

On Egypt: A Bit Too Late, Boss!

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“I don't care what people say about me. Right now I care about my country; I care about Egypt.” This is President Mubarak speaking. By saying these sentences he disregards the Egyptian people, and stresses on the land in abstraction. Or perhaps he wants to continue his patriarchal role for His people. He may want to say: “Oh, you the immature. You cannot recognize your interests.” In the same line he continues, “I do not go, because if I leave now there will be chaos.” By chaos, of course he means threats to the comfort of the ruling class, which has freedom and wealth and deprives the people of these.

Whatever he may mean, it is enough for the supporters of the status quo before the uprising to play the role of the police. And they do that. Oddly enough, he still hopes to maintain his image as a kind father. When you think it over, you realize the speaker must have such nerve to speak in this manner. He actually insults Egypt. And the people get this insult and pursue their demands more determinedly, including at an international level. The following are just two small examples in Toronto.

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You would not feel cold; it was cold though, below zero. Water would freeze at this temperature, but not you. With your compatriots chanting for justice and freedom, with consciousness intertwined with passion, with rage and altruism, you would shake with cold and yet not feel it at the same time.

Far from Dundas square, in Toronto, thousands and thousands of miles away, you could feel that parts of your body were being harmed. There in Egypt, more than 10 million people live in absolute poverty and about the same number are unemployed, and this is while it is one of the youngest and most populous Arab countries.

No! You could not stay home. You have come out along with others to ask why Egypt should have the 10th largest army in the whole world when people live such a terrible life. You are enraged with a state that supports the interests of the US and its allies in the area, but deprives people of their basic needs, a state that, once the hungry and enslaved people react, resorts to force and violence. You come and chant along with people to demonstrate that “When people want to live, destiny must surely respond; darkness will disappear, chains will certainly break.” This Tunisian poem is being realized now. You are proud of your compatriots when you see that they put economic demands alongside political ones.

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What is more, none of you are fooled by the green light that the West gives to leaders that do nothing but follow their own interests. By the way, how is it that those governments are considering the substitution of these authorities right now? On the street, you do not hear anything in support of ElBaradei or Omar Suleiman. No! You do not see their posters either. Your brothers and sisters do not want these pseudo-alternatives. A woman holding loudspeaker speaks of class struggle, of poverty. “This is a revolution of bread.” This brings tears into your eyes, and you chant along your compatriots: “Bread, Freedom, Human Dignity.”

However, something makes you anxious about the future. Is it possible that, like several other progressive movements that you have witnessed in your life, this one is to be derailed by the powerful and the wealthy? But something gives you hope: when you have come this far while deprived of all public media to reach the grassroots, and even recently deprived of the internet, you will pursue your demands in the best way possible. Something else makes you happy: they do not limit their demands to just one country; Tunisia, Iraq and all non-democratic and unjust governments in the world are subject to your rage. The Tunisian Ben Ali is as much criticized as Mubarak. You chant: “Revolution, revolution until victory, from Tunisia to Egypt.”

You see Egypt and Tunisia as part of an international struggle that continues, now in Greece, now in Spain, now in Yemen, and now in the workers’ struggles here in Hamilton. You witness the sparks of hope of a long step towards realization of justice, freedom and equality.

When you hear the same slogans and even more radical ones being chanted over there in the streets of Egypt, you become proud of your brothers and sisters having attained such a level of social consciousness.

You are determined to continue protesting until a big change comes about. “When?” — you ask. “Next week.” You will check the website for the place. You think: “What will happen by next week”?

And next week: February 5, 2011

This time you are at Queens Park. The population is three times more than last Saturday, and even more. This time there will be a march as well, and significant signs of international solidarity are even stronger than last week: besides Arabs and Egyptians you see a lot of people who are neither Arab nor Egyptian. And some working class representatives have come and are among the speakers.

Again, you do not see pictures of El Baradei or Omar Suleiman. Instead you chant along the crowd: “Condoleezza, Condoleezza, go get Mubarak a visa.” No! Nobody has come with this illusion that US will provide the country with democracy or justice. You do not

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have to be a genius to notice that US does not want this. Take this simple example. America is presumably one of the countries with the largest number of working class members. However, the level of unionization in this country is proportionately even lower than several third world countries. Why does the US government, which is very much interested in exporting democracy to countries such as Iran, Afghanistan, and now Egypt, deprive its own people of this very basic right?

No, nobody here has such illusions. But still no one is representing your radical demands! And this worries you.

The youngster Noora apologizes that what she wrote just the night before is not well polished. But it hits the nail on the head: “We are still human. We have reason. We have dignity. We struggle for bread. We hate you and your pockets. We hate your two-faced politics. Mubarak! Egypt is our mother, but you are not our father.”

In your broken Arabic you tell her, “You are the real leader of this revolution.” She says, “No”; she has tears in her eyes.

Karl Marx famously said in 1842: “Lack of freedom is the real mortal danger for mankind.” As far as the problem of freedom is concerned the question is not whether it should exist or not, because it has always existed. The only point is that people in authority decide who may have it and who may not. Mubarak’s regime has deprived the majority of the people of this indispensable right.

But unjust and undemocratic rulers seem to be ridiculously slow at getting the message transmitted by people:

“I heard the voice of your revolution.... Let all of us work together to establish real democracy.” The time is not 2011, and the speaker is not Mubarak. The speaker is the Iranian shah and the time is November 5, 1978. It was too late then, and it is too late now.

Enough, boss!

In the last few days, negotiations have been going on among the government and the opposition sides. One crucial factor for the outcome of this step of our brothers’ and sisters’ struggle would be the role of the representatives of women and men of the working class in the largest sense of the term, as an overarching representative of the whole society. The working class of Egypt, having engaged in thousands of protests in the last few years, will pursue its demands, just as women will pursue justice and freedom in every phase of the struggle.