

Military Coups and Revolutionary Tactics

Some Theoretical Thoughts on Different Types of Coups in the Present Period and the Consequential Tasks of Marxist Revolutionaries

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The recent military coup in Zimbabwe which resulted in the overthrow of the Mugabe regime and his replacement by the former vice president Emmerson Mnangagwa has been an instructive event in several aspects. ¹ In this essay we do not intend to repeat the lessons which we drew in our past articles. At this place we rather want to deal with another aspect as the Zimbabwean coup offers us the opportunity to arrive at some generalizations in the typology of military coups. More concretely, we want to discuss three different types of coups.

For the formal, i.e. mechanistic mode of thinking such a differentiation might seem absurd. A military coup is a military coup, full stop. However, for Marxists who are used to think in a dialectical and therefore materialistic way (as it is the only method to think in a truly dialectical way), things are more complex. When we analyze the character of a coup we recognize not only the formal way of a political rupture but also the class content of this process. Lenin used to ask “*Kto kovo?*” (“*Who – Whom?*”) ², when he tried to grasp the class character of a given political process. And this is what we also have to do when we analyze the character of a coup.

Let us move without further ado *in medias res*. Broadly speaking we can differentiate three different types of military coups which consequently demand different approaches and tactics from revolutionaries.

¹ The RCIT has dealt with the recent coup in Zimbabwe in several documents: RCIT and ELA (Zambia): Zimbabwe: The Fall of Mugabe – Victory for the Masses or for the Military-ZANU-PF Alliance? 22.11.2017, <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/africa-and-middle-east/zimbabwe-after-the-resignation-of-mugabe/>; RCIT: Zimbabwe: Down with the Military Coup! No to the dynastic Mugabe Regime! For Independent Workers’ and Poor Mobilisations! For Action Committees of the Workers, Poor Peasants and Soldiers to Advance the Struggle against All Factions of the Ruling Elite! 15.11.2017, <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/africa-and-middle-east/against-mugabe-and-military-coup-in-zimbabwe/>; Michael Pröbsting: The Current Political Crisis in Zimbabwe and the Slogan of the Revolutionary Constituent Assembly, 24 November 2017, <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/africa-and-middle-east/crisis-in-zimbabwe-and-the-slogan-of-the-revolutionary-constituent-assembly/>; Michael Pröbsting: The Military Coup in Zimbabwe and the Role of Chinese Imperialism, 29 November 2017, <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/africa-and-middle-east/the-military-coup-in-zimbabwe-and-the-role-of-chinese-imperialism/>

² To be precise, I am translating this formula from the Russian and German language version of Lenin’s Collected Works. The English-language version of the Collected Works uses a less precise formulation – which, by the way, is an often occurring, general weakness of the English language translations of the writings of Marx, Engels and Lenin: “*The whole question is who will take the lead. We must face this issue squarely—who will come out on top?*” (V.I.Lenin: The New Economic Policy and the Tasks of the Political Education Departments. Report to the Second All-Russia Congress of Political Education Departments, October 17, 1921, in: Lenin Collected Works Vol.33, p. 66). The English translation of Trotsky’s pamphlet “*Towards Capitalism or Towards Socialism?*”, where Trotsky repeats Lenin’s formula, uses the correct translation (see The Labour Monthly, November 1925, Vol.7 No.11, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1925/11/towards.htm>).

1) Reactionary Coups against Bourgeois Governments leaning on Popular Support

First, there are military coups organized by the most aggressive, reactionary sectors of the bourgeoisie against a bourgeois government which reflects – from the standpoint of the capitalist class – too much the pressure from the workers and the popular masses. By definition, such a government is not socialist, i.e. it is no authentic workers government. Usually we have in such cases rather a popular front government (i.e. a coalition of the reformist bureaucracy mass organizations of the working class and other oppressed classes with sectors, or maybe even only a “shadow” as Trotsky once famously formulated it, of the bourgeoisie) or a bourgeois government which rests on mass support amongst sectors of the oppressed.

However, despite their fundamental bourgeois class character, such governments, exactly because their power rests to an important degree on the popular support among the workers, the poor peasants, the urban poor or the lower middle layers, are forced to make various concessions to the expectations of their popular supporters. This will usually result in certain social reforms, state subsidy programs for the urban or rural poor, democratic reforms which limit to a certain degree the power of the reactionary repressive state apparatus, economic or political reforms which reduce the domination of foreign imperialist powers etc. Naturally, such governments do not endanger the capitalist system and are dangerous for the working class and the oppressed as they demobilize their struggle. Nevertheless they can provoke the aggression of the ruling class as such popular front governments can become a temporary obstacle for the capitalists’ ruthless offensive.

Let us give a few examples to illustrate this type of coup. To start with some historical examples we could refer to the failed coup of General Kornilov against the “popular front” government of Kerensky in August 1917 in Russia.³ Or take the military coup against the peasant party’s government of Aleksandur Stamboliyski in Bulgaria in June 1923.⁴ Another example is the coup of General Franco against the Spanish popular front government in July 1936.⁵ More actual examples are the military coups in Brazil in April 1964 or in Chile in September 1973.⁶

³ There exists a vast amount of Marxist literature on the Kornilov coup. Trotsky dealt with this issue in his famous book on the Russian Revolution: Leon Trotsky: History of the Russian Revolution (1932), Haymarket Books, Chicago 2008, chapter 27-31, pp. 439-519. Another valuable book has been written by the Alexander Rabinowitch: The Bolsheviks Come to Power, New Left Books, London 1979, chapter 6-8, pp. 94-150. We have summarized our analysis in a chapter of a pamphlet published by our predecessor organization Workers Power: The Road to Red October: The Bolsheviks and Working Class Power (Chapter 6), <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/russian-revolution-1917/chapter-6/>

⁴ As the military coup in Bulgaria is much less known we list some works dealing with it. See e.g. Roumen Daskalov: Debating the Past - Modern Bulgarian History: From Stambolov to Zhivkov, Central European University Press, Budapest, 2011, chapter 1 and 2, pp. 7-143; Frederick B. Chary: The History of Bulgaria, Greenwood, Santa Barbara 2011, pp. 56-71; Joseph Rothschild: The Communist Party of Bulgaria. Origins and Development 1883-1936, New York 1959, pp. 112-116; George D. Jackson Jr: Comintern and Peasant in Eastern Europe 1919-1930, New York and London 1966, pp. 172-180; Geschichte der Bulgarischen Kommunistischen Partei, Sofia 1986, pp. 73-100. From a Marxist perspective see e.g. ECCI Appeal to the Workers and Peasants of Bulgaria to Oppose the new Bulgarian Government, 23 June 1923; in: Jane Degras: The Communist International 1919-1943. Documents, Volume II 1923-1928, pp. 47-51; Karl Radek: Der Umsturz in Bulgarien (23.6.1923), in Die Kommunistische Internationale, No. 27 (August 1923), pp. 3-41; Grigori Sinowjew: Die Lehren des bulgarischen Umsturzes, in Die Kommunistische Internationale, No. 27 (August 1923), pp. 41-47.

⁵ Trotsky’s writings on the Spanish Revolution are collected in Leon Trotsky: The Spanish Revolution (1931-39), Pathfinder Press, New York 1973. In addition, we would refer – in place of many works – to the account of the US

Finally, to give examples from recent years, we refer to the bloody military coup of General Sisi against the Egyptian government of President Morsi on 3 July 2013 ⁷, the coup of the Thai army against the government of Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra in May 2014, ⁸ or the institutional coup against the government of Dilma Rousseff in Brazil in April 2016. ⁹

All these governments had in common that, while having a bourgeois class character, they rested on mass support amongst the popular classes. As a result, the Morsi government – the first and only democratically elected government in the history of Egypt – put some limits to the total domination of the army command and lent some support to the Palestinian people fighting against the terrorist Apartheid regime of Israel. Similarly, the Rousseff government with its support amongst the organized sectors of the working class and the poor peasants (e.g. CUT, MST, MTST) was under some popular pressure to moderate the neoliberal attacks. And the government of Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra was hated by the bourgeoisie because it gave some subsidy programs to the poor peasants.

Trotskyist Felix Morrow who went to Spain as a volunteer to fight the fascists: Felix Morrow: *The Civil War in Spain*, Pioneer Publisher, New York 1936. See also Pierre Broué and Emile Témime: *The Revolution and the Civil War in Spain* (1970), Haymarket Books, Chicago 2008; *The Spanish Civil War. The View from the Left*, Revolutionary History Vol. 4, No. 1/2, London 1992

⁶ Again, there exists a vast amount of Marxist literature on the Pinochet coup in Chile. To name just a few: Michel Raptis: *Revolution and Counter-Revolution in Chile*, Allison & Busby, London 1973; Tariq Ali: *Die Lehren von Chile*, Rote Hefte der GIM, Berlin/Hamburg; *Widerstand in Chile. Aufrufe, Interviews und Dokumene des M.I.R.*, Verlag Klaus Wagenbach, Berlin 1974; Fernando Mires: *Die Militärs und die Macht. Thesen zum Fall Chile*, Rotbuch Verlag, Berlin 1975. The analysis from our side has been published by our predecessor organization Workers Power: *The Lessons of Chile*, in: Workers Power No. 45 (September 1983), pp. 4-5

⁷ The RCIT has published numerous documents on the coup in Egypt which can be read at www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/africa-and-middle-east/. The most important documents of those which we have published in the weeks after the coup are the following: Yossi Schwartz: *Israel and the Coup in Egypt*, 21.8.2013, www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/africa-and-middle-east/israel-and-egypt-coup/; Michael Pröbsting: *The Coup d'État in Egypt and the Bankruptcy of the Left's "Army Socialism". A Balance Sheet of the coup and another Reply to our Critics (LCC, WIVP, SF/LCFI)*, 8.8.2013, www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/africa-and-middle-east/egypt-and-left-army-socialism/; Yossi Schwartz: *Egypt: Mobilize Resistance against the reactionary military regime!*, 27.7.2013, www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/africa-and-middle-east/egypt-no-to-military-regime/; Michael Pröbsting: *The Military's Coup d'État in Egypt: Assessment and Tactics*, 17.7.2013, www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/africa-and-middle-east/egypt-meaning-of-coup-d-etat/; Yossi Schwartz: *Egypt: The U.S. Support for the Military Coup and the Left's ignorance. Notes on the role of US imperialism in the military's coup d'état and the failure of the Egypt left*, 11.7.2013, www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/africa-and-middle-east/egypt-us-support-for-military-coup/; RCIT: *Egypt: Down with the Military Coup d'État! Prepare Mass Resistance!* 8.7.2013, www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/africa-and-middle-east/egypt-down-with-military-coup-d-etat/. All these articles and essays were published in the RCIT's journal Revolutionary Communism No. 12 and 13.

⁸ On the coup in Thailand see the following RCIT documents: RCIT: *Thailand: Defeat the looming reactionary Coup D'état!* <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/asia/thailand-looming-coup-d-%C3%A9tat/>; RCIT: *Thailand: Smash the Developing Military Coup!* <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/asia/thailand-coup/>; Michael Pröbsting: *Thailand: How Should Socialists Fight Against the Coup?* <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/asia/thailand-coup-critique/>; Michael Pröbsting: *Thailand: Ultra-Leftism and the Coup*, <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/asia/thailand-coup-reply/>. All these articles were published in the RCIT's journal Revolutionary Communism No. 23.

⁹ See e.g. on the coup in Brazil the following RCIT documents: CCR: *Brazil: The Only Way Forward: Defeat the Coup with Mass, Independent Class Mobilizations of the Working Class and Oppressed!* 22.4.2016, <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/latin-america/statement-on-coup/>; CCR: *Brazil: Right-Wing Opposition threatens with a Coup d'État*, 18.11.2014, <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/latin-america/brazil-coup-danger/>

As the purpose of this essay is only to generalize the experience of different types of coups we refrain from dealing with these examples in detail and refer readers to the appropriate literature in the respectively footnotes.

To avoid any misunderstandings: all these governments never had a socialist character but were rather bourgeois in their class character. They were not willing to expropriate the capitalist class but only to implement some social and democratic reforms within the limits of capitalism. However, in a period of crisis and decay, the capitalist class can not afford even such reforms but must smash all obstacles which stand in their way to increase its share of the national wealth and to expand its political domination.

In such situations, the tactic of revolutionaries has always been to call for a united front against the immediate threat of the coup in order to defeat it. Such a united front orientation should focus on the workers organization but must also include other popular mass organizations of the poor peasants, the urban poor or the lower middle class which are ready to fight against the putschists. Of course revolutionaries would limit such a united front only to the practical struggle against the coup and for the defense of the democratic rights. At the same time, Marxists have to warn against any illusions against such popular front governments and must call for political independence of the working class.

Here is not the place to elaborate the approach of the Marxist classics on military coups in detail and we refer readers for this to other works of the RCIT.¹⁰ To give a short summary we quote the position of the leadership of the Communist International which it unanimously took in face of the military coup in Bulgaria in June 1923. Grigory Zinoviev, the chairman of the Communist International, sharply criticized his Bulgarian comrades for their neutrality in this conflict and emphasized: *“In the moment where the fascists where in struggle with the leaders of the Peasant Party, it was (and remains today) the task of the Communist Party to unite with all honest supporters of the Peasant Party to struggle against the Whites. Has Kerensky not been an enemy of the workers in September 1917? But nevertheless did the Bolsheviks march with Kerensky against Kornilov.”*¹¹

Leon Trotsky generalized such an approach in an essay written in 1937 on the Spanish Revolution: *“Before 1934 we explained to the Stalinists tirelessly that even in the imperialist epoch democracy continued to be preferable to fascism; that is, in all cases where hostile clashes take place between them, the revolutionary proletariat is obliged to support democracy against fascism. However, we always added: We can and must defend bourgeois democracy not by bourgeois democratic means but by the methods of class struggle, which in turn pave the way for the replacement of bourgeois democracy by the dictatorship of the proletariat. This means in particular that in the process of defending bourgeois democracy, even with arms in hand, the party of the proletariat takes no responsibility for bourgeois democracy, does not enter its government, but maintains full freedom of criticism and of action in relation to all parties of the Popular Front, thus preparing the overthrow of bourgeois democracy at the next stage.”*¹²

¹⁰ For an overview of the approach of the Marxist classics on military coups see e.g. Michael Pröbsting: The Coup d'État in Egypt and the Bankruptcy of the Left's "Army Socialism", Chapter III. "The Marxist classics on reactionary coups d'états", in: Revolutionary Communism No. 13 (September 2013), pp. 30-33, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/egypt-and-left-army-socialism/>

¹¹ Grigori Sinowjew: Die Lehren des bulgarischen Umsturzes, in Die Kommunistische Internationale, No. 27 (August 1923), p. 45 (our translation)

¹² Leon Trotsky: Is Victory Possible in Spain? (1937), in: Leon Trotsky: The Spanish Revolution (1931-39), Pathfinder Press, New York 1973, p. 257

2) Military Coups as a Result of an Internal Conflict inside the Ruling Elite

Another type of coups is those which basically reflect a power struggle within the ruling elite. As the existence of authoritarian bourgeois regimes usually reflect a crisis-ridden background of their capitalist economic and social fundament, these regimes are often characterized by numerous internal contradictions. Given the nature of such regimes, neither parliamentary elections nor mass mobilizations are available as instruments to solve these internal contradictions inside the ruling capitalist class. As a result, the rivaling factions have to resort to military coups as an instrument of political change.

History has seen numerous examples of such coups which reflect internal conflicts inside the ruling elite. In order to give just a few examples we refer to the various coups taking place in Greece in the 1920s and 1930s or the coups in Syria and Iraq in the 1960s which replaced one faction of the bourgeois nationalist Baath Party with another.¹³ The recent coup in Zimbabwe is more recent example of this type of coup.

In such situations, Marxists will always oppose such a coup. However, they will not defend the regime against the coup as both sides represent qualitatively equally reactionary camps. Hence, the working class has no interest in the victory of any of the two camps. It must retain a strictly independent position and prepare for future struggles.

3) Military Coups as a Part of a Broader Process of Popular Uprising against a Reactionary Regime

In most cases, military coups correspond to the sample of the above mentioned first or second type. This is only natural as the army's officer corps represents the core of the bourgeois state apparatus. Hence, military coups usually represent the attempt of the ruling class (or sectors of it) to settle conflicts between them and/or to suppress the toiling masses by force.

However, as we have already explained in the past, there can be exceptional cases where a coup has a rather different character. Such a case belong to that type of coups which we would call the third category: military coups which are part of a broader process of popular uprising against a reactionary regime.¹⁴

Marxists, of course, do not advocate a coup as the way forward for the liberation of the working class and the oppressed. The method of the class struggle focuses on the organization of the working class in the struggle for the overthrow of the ruling class via mass mobilizations – demonstrations, strikes, general strikes, and armed insurrection.

¹³ As the result of one of these coups, Assad the father came to power in 1970 and created the dynastic rule of his clan which unfortunately lasts until today.

¹⁴ See on this e.g. the sub-chapter „*Can a Military Coup ever reflect an Advance of the Revolution?*“ in: Michael Pröbsting: *The Coup d'État in Egypt and the Bankruptcy of the Left's "Army Socialism"*, Chapter II. "The Marxist classics on reactionary coups d'états", in: *Revolutionary Communism* No. 13 (September 2013), p. 25, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/egypt-and-left-army-socialism/>

However, there can be circumstances where the social contradictions between the ruling class and the middle class and the popular masses lead to sharp conflicts inside the army's officer corps. In such cases it can happen, that lower-ranking officers – coming usually from the middle class – rebel against the ruling regime.

One example for such a “progressive” coup has been an uprising of left-wing officers in summer 1932 which led to the short-lived “*Socialist Republic of Chile*”.¹⁵ While the Stalinists denounced this uprising as “*a fascist coup under a socialist mask*”, the Trotskyists lend critical support to it.¹⁶

In our essay on the Egypt coup in 2013 and the treacherous pro-Army “socialists” supporting it, we named several other cases of such a kind of military coup. We referred to the rebellion of the *Free Officers* movements in Egypt (1952) or Iraq (1958) against the monarchies which were lackeys of the imperialist Great Powers. Another example is the so-called *Carnation Revolution* on 25th April 1974 in Portugal when low-ranking officers organized in the *Movimento das Forças Armadas* overthrew the reactionary *Estado Novo* dictatorship. The downfall of this regime which ruled Portugal since 1926 opened a revolutionary period in which the masses played a highly active role and only failed in a successful socialist revolution because of the betrayal of social democracy and the Stalinist PCP.

More recent examples are the successful overthrow of the reactionary regime in Burkina Faso in 1983 by a military uprising led by “*Africa's Che Guevara*”, Thomas Sankara. Another example is the failed coup d'état (“*Operation Zamora*”) of Hugo Chávez and his *MBR-200* movement in Venezuela in February 1992.

While Marxists would not participate in such coups as it contradicts our method of class struggle, they certainly would have a different approach to such coups than they have to the coups of the first and second type.

In opposite of the former cases, revolutionaries would not call the working class to mobilize against the coup. They would rather advocate using the coup in order to mobilize against the old, reactionary regime. They would call for mass mobilizations to bring down the ruling elite and to fraternize with the soldiers who are conducting such a coup against the same enemy. In other words, they would join the struggle on the side of the rebellious soldiers but with their own methods of mass mobilizations and organizing of the workers and oppressed.

4) One is Lost without an Understanding of Dialectics

As the polemics in the above mentioned RCIT documents on the coups in the past years demonstrate, there has always been a lot of confusion among socialists on how to assess such coups and which tactics should be applied. As the purpose of this essay is not a detailed discussion of these past coups but rather arriving at a generalization of the different types of coups, we limit ourselves to some observations which seem to us useful in order to better understand the dialectical nature of our approach.

¹⁵ See on this e.g. Arno Münster: *Chile – friedlicher Weg?* Rotbuch Verlag, Berlin 1975, pp. 48-51

¹⁶ See on this e.g. Leo Trotzki: *Schriften 3.3.*, Neuer ISP-Verlag, Köln 2001, p. 425

While we have elaborated the different essence of the three types of military coup, it would be wrong to mechanistically imagine that there would exist a “Chinese Wall” between them. It can be the case, and actually it has happened repeatedly, that a concrete coup of one type contains also certain elements of another type. A reactionary coup against a bourgeois government based on popular support can also have some support among the backward middle class. For example, the coup of General Pinochet in September 1973 could count on the support of Chile’s right-wing middle class which increasingly held large demonstrations on the streets at that time. Likewise, the Egypt army command was able to mobilize mass demonstrations for their support in 2013.

The same could be said about the institutional coup against the Rousseff government in Brazil as it became visible in the repeated reactionary mass demonstrations in Sao Paolo and Rio de Janeiro. The recent coup in Zimbabwe led by General Chiwenga and Emmerson Mnangagwa also had some support among sectors of the population who were fed up of the Mugabe regime.

The German philosopher Hegel liked to say – and the Marxist classics referred to this insight many times – that “*the truth is always concrete*”. Marx himself once remarked in Volume III of *Capital*: „*But all science would be superfluous if the outward appearance and the essence of things directly coincided.*”¹⁷ Hence, the task of Marxist is to analyze concretely a given phenomenon and to understand its essence. This includes also the necessity to recognize the “*concrete totality as a unity of universal and particular*” as Abram Deborin, the leading Soviet philosopher of the 1920s before Stalin’s clamp down, splendidly worded it.¹⁸ Hence, Marxists have to analyze which elements of a given totality are dominating and which are rather subordinated. As Lenin once remarked in his *Philosophical Notebooks*, one of the fundamental requirements of the materialist dialectic is to “*the deepening of man’s knowledge of the thing, of phenomena, processes, etc., from appearance to essence and from less profound to more profound essence.*”¹⁹

5) Can the Coup in Zimbabwe be compared with Egypt Coup?

Let us briefly deal with an example of such a confusion which arises if one does not carefully distinguish the different types of military coups as we outlined it above. The comrades of the South African “*Workers International Vanguard League*” committed, in our opinion, such a mistake. In their statement on the coup in Zimbabwe, which contains a number of correct conclusions, they also draw “*some parallels with the coup in Egypt when General Sisi deposed elected leader, Morsi. The Generals played on the inability of the democratic regime to meet the needs of the masses. They posed as the friends of the masses. Gradually they cemented their control, declared a state of emergency and brutally suppressed the masses,*

¹⁷ Karl Marx: *Capital*, Vol. III, in: Marx Engels Collected Works Vol. 37, p. 804

¹⁸ Abram Deborin: *Materialistische Dialektik und Naturwissenschaft* (1925); in: *Unter dem Banner des Marxismus* 1. Jahrgang 1925/26, Verlag für Literatur und Politik, Wien, p. 452 (our translation). Unfortunately while there exist numerous works of this great Marxist philosopher in Russian language and also a considerable amount in German language, the weakness of Marxism in the Anglo-Saxon world in the 1920s has resulted in the situation that hardly anything of his works of the 1920s has been translated into English language. Some useful quotes and summaries of Deborin’s views in English language can be found in the following books: David Joravsky: *Soviet Marxism and Natural Science 1917-1932*, Routledge, New York 1961/2009; David Bakhurst: *Consciousness and Revolution in Soviet philosophy: From the Bolsheviks to Evald Ilyenkov*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1991; Helena Sheehan: *Marxism and the Philosophy of Science*, Humanities Press International, New Jersey 1985.

¹⁹ V. I. Lenin: *Conspectus of Hegel’s Science of Logic* (1914); in: *LCW* Vol. 38, p. 221

*thousands were imprisoned and many killed. Once they had consolidated their grip they lifted the charges against the deposed dictator, Mubarak and rolled back many of the gains of the Tahrir square uprising.”*²⁰

Here is not the place to repeat our detailed analyses of the coups in Egypt in 2013 and in Zimbabwe in 2017 which can be read in the numerous documents which we have produced about these events. It is sufficient to remark that hundreds of thousands of people marched on the streets, occupied central places and faced the most brutal repression in defending the Morsi government against the coup plotters – a government which was elected in the freest bourgeois parliamentary election the country has ever seen. This repression resulted in the killing of thousands of demonstrators and the arrest of tens of thousands of people. More than 1.000 protestors were murdered shortly after the coup on a single day, the 14 August 2013, on Rabaa Square and al-Nahda Square in Cairo – *“one of the world’s largest killings of demonstrators in a single day in recent history”* (Human Rights Watch)!

Compare this with Zimbabwe: not a single demonstration in defense of Mugabe took place – neither during the time of the coup nor since then!

The Egypt coup took place against the background of fundamental clashes between the classes which were reflected in numerous mass demonstrations. The coup in Zimbabwe was an internal affair inside the ruling elite which found expression in a faction struggle inside the ZANU-PF government party.

Consequently, Mohammed Morsi has been in prison since the coup and faces the death penalty. Mugabe and his family, on the other hand, were guaranteed immunity and could retain their multi-million dollar wealth.

Let us repeat, in conclusion, that it is obligatory for any Marxist analysis to separate the primary factors from the secondary and *“to assess, above all, the general direction of the development”* – to put it in the words of Abram Deborin.²¹ Such a concrete and correct assessment is crucial for Marxists since without it they are doomed to lack an orientation and to fail in developing the necessary revolutionary tactics.

We hope that this short essay will serve as a contribution for revolutionaries to develop a correct approach to different situations of coups in future class struggles.

²⁰ WIVP: On the military coup in Zimbabwe, 18.11.2017, <http://www.workersinternational.org.za/index.php/2-uncategorised/69-zimbabwecoup>

²¹ Abram Deborin: Lenin als revolutionärer Dialektiker (1925); in: Unter dem Banner des Marxismus, 1. Jahrgang (1925-26), p. 224 (our translation)