

Editorial

The month of August is commonly thought of as the 'silly season' in which nothing very significant happens but this August there were two developments - in Egypt and in Syria - of major international significance both of which occurred too late and unrolled too rapidly to receive the treatment they deserve in this Review: brief editorial comment will have to suffice.

Egypt and Syria

Events in Egypt have taken a very sinister turn. After a year of government by Mohammed Morsi and the Muslim Brotherhood that combined right wing neoliberalism with ineptitude and creeping authoritarianism, the masses took to the streets in their millions. By all accounts the numbers involved in the anti-Morsi mobilisation of 30 June were phenomenal: 17 million or more - perhaps the largest street demonstration in history.

However, there was a certain ambiguity in this vast movement. On the one hand millions who took to streets were basically enraged at Morsi's neoliberalism, his protection of the rich and attacks on the poor and his inability to halt the deterioration of the Egyptian Economy. Of these many were the same revolutionaries who had brought down Mubarak. On the other hand there was an element in the movement of what the Egyptians call feloul - remnants of the old regime - who saw this as their opportunity to get back at the Brotherhood. At the same time there were many just being drawn into political activity who, while not being feloul, still had illusions in the Egyptian military. This ambiguity showed itself in the cheers and celebrations of many of the demonstrators when the army responded to the movement

by arresting Morsi and deposing the government.

At the time many hoped that this would be basically a rerun of what happened on 11 February 2011 when the army deferred to people power on the streets and in the factories and removed Mubarak. Unfortunately this was no mere repetition and this time the generals exploited the ambiguity referred to above to brutally assert their own power. On 14 August, after a long and increasingly violent stand-off with Muslim Brotherhood protestors who refused to accept the removal of their president, the army perpetrated a ruthless massacre on the streets of Cairo and elsewhere. By the military's own account they slaughtered over six hundred protestors and the real figure is probably much higher (the Muslim Brotherhood claim over two thousand).

This was the old regime striking back with a vengeance and their counter revolutionary intentions became clearer by the day as they imposed a general curfew, continued the killing, arrested thousands, censored opposition newspapers, reclosed the border with Gaza (partially opened as a concession to the revolution) and rubbed everyone's noses in the dirt with the release of Mubarak (announced, with bitter irony, on the same day that Chelsea Manning got 35 years - there have always been the closest links between the Pentagon and the Egyptian generals).

There are important lessons to be learned from this whole episode. First, that while no serious social change is possible without 'people power', the mobilisation of the masses on the streets, when it comes to revolution people power alone is not enough, there also needs to be politics - analysis, strategy and direction. Above all

there needs to be clarity on the role of the state: this general truth, to which Lenin devoted his greatest work, *The State and Revolution*, and which has been repeatedly emphasised in *IMR* (see for example the article on ‘Understanding Left Reformism’ in the last issue) applies with particular force to Egypt where illusions in the ‘national’ or ‘progressive’ role of the military has been the great weakness of the left since the days of Nasser. Second, that as well as analysis there has to be a concrete political alternative. In Egypt the Revolutionary Socialists have done their best to provide this but although they have grown rapidly from a very small base, they remain far too small to give leadership to a movement of many millions. Remedying this state of affairs is a key strategic task for the future.

In the meantime all is not lost. The army is clearly master of the situation at the moment but they have not yet crushed the left or the workers’ movement which had been on the rise in a big strike wave. And what remains to be seen is how the masses react if and when the army - like the Brotherhood before them - prove unable to resolve the economic crisis and take it out on the people.

Parallel to events in Egypt has been the developing crisis over Syria. As these lines are written the US government is threatening a serious assault on Syria. The excuse for this is the horrific chemical weapons attack around Damascus on August 21. Excuse is the word because regardless of whether or not the Assad regime was responsible for the attack¹. US imperialism is not the friend or defender of the Syrian people and it is clear from the examples of Iraq, Afghanistan and Libya that its intervention will a) only worsen the suffer-

ing of the Syrian people and b) strengthen the ability and willingness of the US to use military force to defend and extend its imperial control of the middle east and elsewhere.

Fortunately a rather unexpected obstacle was thrown in the path of Obama’s war drive by the refusal of the British parliament to support military action. This is more or less unprecedented and can only be explained by the overwhelming opposition of British public opinion as a legacy of Blair’s lies in 2003 and the subsequent debacle in Iraq. Many who demonstrated in 2003 felt they did so in vain because of the failure to stop Blair, but the value of their efforts has clearly been vindicated.

A final point about Syria: opinion on the left is divided about the Assad regime and the opposition to it. It is clear that the uprising against Assad began in February 2011 as a popular revolution against a brutal dictatorship directly inspired by the Tunisian and Egyptian Revolutions but since then this has been lost sight of in the midst of various interventions by Al Qaeda, Saudi Arabia, Iran, Hezbollah and so on and this is an aspect of the situation neither the US, nor Russia nor the western media will care to mention. However the evidence is that the popular revolt is still alive and in this context I will quote Ghayath Naisse, member of the Syrian Revolutionary Left Current:

This is a popular revolution-
at its heart are the workers,
the masses and the rural poor.
It began in the popular work-
ing class districts and spread
to the countryside. This rev-
olution from below is still alive
in the popular quarters of cities
such as Damascus, We created

¹However left wing and anti-intervention sources from Syria assure me that that there is no real doubt that the attack was perpetrated by Assad’s forces in the attempt to break resistance in Damascus and that this is not the first time the regime has used chemical weapons.

popular committees to coordinate our protests, and popular councils to rule our liberated areas. We have experimented in self organisation and self rule. But we face many enemies. On the one side we have a cruel and barbaric dictatorship, backed by Russia, China, Iran and Hizbollah. On the other is the counter revolutionary camp of Saudi Arabia and the petro monarchies backed by the US and western powers. This is why we say 'neither Washington nor Moscow, Riyadh nor Tehran'. We want a future Syria under popular rule, where the labouring masses are in control. Our victory can only come from our hands. The Western powers want to derail our revolution, they have their own imperial and sectarian agendas. There are never any guarantees of victory. We always face the horror of defeat. But socialists must always stand with the oppressed and those in revolt..

The fact that a joint statement², expressing just this point of view, was issued by five Middle Eastern socialist organizations - the Revolutionary Socialists (Egypt) - Revolutionary Left Current (Syria) - Union of Communists (Iraq) - Al-Mounadil-a (Morocco) - Socialist Forum (Lebanon) - League of the Workers' Left (Tunisia) - is a development of the highest significance.

²<http://www.al-manshour.org/en/statement-by-rev-socialists-marxists-on-us-attack-on-syria>

In this issue

In this issue we publish articles on a variety of topics ranging from the tricky task of being a revolutionary socialist in parliament or how in the words of Lenin and Richard Boyd Barrett to 'stand on the dung heap without falling into it', to an introduction to work of the great (but little known in Ireland) Portuguese novelist Jose Saramago. We are also pleased to have increased our number of book reviews. However two articles require particular comment.

The first is our lead article by Sinéad Kennedy on 'Marxism and Feminism'. Women's liberation has been of major importance to socialists and Marxists going right back to the days of Marx and Engels, Bebel, Zetkin, Lenin and Kollontai and the relationship between Marxism and feminism was the subject of many debates in the 1970s and 80s and subsequently. Kennedy moves this discussion forward in a significant way by locating the current backlash against women by means of raunch culture in the ideology and practice of neoliberalism with its drive to commodify and submit to market forces everything including womens' bodies and sexuality and its exclusive emphasis on individual rather than social responsibility. In this way the article makes a powerful case for the relevance of Marxism to the struggle for women's equality.

The second is Brian O'Boyle's 'Cracking the Crisis - Financial Conspiracy or Declining Rate of Profitability'. Economics is never the easiest of subjects and Marxist economics suffers from the added difficulty that its core concepts are never to be found in the public discourse of politicians or the media and very rarely in the education system. Even from RTE and the *Irish Independent* you could easily draw

the conclusion that we've all been ripped off by the banks but not in a month of Sundays will we hear mention of the labour theory of value or the tendency of the rate of profit to decline. Yet these theories are of great political importance. The first explains how exploitation is not an occasional feature of capitalism but inherent in its nature. The second explains why throughout its history capitalism has alternated between booms and slumps and why the contradictions in the system cannot be solved by even the most powerful governments, banks or corporations.

Beginning by rejecting the notion that the current global economic crisis was somehow engineered by the capitalists or bankers for their secret purposes O'Boyle offers a careful account of two of Marx's key economic concepts and theories showing how they prove that capitalism has built-in tendency to crisis and arguing that the empirical facts of capitalism's development since the Great Depression of the 1930s through to the present basically con-

firm Marx's fundamental argument.

Finally, readers of IMR will be interested in the Marxism 2013 Festival of Ideas and Resistance which is being held on 15-17 November at the Teachers Club, Parnell Square West in Dublin. This will be a weekend of debate and discussion covering a wide range of national and international issues and combining theory and activism, history and culture. Speakers will include Clare Daly, David Norris, Terry Eagleton, Eamonn McCann, Kieran Allen, Michael Taft and Sinéad Kennedy with guests from Egypt and Greece. Tickets are €12 waged, €8 unwaged and bookings can be made at SWP office 018722682.

One new feature we hope to establish at Marxism this year is an art exhibition, Left in Vision 2013. Any artist interested in submitting work should contact Anthony and Ciarna Hackett on 0879456166 or 08572193778 or email ciarnehackett@gmail.com.

-John Molyneux