

Counter Revolution Disguised as Democracy in Egypt

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In a country where the embers of revolution are still glowing, you would assume that a presidential election would produce a revolutionary-appearing government. Not so in Egypt. The revolutionaries who toppled the hated dictator Mubarak will have zero representation in the upcoming runoff election for president.

Those who opposed the revolution, however, are well represented. The runoff election features Ahmed Shafiq, the dictator's former Prime Minister who remains a military strongman. Shafiq's presence in the election is a stark reminder that the revolution's goals have yet to be accomplished.

The other non-revolutionary presidential contender is Mohamed Morsi of the Muslim Brotherhood. The leadership of the Muslim Brotherhood stayed quiet during the initial phase of the revolution until their youth wing dragged them into the fray. The leadership has since pretended to be an ally of the revolution, but their fake revolutionary credentials have been exposed several times since winning a large chunk of parliamentary seats, steadily eroding their popularity.

For example, Egypt's executive power still consists of a cabinet handpicked by the military, a fact that began to fan the revolution's hot coals, re-igniting mass protests. The Muslim Brotherhood stayed silent — as before — until the heat once again forced them into action: the Brotherhood shut down parliament, demanding that the army's cabinet step down. But the military responded with inaction and threatened to shutdown parliament permanently. The Brotherhood responded by compelling the re-opening of parliament, and the cabinet remained in place.

The Brotherhood is now correctly viewed by many as being somewhat subservient to the military, a role their leadership played pre-revolution. This exposure accounts for the drop in their popularity that resulted in their earning only 25 percent of first round Presidential votes, after winning 47 percent of the Parliamentary seats in November/December.

Regardless of which candidate wins the election, the military could very well remain the real power in the country. This is because Egypt still lacks a constitution; the new president will literally have zero power until one is created. If the military's candidate loses they will fight to limit the president's power. Many of the more honest contenders for president have already boycotted the election for this reason.

A Constituent Assembly had been bureaucratically set up by Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood-dominated parliament to write a constitution, but other parties boycotted it because of the

Brotherhood's overwhelming power over the proceedings. Then Egypt's military-dominated courts dissolved the Assembly, probably to keep the Brotherhood's power in check (the military and the Brotherhood have a love-hate relationship, relying on each other as props while simultaneously vying for power).

The pathetic state of Egypt's democracy led the spokesman for the military's candidate, Ahmed Shafiq, to declare "the revolution has ended." But he has spoken too soon. When stripped down to its essentials, a revolution is the majority of working people actively engaged in politics. And because the coming election will not allow this majority an avenue to be engaged in politics, they will likely continue their political engagement in the streets.

Inevitably, however, the revolutionaries will learn that it's not enough to oust Mubarak; a positive vision must replace the dictator, lest representatives of the old regime attempt to replace the dictator with his clone. Hopefully, the revolutionaries will create a vision that unites them against their opponents, while organizing themselves as a cohesive, powerful social force that can withstand the organized power of the past, complete with inspiring ideas capable of mobilizing working people and truly transforming society, as opposed to a mere shuffling at the top.

The Egyptian ruling class is consciously using these elections to channel the revolution's energy into a dead-end. This is a timeless revolution-killing strategy: the ruling class calls for an election before the revolutionaries have had the time to properly organize themselves, leaving the election to be won by those groups — The Muslim Brotherhood and the army in this case — who were organized pre-revolution. The winners of revolutions are the organized or the wealthy, often times both.

Egyptian society will refuse to remain calm after these elections; there are too many economic and social problems that remain unfixed post-revolution, most notably high unemployment within an economy in shambles.

The military government has already asked the U.S.-dominated International Monetary Fund for a \$3.2 billion loan, which will not be finalized until after the elections. The delay was intentional, since the conditions of the debt deal will inevitably include austerity — cuts to basic social programs, elimination of gas and food subsidies, combined with privatizations of the public sector and other anti-worker policies.

Like the revolutionaries in Greece, Egyptians will fight against austerity while fighting for a truly democratic Constituent Assembly; either issue by itself could re-spark the still smoldering revolution. But democracy will have a new meaning for Egypt's revolutionaries: the abstract ideal will be tossed aside in favor of a democracy of economic and social equality, requiring that the economic and social power of Egypt's old rulers be smashed.

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