

Progress in Egypt post-revolution in the frame of Constructive Programme

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What is Constructive Programme?

A constructive programme is about creating a new society in the shell of the old following a successful non-violent revolution. At its core is the idea of increasing power from within through development of personal identity, self-reliance, and fearlessness. The people in the areas directly involved must themselves act as a catalyst for change. They must start by changing things in their own lives to reflect the changes they would like to see made in their communities as a whole. New ideals and policies must embody equity, liberate education, promote self-reliance, as well as a clean environment. In addition, change must be made collectively and the idea of community is vital to the success of these changes. However, progress can be lost by the lack of alternatives. Realistic alternatives need to be developed so there can be something to turn to when the old policies are toppled. These alternatives, however, need to be created at the lowest levels of the peoples lives; an interior transformation of the individuals to spread change amongst the greater population. The idea of the constructive programme is a society based on respect for the individual as well as the needs of the people, and the importance of helping those in greatest need first. Also, other measures that can be taken, such as decentralizing economy and industry, that support the whole population, including rural inhabitants, to fully participate both socially and politically. By decentralizing the economy, it places power into the peoples' hands as they can live by their own efforts and responsibilities. Overall, constructive program is a mentality that is shown through action. The people of the community must come together and through teamwork and self-motivation, begin to change their society from within their own lives.

Progress in Egypt

The revolution in Egypt in early 2011 was a swift and successful non-violent uprising. Through non-violent action inspired by Egyptian youth, the revolutionaries succeeded in bringing down their government in a matter of days. When their leader fell, the military was placed in charge, temporarily. Since the military is not necessarily designed to lead a country and is at a loss as to what to do post-revolution, they are hoping to transition the power and leadership to a more appropriate leader. There were no suitable alternatives to the government that had been destroyed, as is necessary for a constructive programme. Rather, the Egyptians were forced to utilize a far less than suitable replacement: the military. With no

experience and no training as to how to lead a nation, the government has been unable to mobilize the people to achieve much progress. However, on March 20, a referendum vote, which was the first non-rigged vote to take place in Egypt in about 60 years, took place. This vote approved limiting the presidential terms to two four-year terms, as well as laying the groundwork for parliamentary elections in June and a presidential vote in August. Allowing the people to freely express their preference on a matter affecting them was a monumental achievement.

The referendum approving the government to move rapidly forward with elections was passed with 77.2% approval with 41% of eligible voters participating. This is far more than in past Egyptian elections, as people felt like their vote actually counted for something this time. While this feeling of empowerment is something that constructive programme strives for, the vote on this referendum is not really giving anything back to the people nor putting any more power in their hands. They are again passing the power and decision making ability onto someone else. Besides the ability to freely participate in votes and elections, the people do not hold much power of their own. In addition, there was no public discussion of the referendum, therefore leaving the Egyptians to rely on highly influential groups, such as the Muslim Brotherhood, to provide them with advice on voting. In some ways, the vote was just a battle of persuasion between parties: liberal, conservative, and all measures in-between. So while the election made progress in the direct involvement the Egyptian people have in their government, it still is not allowing them to freely and completely participate. This was an important junction at which the Egyptian people could evaluate and choose what structure to create for their new society, and democracy was selected to be that structure. Western-style democracy is definitely a step in the right direction for Egypt, and it will be interesting to see the Egyptian interpretation of this form of government.

Despite the high clear majority approving the referendum, not all supported the move to rapid elections. The Muslim Brotherhood argued that the referendum for rapid elections would bring a swift return to civilian rule, but these rapid elections also favour their well established party. The liberal wing opposed the referendum because it said the liberal wing lacked time to form effective political organization, decreasing their odds of having a legitimate chance at winning the presidency or parliamentary elections. They also said the Muslim Brotherhood and other pre-existing parties would seek a constitution that centralized power. This is in direct opposition of the constructive programme which seeks to place the power in the hands of the people and allow all to play a role in government, economy, and

society. In addition, by not allowing enough time for new parties to establish themselves, these rapid elections are limiting the possibilities for new people to get involved in their government. In the wake of a revolution, the country needs be relishing the opportunity to have the possibility of new leaders and new opportunities in government.

In addition, despite the fact that the vote was not rigged, there were still groups that put pressure on voters. For example, religious organizations spread rumours that voting against the referendum would threaten the second amendment of the Egyptian constitution which sets Islamic law as the basis for Egyptian law. This put pressure on many religious voters to approve the referendum. Conversely, the main group of young protestors that had ignited the revolution encouraged people to vote no in order to give them a chance to develop their new liberal parties and to be able to present qualified candidates for the upcoming elections. And interestingly, most of the votes against the referendum came from the larger, more liberal cities such as Cairo and Alexandria. Clearly, the interference of religion in politics caused issues. Rather than acting as one community, as outlined in constructive programme, certain groups turned to exploiting the religious concerns of their fellow citizens to encourage them to vote a certain way. Voters should be encouraged to vote for whatever they think will help them and their country make the most progress towards positive change.

While the elections are a specific example of the slow progress being made in Egypt, there are also more widespread issues that continue to plague the country. With the army still in charge until the election of a new president later this year, the ability for dissenters to speak out is somewhat challenging. Maikel Nabil, an Egyptian blogger, was recently arrested and sentenced to three years in prison for criticizing the armed forces. On his blog he discussed all the things the army had not done to help the people, and the things that had even been done to hurt the people of Egypt. He believes that with the army in charge, the dictator may be gone but the dictatorship lives on. The army did not stand by the Egyptian people's side during the revolution, and their control has even allowed some powerful Egyptians to make deals with the Supreme Council of the army to gain political positions while completely sidestepping any regular political process. While the army itself did not directly harm the people, they supported the police in their attempts to harm the protestors indirectly ignoring the violence the police were utilizing, and directly by providing them with bullets to hurt, and even kill, the protestors. In addition, although the revolution is over and Egypt is forging ahead into a new era, the army leadership continues to detain and torture revolutionaries and opponents of the military leadership, and maintain repressive institutions while attempting to

circumvent the true demands of the revolution. Changes are being made, but not necessarily the ones the Egyptian revolutionaries fought for.

A specific group within the revolutionaries that has been particularly disappointed by the changes being made is Egyptian women. They played an extremely active role in the revolutions, and stood along side the men throughout the protests as equals. However, their role in the revolution has not been recognized in the new Egyptian government. The new cabinet contains just one woman, while under Mubarak there were three women in the cabinet. In addition, no women were chosen to be a part of the constitutional committees in charge of revising the Egyptian constitution. And unfortunately, sexual harassment rates have returned to pre-protest levels. This exhibits how difficult it may be to overhaul and change such a historically patriarchal society to respect and acknowledge the rights and abilities of women. While during the revolution women spoke for social and political rights of all Egyptians without discussing gender rights at all, it seems that if Egyptian women do not actively push for gender-sensitive legislation, they may unfortunately be overlooked and left behind.

While the principles of constructive programme would serve as a useful guideline in the wake of the Egyptian revolution, the Egyptian people are lacking the infrastructural knowledge about how to continue their pattern of change. Having been held under restrictive rule for so long, the Egyptian people are at a loss as to how to rule themselves and change their own lives and society for the better. And while the liberal wing tries to bring about a different leadership in the society, the stronghold of religion in the country acts as a barrier for true change. Despite the fact that the old government is gone, the same social pressures and expectations exist. Until the fight for power is not so competitive and selfish, the people will not be able to come together as a community to lift each other up to achieve self-reliant and independent success for Egypt and all its people.