

paper, predicts a 35% wage decrease in the government sector over the coming five years. We can imagine the size of unemployment if we add the two million unemployed who will return from abroad in the next two years, searching for work.

Politically, what the authority 'grants' is single precisely delineated freedom, freedom of the press, while the mass movement and freedom to organize are prohibited; strikes are considered criminal acts. President Mubarak personally amended the election law for the people's council (parliament). The new rule recognizes only one ballot - the official one. Fraud was used to deprive the nationalist opposition of representation; in this way, it was kept out of the people's council, the consultative council and the local councils.

In Mubarak's term, barbaric repression has been practiced against the legal moves of workers, students and peasants. University campuses and Al Azhar mosque were violated. Now 1,236 central security soldiers are being tried in the state security courts; 1,205 of them face capital punishment, despite the fact that there is a general consensus, even among officials, that their uprising was spontaneous. It erupted as a result of their bad living conditions and the humiliation to which they are subjected.

There are some who challenge these facts and the realities of daily life; they insist on circulating illusions about 'reforms' and counting on changes from 'within the regime'. However, these illusions find no echo among the masses. The leaders who promote such illusions are being isolated and losing credibility. There is a process of polarization going on within the parties they lead; there is a split between the leaders and their base.

I would like to stress one point in conclusion. We make a sharp distinction between the 'reforms' such as I have described, which we reject, and the necessary struggle to impose reforms and seize our rights in all aspects of life.

## What are the lessons to be drawn from the elections conducted by Mubarak?

### What kind of democracy do you demand?

The main lessons can be summarized as follows:

1. Exposure of the illusions that there were essential differences between the regimes of Sadat and Mubarak. In fact, the latter imposed a much worse election law than his predecessors. The amendment changed the elections from a district system to one central ballot, in order to impose more restrictions and allow more chances to control the results. It guarantees depriving all opposition forces from representation in the parliament, while in the past a few individuals were able to enter. Still, the authorities were forced to falsify the election results, which exposes their claims about democracy and honesty.

2. Democracy is not a gift from God. It can never be attained by using logical, reasonable arguments, or by appealing to the 'enlightened' sector in the authority. Democracy must be seized through mass struggle, and the struggle of the conscious, organized popular movement.

3. Rejection of the tendency to accept reality and adapt to the situation. The opposition has quickly given up resisting the amended election law. They did not seriously try to exert any pressure, especially not on the mass level, even though they had a good example before them: The success of the lawyers in forcing the regime to back down on amending the rules for the lawyers' union. This achievement was due to their perseverance and the mobilization of all lawyers in the battle against the regime.

4. The political and social struggle cannot be confined to the forms and channels allowed by the authority or its law. The struggle has to be broadened through an active practice and imposed by force. In fact, the masses practice this policy, for all forms of mass struggle are illegal. The punishment for sit-ins and strikes, for example, is life imprisonment with hard labor. Only the fact of broad mass struggle prevents the regime from simply implementing this law. We raise this issue because

many political leaders think a lot about legalities. As a result, they refuse to call for mass movements, or even to participate in any action that is 'against the law'; they wait for the authority's permission! Even worse, these leaders were able to obtain a court order allowing them to organize mass meetings and marches, but they backed down because this order contradicted the authority's orders!

5. Serious work to infiltrate the bourgeois institutions, mainly in order to use them as a platform for propagating the programs of the nationalist parties. This is not an aim in itself, nor the main form of struggle, though there are indications that some forces consider it so. There is no doubt that the nationalist and leftist forces benefited from the previous election campaign. It allowed some organizations to have broad contact with the masses and inform them of their program and policies. However, their failure to gain representation was followed by a period of paralysis and disunity, which only confirms the legalistic mentality of their leaders. They did not follow up and utilize the contacts gained with the mass movement, as if their job had ended with the elections.

There is a tendency to exaggerate the reasons for the relative freedom of the press, considering it the main test of the regime's 'democracy'. The signs of the democracy that we are demanding stem from a class basis. We concentrate on democratic freedoms that serve the interests and struggles of the toiling masses, and allow freedom of movement for the more radical forces, i.e., the real left. Thus, we struggle to seize the right to form parties without restrictions, and the freedom to political, social and trade union organization. We struggle for ridding the parties of the authority's hegemony, and for the right to strike, sit-in and demonstrate, etc. In general, we struggle for all that serves the organization and mobilization of the toiling masses.

## Can you inform us about the activities of the revolutionary movement in the mass organizations?

First, it is necessary to know about the background. The most important lesson learned by the traditional Egyptian bourgeoisie is persistently working to dismantle the revolutionary movement and, more important, isolating it from the mass movement, while seeking to control the latter, especially the labor organizations, if it is not able to liquidate them. The bourgeoisie gained experience in this field because at an early stage it was faced with well-developed, active workers' and peasants' movements. Since the 1980s, there has been a protracted, strenuous struggle by the trade union movement. With the bourgeois revolution, led by Saad Zaghloul, one of the first decisions of his government was dissolving the general workers' union. The union leadership was arrested and the workers subjugated to the worst kind of oppression for several decades. The bourgeoisie sought to dominate the movement and organization of the working class, as well as to passify it. This policy was applied by all, from the Wafd Party to the elite parties under the monarchy, to the extent that the Honorable Abbas Halim from the ruling family sought to establish a workers' party.

In Nasser's era, the state consolidated its grip on the labor organization, subordinating it to the state's bureaucratic political formation (the Arab Socialist Union); membership in the latter was required for being nominated to any trade union position. Following the collapse of the monarchy, the regime violently suppressed the peaceful strike of the Kafr Dawar workers. The military court instituted the death sentence which was carried out on two union leaders, Khamis and al Bakarey. In spite of this, the workers supported the July revolution, especially in the period when its nationalist position was consolidated after the nationalization of the Suez Canal in 1956. The progressive direction pursued by the regime in the social and political arenas gave the workers many gains. Then came the 1967 defeat. This led the workers, together with all the popular ranks, to confront the capitulationists, to reject defeat and expose its internal causes, to move for seizing their right to participate in decision-making, and supervise the plan for 'change' which became a mass demand for insuring the base of liberation.