

Oppose US-backed “transition” in Egypt

Patrick Martin
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The mass movement of Egyptian working people against the Mubarak dictatorship must oppose and reject the initiative by the American government to replace Mubarak with a military-dominated “transition” government. This maneuver is aimed at safeguarding the interests of imperialism and the Egyptian ruling elite, and aborting the Egyptian Revolution.

President Obama took the occasion of a joint press appearance Friday with visiting Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper to make his most open call for Mubarak to “make the right decision” to resolve the crisis in Egypt.

Vice President Joseph Biden telephoned Egyptian Vice President Omar Suleiman, the longtime boss of the intelligence services who is now favored by Washington as Mubarak’s immediate successor. According to a White House statement, Biden urged Suleiman that “credible, inclusive negotiations begin immediately in order for Egypt to transition to a democratic government that addresses the aspirations of the Egyptian people.”

The Obama administration envisions a regime based on the military and headed by Suleiman, Field Marshal Mohamed Tantawi, the defense minister, and other top Mubarak aides, with the addition of representatives of the corrupt and venal Egyptian bourgeois opposition—figures such as Mohammed ElBaradei, the former head of the UN nuclear weapons inspection program, Amr Moussa, secretary of the Arab League, and big business spokesmen like the Wafd Party.

State Department spokesmen have also suggested a role for the Muslim Brotherhood, the Islamist bourgeois party that has long been outlawed in Egypt, but whose candidates, running as independents, won 20 percent of the seats in the 2005 legislative elections. After years of using the “threat” of the Islamic

fundamentalists to justify support for the Mubarak dictatorship, Washington has decided to cultivate the Islamists as a bulwark against the main danger—social revolution.

In an analysis published in November 2007, the *New York Times* foreshadowed this type of manipulation of the succession to Mubarak. The article noted: “Mr. Mubarak has not always been the perfect ally, but American officials say that he is invaluable for his historical perspective and the importance he places on the relationship with the United States and peace with Israel. An American official here said the hope was that Mr. Mubarak’s ultimate replacement would be someone who maintains the same historical appreciation for peace and relations with Washington.” In other words, Mubarak’s successor must be, like him, an American stooge.

A Suleiman government would have an out-and-out criminal at its head. The Egyptian vice president—appointed to that post only last week by Mubarak—is better known as the chief of Egypt’s notoriously brutal security apparatus. He is directly responsible for the torture of thousands of political prisoners, a role for which he was especially prized by the CIA, which regularly shipped prisoners to Egypt for treatment that could not be administered in Guantanamo Bay or the agency’s own network of secret prisons.

Journalist Robert Fisk described Suleiman acidly as Mubarak’s “chief negotiator with Israel and his senior intelligence officer, a 75-year-old with years of visits to Tel Aviv and Jerusalem and four heart attacks to his credit.” It was under his direction that Gaza has been systematically blockaded and starved for the past four years, since the coming to power of Hamas in that territory. Suleiman is a confidante of the Israeli regime, the most highly regarded Egyptian in the eyes of Mossad and the Israeli military.

Suleiman and the military would have a civilian fig leaf in the form of individuals like ElBaradei, who are equally hostile to the revolutionary movement in the streets of Cairo, Alexandria and other cities. ElBaradei has argued for delaying elections even further than the September date set by Mubarak. He is proposing instead a three-member ruling council (presumably himself, Suleiman and a top military officer) to hold power for at least a year while the electoral system was “reformed.”

The major task of such a “transition” regime would be to delude the popular movement against Mubarak with illusions of reform, and then disperse the mass demonstrations, including the physical suppression of all those who rightly refuse to accept such a US-brokered transition as a genuine democratic development.

In that context, Obama’s words Friday have an ominous ring. He reiterated previous statements that the US government opposes the use of violence either by the government or the protesters—as though there were an equivalence between a brutal military dictatorship, armed to the teeth, and with a long record of torture and murder, and the Egyptian masses, who successfully defended themselves in Tahrir Square with their bare hands and sheer force of numbers.

If Mubarak is replaced by a caretaker regime based on the military, both the Obama administration and the American media will swing behind the new rulers, vilifying all popular opposition as “terrorism” and endorsing the bloodiest measures of state repression.

Far from representing a concession to the democratic demands of the masses, such a regime would represent a carefully constructed roadblock. It would cement the role of the Egyptian government as a servant of US imperialism, collaborator with Israel, and enemy of the Palestinian people and the oppressed masses of Egypt itself.

The Mubarak regime is not simply the product of a criminal dictator and his coterie of thugs. It is, rather, the instrument of the ruling class in Egypt and its imperialist patrons. The regime arises from the incapacity of the Egyptian bourgeoisie to address the social needs of the masses and carry out the basic tasks of the democratic revolution. This involves, not merely electoral formalities—which Egypt has in abundance—but freeing the country from the grip of

imperialism, the Egyptian stooges of foreign capital and the rule of semi-feudal landlords who still dominate the countryside.

The course of events in Egypt has already provided a powerful vindication of the theory of Permanent Revolution, advanced by Leon Trotsky and upheld by the International Committee of the Fourth International. A century of bitter political experience has proved that no section of the national bourgeoisie can play a progressive role. Only the working class, mobilizing behind it the masses of the rural poor, and advancing a socialist program, can show the way forward.

The class divisions in Egypt constitute the dominant reality of social and political life. Particularly over the past two decades, a powerful and brutally oppressed working class has grown up in Egypt, engaging in a series of militant and bloody battles with the police-state regime.

An impassable social gulf separates the factory workers and impoverished *fellahin* from the privileged elite and its political representatives, from Mubarak and Suleiman to ElBaradei and the Muslim Brotherhood. These divisions have already been manifested in the spontaneous formation of neighborhood committees—in the working class areas, to ward off attacks by Mubarak’s thugs, in the handful of bourgeois gated communities, to guard against the threat of “mob rule.”

The burning necessity is for the self-organization of the workers, independent of all the political operatives and parties of the bourgeoisie. This means the building of factory and neighborhood councils, the Egyptian equivalent of soviets, to mobilize the vast social power of the oppressed masses.

In this struggle, the most urgent necessity is for the creation of the political leadership to impart a revolutionary orientation to the mass movement, directing it toward the seizure of power and the reorganization of society along socialist lines.

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