

On the US “left” and the Egyptian Revolution

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The revolutionary upheaval in Egypt has prompted the country’s ruling elite and US imperialism to prepare a political alternative to Mubarak if he proves a liability or is incapable of crushing the ongoing mass movement. As the WSWs has warned, any replacement sanctioned by Washington would be nothing more than pseudo-democratic window dressing for a military regime and a bloody crackdown against the working class.

The middle class “left” in the United States is making its own small contribution to these counterrevolutionary plans. Just as they did in the recent events in Tunisia, the ex-left is seeking to prevent the working class from advancing its own revolutionary program. Instead, they are promoting Mubarak’s bourgeois opponents as the legitimate leaders of the mass movement.

These figures in fact had nothing to do with the eruption of protests in Egypt. They opposed the initial demonstrations, and have been working frantically over the past several days to get them under control.

In an article, entitled, “Mubarak must go,” Lee Sustar, the labor editor of the International Socialist Organization’s *Socialist Worker* web site, argues that the working class must subordinate itself to the bourgeois “pro-democracy” opposition in Egypt, which includes Mohamed ElBaradei, the Muslim Brotherhood and various middle class reformers.

Sustar blames Mubarak for “trying to drive a wedge of social class into the protest movement, which so far has involved a broad spectrum of Egyptian society—virtually everyone other than the superrich who benefited directly from the regime.”

As evidence, he points to Mubarak’s efforts to appease the demonstrators by announcing a job creation program and the maintenance of food subsidies, saying these are “designed to appeal to the poor and the working class and draw them away from the middle

class leaders of the pro-democracy movement.”

Mubarak did not create the “wedge” between the working class and the upper middle class leaders of the bourgeois opposition parties—it exists objectively. The struggle by the masses of workers and unemployed youth to win their demands necessitates an attack on the private property and wealth of the Egyptian ruling class and foreign banks and corporations. The bourgeois opposition leaders are thoroughly opposed to this and would rather see a dictatorship than a socialist revolution.

Acknowledging that ElBaradei and others “lack a base” among workers, Sustar makes it clear he sees the role of the ISO as building up their credibility in the working class—by concealing the class antagonisms within the anti-Mubarak movement. Sustar says it has been the “perspective of the socialist activists” to “forge links between the new workers movements and the pro-democracy efforts that had been—prior to the uprising in Tunisia—led by middle class reformers with a small social base.”

The “movement for democracy,” Sustar continues, “needs the social weight and political organization of the working class—not only to make it impossible for Mubarak to stay, but also to carry on the struggle against his cronies and the corrupt business interests that constitute the core of his regime.”

The core of Mubarak’s regime is not corruption but capitalism and the imperialist domination of Egypt. The bourgeois opposition is not seeking the overthrow of this system but greater access to capital and political influence, both within the police military apparatus and in Washington.

In the name of maintaining “unity” with the upper classes, all socialist demands must be suppressed. There is not a word in the article about the independent interests of the working class. Nowhere does Sustar propose that the working class seize political power and

implement socialist policies to realize the demands of the mass movement for jobs, decent living standards and political rights.

The ISO is oriented in a completely different direction. The working class is relegated to lending its weight to the bourgeois democratic movement. The emasculation of the revolutionary strength of the working class—which is the most prominent force in the mass movement—will lead not to democracy, but to dictatorship and a bloodbath.

The ISO has also promoted the views of Mostafa Omar, whom it describes as an Egyptian “activist and socialist.” In a January 26 interview on its web site, Omar presents the state-controlled, pro-corporate Egyptian Trade Union Federation as a progressive force.

“The Egyptian national trade union federation—led by people appointed by the government,” he writes, “has partially broken with the government in the two weeks following the Tunisian uprising. They want price controls, an increase in wages and a system to subsidized outlets for basic food... For the union officials to demand this is unheard of, because these people supported neo-liberalism. That is the impact of Tunisia.”

Hostile to any independent mobilization of the working class, the ISO has long promoted such state-controlled unions as legitimate workers organizations. Its adulation for the AFL-CIO in the US is well known. Last month it hailed the Tunisian General Labor Union (UGTT)—a long-standing prop of the Ben Ali dictatorship—as the “critical nucleus” for the Tunisian uprising. (See, “The American middle class “left” and the Tunisian revolution”).

In a three-part series posted on the *Socialist Worker* web site last year, Omar explicitly praised ElBaradei, saying his “new movement for democracy” had “electrified a country ravaged by poverty and political repression for so long.” If supported by the Egyptian working class, he claims, this movement “could signal the start of the first serious challenge to US imperialist domination in the region since the days of the Arab nationalist project of the 1960s.”

Omar notes approvingly that ElBaradei set up the National Association for Change (NAC), with the Muslim Brotherhood and other opposition parties, “spanning the right to the left of the political

spectrum.” Doing his best to conceal the bourgeois character of this movement, Omar says ElBaradei has been “reaching out to poor peasants and workers,” “publicly backs the right to strike” and has called on workers to join the NAC.

Omar acknowledges that ElBaradei “is attempting to put together a moderate, populist and reformist coalition that could tap into mass anger and channel it safely toward a more democratic system, while avoiding any violent confrontation with the regime.”

Despite these “quite moderate positions,” he writes, “the left has an opportunity to grow both numerically and in terms of influence” by supporting his movement. His list of the supposedly “revolutionary socialist groups” that have benefited from ElBaradei’s arrival on the scene, includes “reviving remnants of former Stalinist organizations” that have a long history of betrayal.

The ISO’s “man in Egypt” warns against any “ultra-left and abstentionist” approach to ElBaradei. “While Egyptian socialists are correct to criticize ElBaradei’s campaign as a liberal capitalist attempt to salvage a bankrupt system, it is not yet a foregone conclusion that ElBaradei would not be forced under mass pressure to take, at least formally, radical positions—for example, on the question of Israel and imperialism. This could bolster the confidence of ordinary people in struggle.”

This is a brief for a bourgeois politician working actively with the Egyptian ruling class and American imperialism to suppress the revolutionary strivings of the working class, and create the best conditions for the restabilization of the dictatorship, with or without Mubarak. In its efforts to tie the working class to such forces, the ISO is working as a tool of US imperialism.



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