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## Class Warfare in Egypt

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Egypt is at war. More accurately, Egypt is experiencing yet another battle in its ongoing class war. The battle is so fierce because the primary combatants are the two most powerful social forces in Egypt, both factions of the capitalist class – the military as the state capitalist class and the *Ikhwan* (the Muslim Brotherhood) representing the competitive capitalist class.

The military's most recent explicit intervention into the political domain is assuredly not revolutionary. Nor is it cause for optimism. It is also not the ahistorical coup of liberal commentary. As a battle between two different kinds of property in Egypt, this is a *further* descent along the retrogressive trajectory set by the events of 25 January 2011. Egyptian politics are increasingly counter-revolutionary.

This battle marks the beginning of the fourth phase of the so-called Egyptian “revolution.” It is the new low point. The first phase was 25 January 2011 to 6 February 2011. This exceedingly brief period was revolutionary as the proletariat threatened the military's proprietorship of the Egyptian state. The second phase lasted from 6 February 2011 until 18 February 2011. During this period the radical potential of the proletariat was curtailed and the revolution reduced, to borrow Marx's phrase, to the bourgeois scale – witness the discursive shift in demands from “Bread, Freedom and Social Justice” to “the people demand the fall of the regime.” The *Ikhwan's* involvement reduced the revolution and, in turn, made it possible for the military to safely, and to its benefit, depose Mubarak. The third phase extended from 18 February until 1 July 2013. It was during this period that the material interests of the military and the *Ikhwan*

colluded to further drive the proletariat from the political field. This, the fourth phase, was necessitated and made possible by the preceding phase. The collusion of the state and competitive capitalist classes was successful; so successful in fact, that the working class was immiserated and disempowered past even the point of 25 January 2011. The immiseration produced economic, and then political, grievances. The disempowerment meant the predominance of populist identities over class consciousness and cohesion. The state capitalist class seized on the grievances articulated from populist positions and protected its interests, at the expense of the interests of the competitive capitalist class, through blatant manipulation of nationalist ideology. Of course, all of this was interpenetrated with dominant interests in the global political economy.

Such a materialist reading of recent Egyptian politics gets away from superficial, asubstantive notions of “youth,” “deep state” and “Islamist” and offers a number of critical insights into the essence of the contemporary moment:

First, a contradiction lies at the heart of *Ikhwan* discourse, at the heart of all vulgar “analysis” of recent Egyptian politics in fact. The military’s actions in 2013 are the same as they were in 2011, and that is because they follow from the same motivation. Sisi’s supposed recognition of the legitimacy of the protestors’ demands and ultimatum to Morsi on 1 July 2013 was essentially identical to Tantawi’s recognition and ultimatum to Mubarak on 31 January 2011. In both instances, the military protected its vast material interests by sacrificing the class wielding political power. Either 25 January 2011 was a revolution, and now so too are these political machinations, or 25 January 2011 was a coup, and now so too is this. It is rhetorical drivel to contend that in 2011 the military helped execute a revolution, but now is committing a coup. It is the extension of this contradiction that produces such paradoxical realities as reactionary Islamists, and they are always reactionary, claiming to be revolutionary while supposedly progressive liberals desire a military coup.

Apologists rationalizing the military’s intervention on the grounds that this supposed revolution is a corrective for the last one have different problems. They clearly do not understand that militaries are reactionary, not revolutionary; and no national exceptionalism, real or imagined, changes that. State militaries never make revolutions. They only ever commit coups. The apologists also obviously fail to appreciate that when the “people” have to turn to the military to realize their politics, it is the military, and not the people, that is powerful. If the “people” truly had the power they claim and/or is ascribed to them, there would have been no need for military intervention.

Second, it was under the cover of the last two years of social peace and the contrived harmony of national interests that class warfare was waged against Egyptian working people. The military and the *Ikhwan* colluded in this struggle against the social force that originally birthed 25 January 2011. The battles in this phase were less fierce and ignored by the corporate collaborationist media because the contest was so one-sided – two factions of capital united against a dominated and increasingly policed and surveilled labour; because they were blunted by institutions – the Political Parties Law, drafted with the assistance of the *Ikhwan*, prohibited the formation of class-based parties and imposed prohibitive organizational and material hurdles on workers’ mobilization; and because the victors were clients of dominant power in the global

order – ostensibly Qatari capital backing the *Ikhwan* and American capital backing the Egyptian military.

This exposes two additional contradictions. The *Ikhwan* is objecting to the military's rifles dislodging its president when it was those same rifles that installed the *Ikhwan* as the junior partner in the governing coalition and allowed it to conduct elections and fashion its constitution. Now, it is only political that the *Ikhwan* tried to institutionalize its post-2011 political dominance. All social forces attempt to "lock in," as it were, power relations at their moment of victory. But what did it expect?; that after using its rifles against one social force the military would mothball them and not use them again against another, even more powerful social force? In not demolishing the state, but instead agreeing to turn its apparatuses against other interests in society, the *Ikhwan* ensured that it could be disempowered by the very rifles by which it had been empowered. Those cheering in sheeplike fashion the military's intervention would do well to remember this for next time.

At the moment the collusion between the different forms of property in Egypt is ended and they come to blows, working people are too weak to successfully contest it as a tripartite struggle. In state capital's moment of relative weakness, if only due to its battle with another capitalist faction, labor is even weaker. The peace between the capitalist factions was broken precisely because the dominant class did not have to worry about another productive force successfully engaging it. The tragedy of this moment is that labor cannot exploit the irreconcilability of some capitalist interests. It shows just how much more work, particularly ideological labor, the working class has to do.

Third, power in the global order is permitting this counter-revolutionary intervention because the form of state the *Ikhwan* was constituting was not permissible to the order. This was not because of the group's religious ideology. The global order tolerates theocracies, see Israel and Saudi Arabia. It was not because of the group's economic policies. The *Ikhwan* is neoliberal; they, like Republicans and Tories, are *market* fundamentalists. The *Ikhwan* is being marginalized because it was not reforming the state along neoliberal lines fast enough. Because of the group's material interests in the Egyptian political economy it was slow to accept the conditionalities of the long-negotiated International Monetary Fund loan. Global capital wanted access to Egyptian labor and resources and when financial coercion in the form of a capital strike proved unsuccessful, military coercion was exerted by an American client mechanism in the country. In a move that evidences that the global order wants a different form of Egyptian state faster, Mohammed ElBaradei, a former functionary of that very order, is now the anointed representative of acceptable change.

This intervention, too, will have contradictory consequences. Most notably, the military's retrogressive maneuver now will result in a further neoliberalization of the Egyptian political economy in the longer term which will, as it has done in the past, threaten the military's material interests.

It is imperative to ignore American and European diplomatic hand-wringing and recognize that the Egyptian military's counter-revolutionary measures are very much in keeping with the practices of dominant power in the regional and global order. Politicization and mobilization of

the citizenry, of any kind, makes other reactionary states in the region nervous. This is precisely why the kings of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates have already sent messages of congratulations to the military's new president (anything lauded by Saudi Arabia is never revolutionary). The US, too, needed this disciplined. The last thing its ruling financial oligarchy wants is people getting it in their heads that a node in the global network of accumulation, particularly a subservient one, can be challenged or worse yet changed from within, regardless of its orientation.

Ultimately, the events of early July 2013 have moved Egyptians further away from revolutionary emancipation. As the counter-revolution of 25 January did, so too will these events erode the limited liberal concessions won through previous struggles within the Egyptian polity; just as the workers' and farmers' quotas were written out of the constitution and women's rights laws overturned in the third phase, already in the fourth phase segments of the media are being quashed. Given extant material circumstances, specifically the political economy's ongoing dependent location in the global structure of accumulation, little better history could have been made. It is profoundly unfortunate, because Egyptians deserve so much better, but today's euphoria will be tomorrow's regret.