

Imperialism and Egypt's "democratic transition"

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The talks taking place between the Egyptian regime of President Hosni Mubarak, the Muslim Brotherhood, and the National Association for Change of Mohamed ElBaradei are a treacherous exercise in political duplicity. Their purpose is to confuse and suppress the revolutionary movement against the Mubarak regime, stabilize bourgeois rule in Egypt, and preserve the country as a reliable instrument of the interests of US imperialism throughout North Africa and the Middle East.

The Obama administration's support for these talks, brokered by Egyptian Vice President Omar Suleiman under the cynical label of a "democratic transition," is as reactionary as it is predictable. Once again, Washington's rhetorical tributes to democracy are being exposed as hypocritical lies. The real aims of the Obama administration were revealed in the open declaration of former Ambassador Frank Wisner—who had been sent to Cairo to meet with Mubarak—that the dictator was playing a critical role. All the efforts of the administration are concentrated on orchestrating a fraudulent "transition" that will safeguard US interests in Egypt.

The reactionary character of these US plans is exposed by the man who has been chosen by Mubarak and Washington to preside over the "transition"—Vice President Omar Suleiman. This is a man who is implicated and has personally participated in the worst crimes of the Mubarak regime. He has, literally, blood on his hands.

The CIA's point man for outsourcing torture to Egypt, Suleiman personally beat Mamdouh Habib, an Australian citizen falsely accused of terrorism in Pakistan and shipped to Egypt to be tortured. Habib was cleared of all charges and released in 2005.

Suleiman also helped the US manufacture false

evidence to justify its illegal invasion of Iraq in 2003. Before that war, he oversaw the transfer of Ibn Sheikh al-Libi from US to Egyptian custody; once in Egypt, al-Libi was tortured until he agreed to say that Iraq was giving chemical and biological weapons to Al Qaeda. This false testimony made its way into US Secretary of State Colin Powell's 2003 report to the UN, calling for war.

The political myths of the "war on terror"—the claim that the key feature of the Middle East was the struggle between the values of "democratic" Western governments and Islamists like the Brotherhood—stand exposed by these negotiations. In fact, the main conflict is between the entire ruling class and the working masses, who have emerged as the main revolutionary force.

Originally, the reason given for US backing for dictatorships and monarchies throughout the Middle East was that authoritarian rule was a necessary evil in the struggle to limit Islamist influence. Now, Washington is treating the Islamists as a necessary evil in its struggle to maintain what it sees as a more fundamental objective: the maintenance of an authoritarian regime upon which Washington can rely.

The class reasons underlying this policy were laid out in a *New York Times* article that held up Turkey as a "map for Egypt." The *Times* wanted the Mubarak regime to emulate the Turkish military's support for the "dynamic private sector" created by the Islamist AKP government's "opening" and deregulation policies. These policies have turned Turkey into a major cheap-labor export economy. The *Times* also cited Turkey's quiet but good relations with Israel, a token of Turkey's essential acceptance of US imperialism's dominance in the Middle East.

With reports showing that half of Egyptian workers

survive on wages of \$2 or less per day, global investors doubtless hope to make fortunes from further “opening” Egypt, as long as the military regime and its yellow unions can suppress the working class. That is, Egypt is to be maintained as a reliable ally of the US military, a well-policed source of cheap labor, and a bastion of political reaction.

This underscores the semi-colonial character of US relations with Egypt, a country that is under the thumb of global imperialism.

Amidst all the political maneuvering and posturing, the concerns and interests of the Egyptian working class, peasantry and youth count for nothing. Not a single one of the social and political concerns that fueled the mass protests will be addressed. The protestors sought fundamental social changes: the dismantling of the police state, the ending of the dominance of major landowners in the countryside, and the raising of wages and living standards. The social forces with an interest in such change—the workers, the oppressed rural masses of Egypt, and the youth—will get nothing from these negotiations, except a cruel betrayal. The torturers will remain in power, protecting the strategic interests of US imperialism, the investments of international capital, and the wealth of the Egyptian ruling class.

The International Committee of the Fourth International states unequivocally: The interests of the Egyptian working class and the oppressed masses can be achieved only through the struggle for power on the basis of a socialist program. There is no other path to genuine democracy. Thus, there is a critical need to build independent organs of popular representation and to overcome the vacuum of political leadership—to pose an alternative to the Egyptian bourgeois state machine and the negotiations of Suleiman.

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