

Egypt: Now overthrow the workplace Mubaraks, urges labour activist

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The revolution was against the Mubarak regime but all we've managed to do so far is remove Mubarak himself. The ones running the country right now are Mubarak's generals, who were the backbone of his dictatorship from day one.

Many are therefore disappointed with Egypt's progress – me less so because I never had high expectations from an army takeover. But two things have changed in Egypt in the past 100 days which give me hope, and both relate to the fact that the revolution is unfinished. The first is that mass strikes are continuing. The second is that workers have taken the step of establishing independent trade unions, which I believe are the silver bullet for any dictatorship.

Attempts are already under way by middle-class activists to place limits on this revolution and ensure it remains only within the realm of formal political institutions. Look at Wael Ghonim's famous tweet following Mubarak's overthrow saying "mission accomplished". I have a lot of respect for Ghonim and what he has done for Egypt but he represents a certain type of middle-class politics where the sentiment is "thank you, now go back to work, invest 100% of your energies into building the new Egypt and don't make trouble". . The army and the media echo this line, portraying striking workers as greedy and self-interested.

But the main part of any revolution has to be socio-economic emancipation for the citizens of a country; if you want to eliminate corruption or stop vote-buying then you have to give people decent salaries, make them aware of their rights and not leave them in dire economic need. A middle-class activist can return to his executive job after they think the revolution is over, but a public transport worker who has spent 20 years in service and is getting paid only 189 Egyptian pounds a month – you can't ask this guy to go back to work and tell his starving kids at home that everything will be sorted out once we have a civilian government in the future.

So this is phase two of the revolution, the phase of socio-economic change. What we need to do now is take Tahrir to the factories, the universities, the workplaces. In every single institution in this country there is a mini-Mubarak who needs to be overthrown. In every institution there are figures from the old state security regime who need to be overthrown. These guys are the counter-revolution. Maybe the counter-revolution isn't clearly organised with a specific command structure, but you have to assume that everyone who belonged to the old regime and enjoyed privileges under it is going to try to defend those privileges, and much of the malaise you see around you in Egypt today is down to that.

There is huge resentment within the Egyptian working class about the neoliberal policies that have impoverished them over the past 20 years, and the struggle for change will be a dramatic one. No doubt the western powers and Arab monarchs who are already deeply unhappy at what they see taking place in Egypt will be even more dismayed at this. But however much pressure they put on the military junta, the pressure of the street can be stronger. The Egyptian people are vigilant about their own revolution.

Hossam el-Hamalawy

P.S.

* guardian.co.uk, Friday 20 May 2011 16.58 BST:

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/may/20/overthrow-workplace-mubaraks-urges-elhamalawy>

* Hossam el-Hamalawy is a prominent journalist, activist and blogger whose website covers Egypt's current strikes