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VICTORY IN EGYPT

The defeat of Hosni Mubarak is an exhilarating moment for the popular movement in Egypt, for those who strive for democracy in many other benighted places, and for people who strive to maintain existing democracies throughout the world.

However, the removal of Mubarak has simply dislodged the semblance of civilian rule and unmasked the military as the real rulers of Egypt. After all, the military has been in control of the state, and helping themselves to land and other assets, since it came to power with the overthrow of King Farouk I in 1952, and the abdication of King Fuad II in June the following year.

By overthrowing the monarchy and subsequently driving the British out of Egypt, the army established its nationalist credentials. Yet, for all this, it has been the most resolutely anti-democratic institution in Egyptian society. Within a year of the colonels coming to power, all political parties were banned, and the country has been run by army officers ever since.

Egypt has been run by the dictators, Naguib, Nasser, Sadat, and Mubarak, for fifty-nine years; all these dictatorships have, with or without a civilian veneer, been military dictatorships. The suppression of political parties, the manifest corruption of state officials, the imprisonment and execution of political opponents, and the torture chambers and secret prisons of the security apparatus, could not have existed for one day without the full engagement and support of the officer corp. Consequently, the army cannot 'save' Egypt, or install a democracy.

The unarmed masses have heroically driven the dictator, Hosni Mubarak, from office. It is a glorious popular victory, but it is only the opening act of the revolution. The second and subsequent phases of the revolution must involve dislodging the army from power; it must prise the generals'

fingers off the Egyptian state; relieve the army of its industrial and commercial assets, establish the rule of law, and displace the military oligarchy, once and for all.

It is a racing certainty, that without a powerful political movement among non-commissioned officers and the rank and file of the army nothing can be achieved. First and foremost the generals must be deprived of their soldiers. The democracy movement must set down firm roots in the army by ensuring that the common soldiers and conscripts begin organising themselves and asserting their independence from the orders and outlook of their senior officers.

The popular movement in Egypt is clearly capable of this if it focuses upon wresting political control and influence from the generals and the officer corp. If it focuses all its efforts upon uniting the rank and file soldiers with the working class, the trade unions, and the largely middle class democracy campaigns, it will put the revolution on a firm footing. Through the organisation of the conscript soldiers, tens of millions of unskilled workers, day labourers, and poor peasants can be brought into the struggle, and victory will be assured.