

Egypt: Socialists need to rethink the military takeover

Wednesday 21 August 2013, by [RIDDELL John](#) (Date first published: 20 August 2013).

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The military massacres in Egypt are “part of a plan to liquidate the Egyptian Revolution and restore the military-police state of the Mubarak regime,” say the Revolutionary Socialists (RS) of Egypt in an August 15 statement [1]. Their present analysis contrasts sharply with their previous positive appraisal the July 3 military coup that ousted Egypt’s elected government.

The RS, who enjoy a wide reputation as a revolutionary voice in the Egyptian struggle, are reconsidering the meaning of this experience. Socialists abroad should be rethinking it as well.

In the rich and varied world discussion of these events, contributions in the *Green Left Weekly* newsgroup (Australia) provide useful starting points for reflection, as do the reactions of several ALBA governments.

The army/police massacre is “a bloody dress rehearsal for the liquidation of the Egyptian Revolution,” the RS now states. “It aims to break the revolutionary will of all Egyptians who are claiming their rights, whether workers, poor, or revolutionary youth, by creating a state of terror.”

Yet only a month ago, the RS and socialist currents abroad that follow its lead looked on the military overturn of Muslim Brotherhood President Mohamed Morsi as the culmination of a great step forward for Egypt’s revolution.

The giant anti-Morsi demonstrations of June 30 that triggered his ouster were “the historic beginning of a new wave of the Egyptian revolution,” the RS wrote on July 5 [2]. True, the army and police had gained in authority, they stated, but “this influence is momentary and superficial.” June 30 represented a “new revolutionary explosion.” In replacing the elected government by a hand-picked junta – the trademark of a military coup – the army’s July 3 coup merely “acquiesced to the will of the rebelling populace.”

Now that the RS has, finally, identified the military rulers as the main enemy, this must shape international solidarity efforts.

Democratic rights

Other aspects of the RS analysis also need review. For example, the August 15 RS statement declares that they do not “defend for a single day the sit-ins by the Brotherhood and their attempts to return Morsi to power.” In reality, the Muslim Brotherhood’s public protests represent an attempt to assert their right to exist as a political movement after six weeks of brutal and bloody suppression. Their right to protest military violence must be defended.

The RS has tended to be even-handed, attacking both the military and on the Brotherhood. Its August 15 statement now explicitly repudiates this approach, rejecting “a kind of ‘balance’ in our attacks on the military and the Islamists.” Yet its main slogan, “Down with military rule ... no to the return of the Muslim brotherhood,” stays in the old groove.

In fact, the military are in the saddle and the Brotherhood repressed and subjected to massacres. In this situation, an even-handed approach is a formula for paralysis and abstention. What is needed is a united defense of democratic and human rights.

The earlier RS statement pointed the way on this issue. “We must be consistent in opposing all forms of abuse and repression to which the Islamists will be exposed in the form of arrests and closures of satellite channels and newspapers, for what happens to today to the Islamists will happen tomorrow to the workers and the leftists,” the RS stated on July 5.

Socialists internationally should support and encourage protests against the military’s denial of democratic and human rights in Egypt - including the rights of the Brotherhood and its supporters. Morsi and other Brotherhood political prisoners should be released, the Brotherhood’s political and legal rights should be restored, and new elections should be held without delay and without any restrictions on who may participate.

In particular, socialists should highlight the role of imperialism, over several decades, in orchestrating, financing, and defending the rise of rightist military tyranny in Egypt - a process that transformed Egypt into a pliant tool of U.S.-Israeli policy.

Bourgeois democracy

The overturn of Morsi swept away the limited forms of electoral democracy achieved following the 2011 revolution, replacing it with direct military rule. The earlier RS statement took no note of this change, suggesting instead that the overturn represented a step forward from “formal democracy, with its ballot boxes” to “legitimacy via the democracy of the popular revolution - direct democracy creating revolutionary legitimacy.” This “opens the horizons to new forms of popular power, which dwarf the temporary democracy of the ballot box,” the RS said.

The dismissal of elective institutions is still evident in the August 20 RS statement, which refers with apparent approval to “the downfall of the legitimacy of the ballot box.”

It is now clear that the talk of “new forms of popular power” was delusionary. Far from achieving a new system of direct revolutionary democracy, Egypt’s popular movement is now overshadowed by the rise of military tyranny. This misjudgement suggests the need to revisit our attitude to the limited democratic gains - the “formal democracy, with its ballot boxes” - achieved by the 2011 revolution.

Since 2011, Egypt’s limited democratic institutions have been subject to repeated heavy-handed

intervention by the military wing of the bourgeoisie, including dissolution of an elected parliament. Nonetheless, election of a government in a process not subject to direct military control erected a safeguard of the democratic rights of working people. And when constitutional rule was swept away, there was no longer any institutional barrier to unrestrained and murderous military repression.

Yes, one day working people will replace bourgeois parliamentarism with a superior form of democracy. But under today's circumstances, socialists are not indifferent to the form of capitalist rule. We strive to defend and to expand the democratic elements won within the capitalist order. Capitalist parliamentarism offers more favourable conditions for workers' struggle than unrestricted capitalist tyranny.

'The central issue is the nature of the regime'

A probing debate on these and other issues in the Egyptian struggle has developed in the discussion list of *Green Left Weekly*, an Australian newspaper associated with Socialist Alliance. The exchange was initiated by Roger Annis, Richard Fidler, and Art Young, socialists in Canada with whom I have collaborated for several decades. Their contribution [3] argues in support of the view of Australian socialist Michael Karadjis [4], who stated on the same list, 'The coup regime has now revealed itself to be a bloody, anti-working class, anti-democratic, anti-Palestinian regime of reaction.'

A contrary view has been argued by Tony Iltis in a series of articles in *Green Left Weekly* and in four replies to Annis, Fidler, and Young (see #1, #2, #3, and #4). Karadjis added a comment in reply to Iltis.

It should be noted that Iltis's writings do not represent the position of Socialist Alliance. SA's views are expressed in August 16 statement [5] that concludes: 'The Socialist Alliance adds its voice to those demanding that all political prisoners be released and supports those who are calling for an immediate end to military rule and a civilian-led process to democratically elect a new government.'

ALBA governments take action

While socialists debate how to respond to military tyranny in Egypt, several anti-imperialist Latin American governments, members of ALBA (the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America) have moved into action.

Days after the army takeover in Egypt, Venezuela's President Nicolas Maduro, speaking at a mass rally in Cochabamba in the presence of presidents of Bolivia, Ecuador, and Argentina, denounced the military coup. He explained that Venezuela defended the Morsi government against the coup despite its disagreements with Morsi regarding the civil war in Syria. (See reports in Telesur [6] and AVN [7].)

Recalling on July 23 Egypt's anti-imperialist stand during the presidency of Gamel Abdel Nasser, Maduro said, "Egypt is in upheaval today because it has departed from the path of independence."

Since then, Bolivia, Cuba, Ecuador, and Venezuela have all denounced the army's massacres, and Ecuador and Venezuela have withdrawn their ambassadors from Egypt in protest.

A call to action

On August 17, Egyptian-Canadians in Vancouver convened a demonstration against the coup d'état and police/army violence in Egypt. The remarks of Roger Annis to this action provide a guide for socialists in Canada in expressing our solidarity [8]:

"We demand that the governments in Canada, United States and Europe cease their complicity with the criminal, military regime and its July 3 coup d'état. They must scrap all military assistance to the Egyptian military. They must condemn the coup and they must support a return to legal and constitutional government. They must demand that political prisoners be released forthwith, including President Mohamed Morsi and other leaders of his party. The draconian, emergency measures by the coup regime that effectively outlaw civil liberties must be ended.

They must also demand that the punitive measures against the Palestinian people in Gaza who are suffering as a result of border restrictions by the military regime be ended. Emergency aid should be provided as needed. Israel must end its treatment of Gaza as an outdoor prison that it can bomb or cut off at will...."

John Riddell

For a 21-item annotated selection of background materials on the Egyptian events, see Roger Annis's 'Reading Guide to the July 3, 2013, Military Coup in Egypt'.

Thanks to Felipe Stuart Cournoyer for research assistance on the ALBA response.

A clarification

Thanks to Stuart Monckton and Michael Karadjis for comments posted elsewhere regarding my article, "Egypt: Socialists Need to Rethink Military Takeover."

They say that my article gives a misimpression of the articles of Tony Iltis in *Green Left Weekly*. In fact, it was not my intention to pass judgment on Iltis's articles; I linked to four of them because they are central to an exchange that I consider important.

However, I can see that what I wrote is open to misinterpretation, and I am sorry for that. I should have written:

"Tony Iltis, whose articles in *Green Left Weekly* were the object of criticism by Annis, Fidler, and Young, posted four responses (see #1 [9], #2 [10], #3 [11], and #4 [12]). Karadjis added a comment [13] in reply to Iltis.

"As for Socialist Alliance, its views are expressed in August 16 statement that concludes: 'The Socialist Alliance adds its voice to those demanding that all political prisoners be released and supports those who are calling for an immediate end to military rule and a civilian-led process to democratically elect a new government.'"

I have noted this clarification in the text of my article on my blog (<http://johnriddell.wordpress.com>).

P.S.

* August 20, 2013:

<http://johnriddell.wordpress.com/2013/08/20/egypt-socialists-need-to-rethink-the-military-takeover/>

Footnotes

[1] See on ESSF (article 29528), [Letter to Egyptian revolutionaries](#).

[2] See on ESSF (article 29124), [Egypt: Four days that shook the world](#).

[3] http://groups.yahoo.com/group/GreenLeft_discussion/message/82758

[4] http://groups.yahoo.com/group/GreenLeft_discussion/message/82732

[5] <http://www.socialist-alliance.org/news/egypt-end-military-repression>

[6] <http://multimedia.telesurtv.net/media/telesur.video.web/telesur-web/#!es/video/presidente-maduro-rechaza-golpe-de-estado-en-egipto/>

[7] http://www.rnv.gov.ve/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=17325:maduro-venezuela-no-puede-aceptar-un-golpe-de-estado-en-ningun-lugar-del-mundo-&catid=27:politica&Itemid=70

[8] <http://www.socialistproject.ca/bullet/867.php>

[9] http://groups.yahoo.com/group/GreenLeft_discussion/message/82760

[10] http://groups.yahoo.com/group/GreenLeft_discussion/message/82762

[11] http://groups.yahoo.com/group/GreenLeft_discussion/message/82777

[12] http://groups.yahoo.com/group/GreenLeft_discussion/message/82780

[13] http://groups.yahoo.com/group/GreenLeft_discussion/message/82776