and stood up to violent police attacks by unleashing molotov cocktails and rocks. And much to the chagrin of the Western imperialists, the mass protests have also spread to supposedly "democratic", U.S.-occupied, Iraq. Yesterday, inspired by the struggles in Tunisia and Egypt, thousands of Iraqis shouting "No to unemployment, No to corruption" held a "Revolution of Iraqi Rage" protest in Baghdad's own Tahrir Square. Large crowds of Iraqi demonstrators bravely defied fierce attacks from the U.S- puppet security forces who had virtually locked down Iraq's capital since Thursday night. Similar mass protests were held throughout the country despite murderous attacks from the Iraqi security forces who killed up to eleven protesters across the country.

It is the working class drawing in behind all the downtrodden that can spearhead the fight to win a decent future for the long-suffering Arab masses. There is a great opportunity now for such a struggle. The ruling classes are divided and discredited. The masses are fearless. And in places like Egypt and Tunisia the labour movement is resurgent.

However, we should not be naïve. The U.S. and West European imperialist powers may have been shaken by the upheavals in their client states but they are very flexible in ensuring that their predatory interests remain enforced even in changed situations. Thus, after strongly backing Mubarak for thirty years and even asserting their support for him at the start of the recent upheaval, Washington sneakily showed Mubarak the exit door when it became obvious that his continued rule could incite such opposition that it could endanger the whole political order in Egypt – the order that has served the U.S. upper class so well. The U.S. rulers have also worked over time to ensure that the new regime would be one that would continue to enforce U.S. diktats. For the time being they have got their wish. The military junta that is now in government in Cairo are the same forces that backed Mubarak for thirty years, that took part in the CIA's "secret rendition" program and torture of political prisoners and that enforced Israel's starvation blockade of Gaza.

To a degree, Washington has been planning for this scenario for a long time. Already, years before Mubarak would fall, Washington, under the guise of "democracy building", was pumping in millions into Egyptian political groups to ensure that any anti-Mubarak forces would remain subordinate to the interests of U.S. imperialism. The U.S doled out this money via organisations like the notorious National Endowment for Democracy and the National Democratic Institute. Now, since Mubarak's demise, the U.S. government is set to massively boost these funds used to interfere in Egypt's political process. For their part, the likes of CNN and the BBC are promoting those figures in Egypt who they think would be reliable servants of

Western imperialism – like former UN arms inspector Mohammed ElBaradei. Meanwhile Western think tanks, NGOs and socio-political organisations are being encouraged to intervene into the likes of Egypt and Tunisia in order to establish “democratic” “civil society.” What the rulers in Washington and London mean by this is establishing institutions that will slavishly apologise for imperialist political meddling in the region and Western corporate exploitation of the Arab toilers. And when the U.S. and Australian rulers speak of “democracy” they certainly do not mean democracy for the impoverished masses. No, they mean a system where the billionaire capitalists and those grovelling to them use their massive financial resources to fund election campaigns, political advertising, media ownership and political think tanks while the masses with their few resources have little chance to be anything but voting fodder for one or other gang of the exploiting elite.

The recent events in Egypt are hardly the first time that Washington has, at the last minute, ditched a former henchman in order to shore up a tottering social order in a subjugated country. A classic case was seen in the Philippines in the mid 1980s. There Washington had backed right-wing butcher Ferdinand Marcos for over two decades. Yet in February 1986, when a military rebellion and mass “Peoples Power” protests made them realise that Marcos’ continued rule was causing “instability” in their Philippines neocolony, Washington told him to go. This Marcos dutifully did. The new regime led by Corazon Aquino was then hailed by the U.S. for its “democratic” and constitutional “reforms.” Yet on 22 January 1987, less than a year after taking power, the Aquino regime unleashed the horrific Mendiola massacre when its security forces gunned down protesting poor peasants. Aquino’s forces went on to murder trade unionists, communists and student activists in a way that would have made Marcos proud – all, of course, with the full support of Washington and Canberra. Let us not allow a similar thing to happen today in Egypt and Tunisia or in any other part of the Arab world!

You see, many of the regimes in the Arab world are widely despised by their populations. Some have already fallen and others will follow suit. **The real question is: What will replace these regimes?** If we end up with a situation analogous to the “Peoples Power” replacement in the Philippines of a Marcos-like regime with a Cory Aquino-like regime then this will be at best a step sideways for the masses and *not* a step forwards. If we are to avoid such a tragic scenario which has all too often been repeated throughout the so-called Third World then an absolute precondition should be that the political process that follows the demise of a hated regime is not in any way shaped by the imperialist powers. For it is imperialist exploitation of the ex-colonial countries that is the main cause of the hardships faced by the peoples of these lands and it is the driving force for perpetuating brutal, corrupt regimes in these countries. So let us oppose all imperialist intervention in the Middle East. Let us demand: Rulers of the U.S.A, Britain, Italy, France and Australia - Stop your support for corrupt dictators in the Arab world and stop also your promotion of new pseudo-“democratic” henchmen! Down with all U.S. and other imperialist funding for political organisations in the Middle East! Western pro-capitalist “civil organisations”: take your patronising lectures out of the Arab world and go and get stuffed!

If the protest movements in the Arab world do not take on an explicitly anti-imperialist character, there is another danger that could arise. Although these protests have largely targeted pro-imperialist governments, the capitalist powers would like to use them as a model to undermine those governments that they are opposed to. The imperialist media have made it clear that their wet dream is that protests spread to socialistic China or at least to other socialistic countries like North Korea or Cuba.

More immediately, Washington and Co. hope that a “peoples power” movement could create a regime in Iran compliant to their interests. It is not that Washington really has a problem with the capitalist brutality or anti-women oppression of the current Tehran government. After all, the U.S.’s strongest ally in the region, the Saudi monarchy, has all the worst features of the Iranian fundamentalist government and more! No, it is just that at this present time the Iranian government has refused to bow to Washington’s diktats. With this in mind, leftists must ensure that any anti-regime movement in Iran not only rejects all imperialist assistance but also does not unwittingly fall in behind Washington’s agenda. They must ensure that any anti-government movement that they are building make absolutely explicit that it opposes all imperialist intervention in Iran. That means it must oppose all economic sanctions against Iran, must oppose demands for Iran to give up its nuclear program and must be very clear that in the case of a conflict between the imperialist powers and Iran, it will side with Iran.

## **NOT MORE GOVERNMENTS THAT SERVE THE EXPLOITERS! FIGHT FOR GOVERNMENTS OF WORKERS AND THE POOR!**

The anti-Mubarak protests in Egypt saw all social classes join together. This has been hailed by the Western capitalist media – for it makes them feel safe. However, from the point of view of the toiling masses, their unity with capitalist and pro-capitalist elements is not a good thing. It meant that their urgent demands, including for better wages, lower food prices, for strong trade unions, against privatisation etc, were often suppressed from being raised for the sake of unity of the movement. Furthermore,

because the upper class and upper middle class components of the protests had much more resources, better education, and the right connections (and let us not forget better computer/internet access) they were able to disproportionately set the agenda of the protests.

That is why it is crucial that throughout the Arab world protests, the working class and its allies politically separate from the pro-capitalist elements. **Isolate the capitalists and their apologists from the mass movements!** Standing for its own class interests does not mean that the working class must restrict itself to its own immediate economic demands. Far from it! Instead, the working class should strive to champion the causes of all the subjugated people. What is needed is for the workers movement and the left to build united front actions on a program of pro-working class, anti-imperialist and pro-women's rights demands. The exact demands to be raised in a particular country can only be determined by leftist activists on the ground in the country concerned. However, among the type of demands that would be raised are ones for greatly increased minimum wages, for laws forcing profitable firms to increase hiring, for full nationalisation of oil and gas industries, for complete equality for women in marriage, divorce and inheritance and for the closure of all U.S. military bases.

Of course, the masses' aspirations for democratic freedoms are legitimate too. It is just that the Arab masses are so exploited and humiliated by imperialism that any capitalist ruler of an Arab country knows that they cannot keep the masses in check without employing the most repressive methods. This is more generally true too for all capitalist countries still oppressed by the richer world powers. Thus, in Thailand "democracy" means the government shooting protesters on the streets and jailing for long periods anyone who criticises the king. Meanwhile, "democracy" in the Philippines means government-backed death squads murdering and "disappearing" dozens of leftist, union and peasant activists every year.

Basically, in the former colonies still downtrodden by imperialism, the weak capitalist rulers there are unwilling to allow any meaningful democracy, not even the fraudulent democracy we see in the Western countries. This is the case no matter what ideological stripe a capitalist bourgeois may wear. Thus, while today the likes of "liberal democrat" Mohammed ElBaradei and the Muslim Brotherhood are singing the praises of "democracy", tomorrow if either of them are in power they would before long be employing the same methods as Hosni Mubarak. The truth is that ElBaradei, the Muslim Brotherhood leaders and other bourgeois figures that opposed Mubarak actually have more in common with Mubarak than they do with the worker and urban poor masses that they joined with in the anti-Mubarak demonstrations.

Now, if all wings of the capitalist elite in the Middle East are incapable of bringing basic political freedoms to the people then they are even more incapable of delivering genuine equality for women. For faced with a fresh and powerful working class, the weak capitalist rulers are driven to use all manner of religious backwardness, feudal practices and superstition to try to control the masses. And all this inevitably leads to the oppression of women.

What all this underscores is that the tasks of bringing political democracy, legal equality for women and freedom from imperialist subjugation to the Arab world can only be accomplished when the working class leads all the masses in the seizure of state power. In thus seizing state power at the culmination of pro-working class and pro-poor struggles, the working class will be compelled to go much further and begin to solve the bread and butter issues facing the masses. This means it will be compelled to rip the factories, mines, banks and land out of the hands of the capitalists and big landlords and place them into the collective hands of the people.

This outline for the liberation of the Arab masses is based on the Trotskyist perspective of Permanent Revolution, the program that was carried out by Lenin's Bolsheviks in the 1917 October Revolution in Russia.

To be sure, such a socialist revolution in any Middle Eastern country would face ferocious hostility from the imperialist rulers. Yet it would also excite the worker masses throughout the world. It could inspire the workers currently engaged in militant struggles in Greece, Portugal and Spain to make the leap from defensive struggles to the seizure of power. The working class in the U.S.A, currently grinding under high unemployment and austerity, would be energised too. And while the workers movement in this country is currently quiet, there are plenty of pent up worker grievances in Australia waiting to be harnessed.

## **SOLIDARITY WITH THE ARAB MASSES MEANS OPPOSITION TO ALL IMPERIALIST MEDDLING IN THE MIDDLE EAST**

In response to the tumultuous events in the Arab countries, leftists and Arab activists in this country have sought to build solidarity actions with opposition movements in the Middle East. Today, a "Rally in Solidarity with Middle East Democracy

Movements” will be held in Sydney. The rally has been organised by the “Solidarity with Middle East People Power Committee”: a coalition involving left groups like Socialist Alliance, Solidarity and Socialist Alternative alongside some activists of Middle Eastern origin.

The call for the demonstration includes the correct demand: “No more Australian support for corrupt regimes.”

The rally leaflet’s key demand is “for the Australian Government to support the movements in Egypt, Libya, Iran, Yemen, Bahrain, Tunisia.” However, the truth is that the capitalist Australian government will never genuinely support any movement that fights for the interests of the toiling masses. Indeed, if they did nominally support a mass movement in an Arab country it would only be to try and derail the movement in order to ensure that it does not threaten the framework of imperialist domination. Thus the call for Canberra to support these movements is harmful. At best it would prettify the Australian and other imperialist rulers’ efforts to coopt Arab opposition movements by making out that Western government support for such groups would be a positive development. As we have stressed in this leaflet: **whether the imperialists are openly backing a hated dictator or whether they are promoting a set of oppositionists to be their new henchmen, their interventions are equally harmful.**

Right now the call for the imperialist Australian government to support the Arab opposition movements could be especially disastrous. The imperialist rulers are today looking to seize on the turmoil in Libya to more directly intervene into North Africa and put Libya’s oil supplies under their direct control. Australian foreign minister Kevin Rudd has just called for a no-fly zone to be imposed over Libya. Given how such a no-fly zone would be enforced, this is tantamount to calling for direct imperialist intervention into Libya. Such imperialist intervention would guarantee that any opposition movement in Libya could play no progressive role. And it would be a deadly threat to progressive forces throughout North Africa.

That is why it is urgent that Australian leftists stop greasing the skids for imperialist intervention in the Middle East by calling on the Australian government to get involved. Instead, we in Trotskyist Platform call for leftists in this country to build united-front actions to demand an end to all imperialist intervention in the Middle East. **Let us not only oppose Washington and Canberra’s support for the oppressive monarchies ruling Jordan, Saudi Arabia and Bahrain but oppose their efforts to coopt opposition movements there. Stop all political donations by the capitalist powers to organisations in the Arab world! All U.S. and Australian troops and cops get out of Iraq, Kuwait and the Persian Gulf! U.S./NATO/Australian troops get out of Afghanistan! Down with the Western military aid to Israel! No to imperialist intervention in Libya!**

The best solidarity we can give to the Arab toiling masses is to mobilise class struggle against our own imperialist rulers here at home. Such struggles in the imperialist centres would give the Arab masses the confidence to openly challenge imperialist domination of their region. It would inspire in the Arab working class a greater sense of their own power as part of an international class and would thus encourage them to break free from subordination to pro-capitalist “oppositionists.” Oppose the imperialist rulers of the U.S., Britain, Australia etc – the greatest enemies of the Middle Eastern masses! No to all imperialist political meddling in the Middle East! Down with the capitalist regimes in the Arab world - Fight for governments of workers and the poor throughout the Middle East!



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