Hamas and PLO suppress solidarity action for Egypt

By Peter Schwarz

For years the Islamist Hamas and the Palestine Liberation Organization have been bitterly hostile to one another. Nevertheless, both organizations have responded in almost identical fashion to the uprisings in Egypt and Tunisia. Demonstrations of solidarity with the Egyptian people have been ruthlessly suppressed in both the Hamas-controlled Gaza Strip and the PLO-governed West Bank.

Some days ago Hamas physically broke up a solidarity demonstration for Egypt. According to Human Rights Watch and Spiegel Online, six women and ten men were singled out for arrest and beaten. Even though Hamas has links to the Muslim Brotherhood, which is half-heartedly supporting the Egyptian demonstrations, the organization obviously fears that the mass movement could spread to Gaza and threaten its own rule.

The social conditions in Gaza are catastrophic. More than half of the 1.5 million population are under 18 years old and “to be young in the Gaza Strip means, in most cases, having no work and no means to make the money necessary for a wedding,” according to Spiegel correspondent Ulrike Putz. “The young people have no way to use their leisure time in a meaningful way, and certainly no way to change their personal circumstances. If you want to travel, you need a permit. These are only given to people under 16 or over 35 years of age.”

A “Manifesto for Change”, posted on Facebook by Palestinian youth, acquired 19,000 friends within a short time. The Manifesto complains bitterly about the prevailing intolerable social conditions in Gaza: “We want to be free. We want to be able to live a normal life. We want peace. Is that too much to ask?”

It continues: “There is a revolution growing inside of us, an immense dissatisfaction and frustration that will destroy us unless we find a way of channeling this energy into something that can challenge the status quo and give us some kind of hope.”

The manifesto was drawn up in response to the closure of a youth center by the ruling Hamas administration in November of last year. When young people were protesting against the closure their demonstration was violently dispersed by Hamas security forces who arrested 16 participants.

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On the West Bank, the Palestinian Authority, led by President Mahmoud Abbas, has imposed a complete ban on solidarity demonstrations with Egypt. Underlying the ban is the close relationship between Abbas and Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, whose overthrow has revealed the real colors of the PLO. The hostility of the PLO and Hamas towards the revolt in Egypt reveals their true class position. This in turn paves the way for the building of a genuine proletarian party, based on a socialist program and the perspective of the Fourth International, capable of uniting the working class throughout the Middle East.

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