

92 February 2011

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Bourgeois revolutions in North Africa/Middle East

Events in the north of Africa have been spectacular. It started off in Tunisia with a militant unemployed person setting himself on fire because he had no income. His fruit and vegetable stall had been confiscated by police.

Trade union solidarity followed. The revolution was, though, usurped by radical middle class people seeking their rights. This movement overthrew the dictator Bin Ali Despite continued protest from working class and proletarian forces; a bourgeois democratic Tunisia is the likely outcome.

This bourgeois democratic revolution has spread to many countries in the region including Algeria, Yemen, Morocco, Libya, Syria Yemen, Lebanon Bahrain, Jordan and most notably Egypt. In Egypt, the pro-western dictator Mubarak was overthrown. Currently there is military dictatorship. Elections are promised.

In Libya there is civil war. Only a minority of the armed forces have defected from Qaddafi who stands defiant. Gaddafi also has some support in the capital Tripoli and his home city of Serte. The rebels have captured Benghazi and other cities. The West has intervened bombing Libya, enforcing a "no fly zone". There is confusion over what this "no fly zone" means for some it means targeting Gaddafi. All imperialist intervention must be opposed. Unfortunately, many see imperialism as a saviour.

Revolutionary communists support these overthrows. However, the proletariat must take leadership. The fight should be not for democratic capitalism but for proletarian revolution. Such leadership would win sector of the middle classes behind its banner including small farmers. This requires the construction revolutionary communist party and a revolutionary communist international. These revolutions must go all the way!

For a revolutionary workers and small farmers government!

For a united socialist North Africa and the Middle East!

Libya Victory to the working class

The victories in Tunisia and Egypt seemed to come easy. In both of those countries the armed forces sided with the revolutionaries and imposed bourgeois democratic regimes. In Libya things are a bit more difficult. Yes, sections of the armed forces defected, but, overwhelmingly the armed forces support Gaddafi. Gaddafi has declared that he will fight to the bitter end. He has also declared that he show no mercy. It will be death to those who defy him. Those who fight with Gaddafi will also suffer the same consequences should the rebels win

Currently, the rebels control Benghazi and the Gaddafi forces hold Tripoli. It appears that the rebels march towards Tripoli has been halted. Gaddafi controls the air force. The rebels have faced an aerial onslaught and have lost ground. Many have been killed as a result.

Gaddafi has talked tough and this has given the imperialists the rationalization needed—to impose their no fly zone over Libya. Of course their intervention is rationalized in terms of “defending civilians” But there is much more at stake.

The imperialists hate Gaddafi because of his left stand in world politics. He supports the Palestinians and has attacked America. They also want to control the revolution. They want it to remain bourgeois and under their control. But a bigger issue is oil. Libya produces 13% of the world’s oil production. The imperialists want it urgently. A compliant government will give them even more billions in super profits than they get at the moment!

Of the imperialists, it is the two war hawks, Cameron of Britain and Sarkozy of France who are doing the dirty work. The US appears to have learned its lessons from Iraq and is treading warily. The cost of their Iraqi intervention was massive. As well as this Obama faces strong antiwar opposition in the US. He doesn’t want to appear like a milder version of George Bush. Once bitten, twice shy. Obama and Clinton have declared that intervention must be UN led and there must not be any US troops on the ground. They also have declared that the intervention will only be in defence of civilians and not for overthrowing Gaddafi. This they stress must be carried out by the Libyan people. The fact is though that US corporations will be the main benefactors from UN intervention for a compliant regime. UN intervention will also contain the revolution. In no way will they allow a socialist revolution led by a Trotskyist party.

Although Australia is unlikely to participate in any intervention, foreign Minister Rudd has played a key role in encouraging UN to intervene “to protect lives”. Also supporting intervention are the Greens. Bob Brown made this clear when interviewed by ABC TV show 730 All Australian intervention must be opposed.

Gaddafi is a ruthless dictator who must be overthrown. Unlike Hugo Chavez, Daniel Ortega and Robert Mugabe we support his overthrow. Also supporting Gaddafi is the British Workers Revolutionary Party led by Sheila Torrance

But it is the working class who must lead the revolution. The current bourgeois leadership will establish a capitalist Libya and hand over the rich oil resources to the imperialists. In fact they support imperialist intervention which will lead to imperialist control of their country. Workers must

lead the revolution! Break from the bourgeois leadership! Build a revolutionary Trotskyist party. For a workers and small farmers government!

Refugees. The failure of the “East Timor Solution”

Communist Left fully supports the mass breakout by refugees on Christmas Island. We oppose detention centres totally. Refugees who come to this country in fear of their lives should not be forced to endure prison camps. We oppose any restrictions on immigration. Whether you are fleeing repression or merely coming to this country because you like the weather here, you should be welcome. You should not have to prove you are a valid refugee. You should be innocent until proved guilty and not have to prove you are not a security threat. ASTO are taking a long time granting security clearances. This is aggravating the situation as it means a longer wait in detention.

Last election there was a race to the bottom between Tony Abbott and Julia Gillard. Tony successfully tapped into chauvinist sentiments within the middle class and labour aristocracy. Tony wanted to “send them back”. It didn’t matter to him that this might mean death or torture. Julia’s counter to this was the East Timor solution. She rejected Nauru on the grounds that Nauru had not signed the UN declaration for refugees. The East Timor solution seemed like a good idea. But Gillard had not contacted the Timorese. No doubt she figured that economic bullying could be used to push this through. The Timorese have now decisively rejected this “solution” which was voted down by their parliament. Fretilin calls them, correctly, concentration camps. Shanana Gusmao has finally put the issue to rest, finally (he assures us). So it is back to the drawing board for Julia Gillard. We are glad that this chauvinist arrogance of Gillard has failed.

Our alternative is no detention centres. We oppose all immigration controls outright. This should be the policy of the workers movement and this policy should be enacted. Union action in support of the refugees now

Refugees riot against detention centre oppression.

For ten days, refugees stood on the roof of Villawood detention centre western Sydney. Militant action including hunger strikes has also occurred at detention centres Christmas Island, Curtin in Western Australia as well as Villawood. We salute the refugees. Their actions are fully justified. These people fled countries such as Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan and Sri Lanka in fear of torture, in fear of their lives. They have braved the elements. Many have been killed on route. Many have finally made it to Australia. Here they are treated like criminals.

They are effectively been treated as guilty until proven innocent. ASIO is taking a long time to give them security clearance. How many months or even years must they be detained?

Communist Left welcomes all those who want to live in this country except counter-revolutionaries. Of course we have no faith in any bourgeois government in determining who counter-revolutionaries are. Essentially all those who come by boat are welcome as are those who overstay their holiday visas. We especially welcome those who suffer from reaction such as the Tamil Tigers and the Hazara people from Afghanistan.

In the case of Afghanistan and Iraq, the Australian government through its military interventions has created the situations from which these people have been forced to flee. Australia has a special responsibility to care for these refugees. They do not deserve prison camps!

The refugees are taking their stand in isolation. On ANZAC day/Easter Monday an important demo in Villawood was organised by the Refugees Action Coalition. It was supported by refugee organisations. This was part of a national day of action including protests in Curtin in Western Australia and Maribyrnong in Melbourne. The latter two protests were attacked by police.

It was extremely important that the left showed their solidarity. But more important would be effective working class action. This was indeed lacking. Only two unions were present at that demo including the Teachers Federation who spoke and the NTEU who came with banners... More action is needed than this. Australian workers have taken action on all sorts of international issues such as Indonesian independence, East Timor, against apartheid in South Africa and against the war in Vietnam; it's time for action in support of refugees.

We as communists, care for refugees and their lives. But the refugee issue is far more important than this. The ruling class is using this issue to enlist working class support for their reactionary offensive. Last election Tony Abbott used this issue very well! Tony did not get elected but he managed to use the immigration issue to wedge ALP supporters and win support in Western Sydney. He also has been successful in getting Gillard Labor to intensify their anti-refugee racism and obey his dictates. When Abbott cracks the whip, Gillard obeys!

The "more human approach" promised by Kevin Rudd is now well and truly thrown out the window on this and on many issues. For example there are more than a thousand children in detention. Rudd promised there would be none.

Rudd/Gillard are Tony Abbott Lite. They enforce his reactionary agenda only a bit more equivocally. The net result is very much the same.

The workers movement must take a stand in support of the refugees. If you support the Abbott /Gillard offensive on refugees you join in the ruling class offensive which attacks every worker and all oppressed people in this country

Review

Marxism and the Arab Revolutions. Sandra Bloodworth Socialist Alternative Issue 165

In the light of earth shattering events, it is the duty of any self proclaiming Marxist organisation to reaffirm the authority of Marxism and to analyse these massive upheavals using the Marxist method. It is therefore entirely appropriate that Marxism and the Arab Revolutions is the lead article in Socialist Alternative issue 162 publication of the Socialist Alternative group...

The author is an experienced comrade, a leading member of SA. She joined the International Socialists in the eighties out of the Queensland Civil Liberties campaign of which she was a leading member. What the article exposes is the inadequacy of Socialist Alternative "Marxism".

First she asserts that images reflecting the creativity of the masses which is, “the heart and soul of Marxism” She points out “every chronicler of revolutions has remarked on the joyful atmosphere, the rapid advance of political consciousness” She quotes Lenin referring to the 1905 revolution as a “festival of oppressed and exploited” and also cites Rosa Luxemburg and Antonio Gramsci. She then equates these with the comments of American socialist Ahmed Shawki who was inspired by the events in Tahir Square, the centre of the revolution in Cairo. Yes these events were inspiring. Yes there were changes in consciousness. But in no way did it constitute revolutionary proletarian consciousness. For Marxists, this is what is decisive.

Bloodworth acknowledges that complete revolution can only be won by the working class going further than the revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt have gone so far. Yes we agree. She once again cites Lenin “Only he is a Marxist who extends the recognition to the recognition of the recognition of the (political rule) of the proletariat. “Yes indeed but how do we get this political rule of the proletariat? Here Sandra Bloodworth is strategically defective.

She asserts that that in Egypt when workers joined the struggle they were a working class “fighting for their own interest”. For Marxists this means the dictatorship of the proletariat. No commentator we know has suggested that this was the intent of the Egyptian strikers. When their statements refer to the popular revolution, they mean the existing one. Where was their party? What was its programme? How and why did it succumb to the bourgeois leadership of the revolution? These are important questions to address if one considers workers were “fighting for their own interests” We don’t think they were. Yes their militant upsurge contained “elements of social revolution” but this is simply not enough.

She then goes on to assert “Take the demand for higher wages. This is not an economic demand ““It fuses economics and politics because it challenges the neoliberal interests of the ruling class.” Were the ruling class of Egypt “neoliberal”? But this is fundamentally wrong.

In A Third Period of Comintern Errors (Writings 1930) Trotsky points out quite the contrary, namely that a class struggle is only political when workers are fighting for clear political demands. He considers confusion between political and economic struggle as made by the Comintern at the time as a betrayal. Trotsky pointed out that workers often fight for higher wages when they have faith in capitalism. The wages struggle, therefore doesn’t represent a break from capitalism. Of course we support higher wages but we don’t confuse militant unionism with political class consciousness.

She then asserts the need for “popular control of production”. In Egypt she says that there were community organising centres. She wants the same in the workplace. She calls them workers councils. Yes, workers control of production is an important part of the revolutionary process.. Yes we urge both workers control and workers committees. But the point is that these are not revolutionary unless there is intervention by a revolutionary party. In Algeria there was even workers self-management under the Ben Bella bourgeois regime. This failed because it was tied to the capitalist state.

The amazing thing about Bloodworth’s article is in no way is the revolutionary party even mentioned, let alone discussed. If all this happens objectively, why have Socialist Alternative? She doesn’t establish the political basis for her own organization.

We agree that that there was the potential for a truly democratic society to emerge — socialism. But the point is to get this type of society, a revolutionary party has to be constructed with a truly revolutionary programme.. That party has to win leadership over the working class and thence middle class sectors behind the proletarian banner. We repeat. Bloodworth does not even mention a revolutionary party let alone discuss the consequences.

Bloodworth believes in internationalism and gives us an example of a pizza ordered and paid for in Cairo, for workers occupying the Capitol building in Wisconsin. According to her “international solidarity comes natural to so many” Well if it comes so natural way why was it in Australia workers acted in solidarity with the fight against apartheid, the national liberation front of Vietnam, independence for Indonesia and East Timor, the-people of Bougainville and so on yet overwhelmingly succumbed to the chauvinist offensive “keep industry in Australia” etc. They also supported the Prices and Incomes Accord. There have been plenty of acts of international solidarity from trade unions and these are important. But the point is that to be consistently internationalist, a political break has to be made. This Sandra Bloodworth doesn’t seem to understand. Sandra Bloodworth’s article not only exposes Socialist Alternative’s inadequacies regarding the revolutions in Egypt and Libya. It exposes the objectivist, economist method of Socialist Alternative in Australia. It therefore exposes the bankruptcy of that organisation.

Banning the Burqa. Sarkozy’s chauvinist offensive in France.

As is well known Sarkozy is a reactionary hard line leader who is seriously attacking French working people and the poor, making them pay for the crisis of the bosses system. There have been many militant responses to serious attacks such as plans to increase the pension age to seventy. French workers are not taking this lying down.

On his part Sarkozy is winning support by pandering to chauvinism. The first victims of this offensive have been the Gypsies. Sarkozy plans to deport them. He doesn’t care that many have been in France for generations. The Gypsies are vulnerable as they are despised by chauvinist French, including sections of the working class. Romania refuses to have them.

The next target are the Muslims. Muslim women who are fully covered, wearing the burqa are only a minute proportion of the French population. But they stand out. The burqa is reactionary and Sarkozy uses many left and feminist arguments against it. Sarkozy knows that using these arguments puts the left in a bind, being seen to be defending a reactionary custom in order to fight a reactionary offensive. Sarkozy no doubt rationalises his legislation in the name of women’s liberation. This is how Liberal MP Bronwyn Bishop argues in Australia. She is silent when it comes to opposing women’s oppression in this country. In reality she is giving the racist campaign a feminist gloss.

Communists oppose the burqa. Yes the Islamic faith oppresses women. The question is how this should be dealt with. The capitalist state is not the answer. We oppose legislation by a capitalist government which effectively denies people their right to practice their religion.

Moslems are victims of the chauvinist offensive. This is true in Australia as well as France. Christian Democrat Fred Nile is campaigning for a ban on Muslim immigrants. He only wants Christians. In places like Lakemba, Sydney Muslim youth are vilified.

In Newtown Sydney, a supporter of the fascist Australian Protectionist Party put up some racist artwork clearly visible from the railway line to the western suburbs of Sydney. It stated "Ban the Burqa". A left protest against this mural was met by violent police attacks. Six were arrested. It is clear that the cops knew the political affiliations of the artist and have consciously chosen to back racist fascists in their chauvinist campaign against left antifascists. In places like Lakemba, Sydney Muslim youth are vilified.

There is nothing new about this reactionary campaign to scapegoat Muslims either in Australia or France.

During the seventies, the campaign was against Algerians. Sarkozy is effectively cashing in on the failure of the French left to fight chauvinism. In fact often they have initiated the chauvinist campaigns themselves. The Communist Party (PCF) was the racist vanguard against Algerians there. It was the fascist Fronte Nationale who politically cashed in on their efforts. Today in France, the Fronte National is on the offensive also. According to some polis FN leader Marine La Pen is leading and if an election is held, would be the French President. We don't know the complete truth but it is clear this is a dangerous situation. Fascism is a deadly threat to the working class and must be smashed.

Abbott and Gillard. Intensified war against the unemployed.

Julia Gillard is supposed to be Prime Minister of Australia. But it appears to be Tony Abbott who is calling the tune. Recently Abbot announced a "tough love" approach to those with disabilities. This means forcing them on to the Newstart, forcing them look for work or face breaching. This is cruel and many will suffer.

Julia Gillard appears to want to follow suit. Her only difference with Abbott appears to be that she fears many of his measures such as compulsory work for the dole are economically irresponsible as they might cost too much. She is happy for the unemployed to endure suffering.

Love this isn't. What it means is mutual obligation and work for the dole. Talk is cheap. It is easy to say that those with disability could find work. It is a different matter getting employers to employ them. There is widespread prejudice.

We have no objection to those with disabilities getting jobs. Indeed they should have the right to work. What Abbott and Gillard want to do is work test and thence breach. This puts a lot of pressure on an unemployed person with a disability. This means eight weeks without pay if they don't pass the work test. They are also threatened with work for the dole.

No one should be forced to live on a dole payment, below the poverty line. No one should be forced to work for it! Work for the dole means hardship for unemployed people. It is even harder for those previously recognised as disabled, either physically or mentally.

Everyone deserves a living wage. It is virtually impossible to live off the dole. The workers movement must fight unemployment and especially work for the dole which is used to undermine the wages and conditions of workers as well as the unemployed.

COMMUNIST LEFT

Communist Left is a propaganda group committed to a fifth Communist International based on the programme of the Fourth. International founded by Leon Trotsky.

We stand for building a revolutionary party. Break from the social chauvinist Labor Party!

For the revolutionary overthrow of the capitalist state. For the expropriation of the bourgeoisie!

For a revolutionary workers and small farmers government!

For the reduction of the working week until everyone is employed! No loss of pay!

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