

Egyptian ‘left’ parties seek alliance with bourgeoisie

Johannes Stern
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The Egyptian revolution that began last January has reached a crucial turning point in which the masses of working people, whose struggles overthrew the Western-backed dictatorship of President Hosni Mubarak, confront the threat of a counterrevolution by the military junta that controls the government. Under these conditions, a group of parties calling themselves “left” and even “socialist” have joined together to establish an alliance with the bourgeoisie, which in turn supports the military.

On May 10 these parties—the Workers Democratic Party, the Revolutionary Socialists, the Popular Alliance, the Egyptian Socialist Party and the Egyptian Communist Party—united in a so-called Socialist Front, declaring its aim to be that of “defending the rights of the people and the interests of the nation.” It added that it would “cooperate with all progressive and democratic powers to achieve common national goals”, consisting of the establishment of a bourgeois democratic, secular state.

The driving force of the revolutionary movement that brought down Mubarak was the working class, which paralyzed the country with mass strikes and forced the hand of the military, which found itself compelled to renounce the dictator.

Since the military assumed power on February 11, not a day has passed without significant strikes and protests by Egypt’s working population. For the masses of Egypt, the fall of Mubarak was only the beginning, and they have already formulated extensive demands that can be resolved only on the basis of a political offensive against the capitalist system.

For example, on March 11, the newspaper *Revolutionary Egypt* published a list of demands made by revolutionary workers. Their demands included:

- Raising the minimum wage and pensions and fixing the [wage] ceiling at approximately 15 times the minimum level in order to realize the principle of social equality which the revolution has adopted. Unemployment benefits for the unemployed and routine increases commensurate with the increase in prices.
- Reclamation of the companies which have been privatized and their return to state control...An end to the horrible program of privatization which loomed over our national economy during the bygone regime.
- A return to imposed price-fixing on goods and services which includes a ban on increasing prices which is a cause for oppression for all of the poor classes.
- The right to strike, to sit in, and to protest peacefully for all Egyptian workers...and all those who are currently striking against the lackeys of the former regime...and those who were imposed upon their organizations with the goal of ruining them, knowing that if this revolution does not lead to a fair distribution of wealth and to the establishment of social justice... then it will be as if nothing changed.. Political freedoms cannot be complete without social freedoms...The right to a loaf of bread is the natural precursor of the right to a ballot.
- The dissolution of the General Union of Egyptian Workers which is considered one of the greatest symbols of the former regime’s corruption

... [...].

The ruling military junta of Field Marshal Mohamed Hussein Tantawi and the military-installed interim government of Essam Sharaf have responded to Egyptian workers’ demands and the endless wave of strikes with violence and draconian laws.

On March 23, the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces passed a law that makes any strike or protest that affects the economy or public life a crime punishable by imprisonment. The emergency laws are still in effect as they have been, with a short interruption, since 1967

Three times since the fall of Mubarak, peaceful protesters on the Tahrir square have been brutally attacked by the military, which also took violent action against protesting students. According to human rights reports, thousands have been arrested, tortured and tried by military courts.

Despite these repressive measures, the ostensibly pro-democratic sections of the Egyptian bourgeoisie stand firmly behind the junta, which they consider the guarantor of capitalism and their class interests. Mohamed el-Baradei, leader of the National Association for Change, has summarized the Egyptian bourgeoisie’s position after the deadly military attack on peaceful protesters at Tahrir square on April 9 describing mutual trust between the Egyptian people and its army as a “red line” and “vital for national unity.”

The Egyptian bourgeoisie’s unconditional support for the military dictatorship confirms the theory of Permanent Revolution, which Leon Trotsky formulated in 1905, just before the first Russian Revolution, and which was subsequently realized in the October Revolution of 1917. Trotsky demonstrated that in states with a belated development, the bourgeoisie would not be able to lead a struggle for democracy and against imperialist oppression; only the working class would be able to fulfill this task on the basis of an international socialist program.

There is absolutely no possibility that Egyptian workers and peasants will find a way towards a democratic and social society within the framework of capitalism. The Egyptian bourgeoisie has already fully shown its antidemocratic character, and the military junta has announced that it will continue the neoliberal economic policies of Mubarak’s regime. International financial markets are already demanding more “reforms”.

Egypt’s masses are deeply alienated from the official bourgeois parties because of the gulf between their social and democratic demands formulated during the revolution and the policies of the Egyptian elite. None of the bourgeois parties or politicians has any significant base of popular support. Even the Muslim Brotherhood, considered the strongest party, enjoys the support of just 20 percent of the population according to most estimates, with its core supporters coming from the upper middle class.

Due to its weakness, and confronted with a revolutionary movement of the working class, the Egyptian bourgeoisie is desperately seeking a means to contain workers’ struggles, directing them into harmless

channels and thus preserving the capitalist system. It is in this context that the role played by the parties that formed the “Socialist Front” has become increasingly significant, with their activities and views given generally favourable coverage in the bourgeois media.

The character of these activities and views is expressed clearly in the political trajectory of one of the front’s members, the Workers Democratic Party (WDP). Founded in the wake of the January 25 revolution, it claims to represent the interests of Egyptian workers, but it is in fact a thoroughly bourgeois party, firmly anchored in capitalism and striving for a parliamentary republic.

In its founding manifesto, published on May 1, the WDP describes one of its main principles as the “consolidation of democracy”. This is to be achieved through “a constitution committed to human rights, civil rights, and freedom of expression”, as well as through the “founding of a parliamentary republic, with the freedom to found political parties and trade unions”.

On March 24, the WDP presented its first draft program, which made it clear that the group has nothing to do with socialism. The term “socialism” does not appear once in the document. The second paragraph, with the headline “Our Party”, puts forward purely bourgeois demands and states: “Our party is one that pursues the goal of achieving freedom, democracy, human dignity and social justice.”

In the next paragraph, its “Declaration of the principles of the Workers Party”, stresses again that the WDP is a bourgeois party. “The WDP will strive for the three principles of the Egyptian Revolution: Freedom, social justice and a bourgeois (civil) state”.

In the fourth paragraph, after proposing some relatively limited democratic and social demands, the WDP abruptly declares its desire to topple capitalism. A few more paragraphs later, however, it clarifies what the party means by this: “Toppling the system does not just mean removing its head. We want to change the basic character of the regime’s policies”. In other words, it poses as the central task that of pressuring the bourgeois regime to alter its policies.

The last paragraph of their draft, titled “The workers’ struggle for their national interests”, outlines demands related to neighboring Arab states and Israel that are basically shared by broad layers of the Egyptian bourgeoisie, who wish for more independence from US imperialism after the overthrow of Mubarak, in order to better pursue their own interests in the region. Such demands could find the support of other bourgeois forces, such as ElBaradei’s National Association for Change and the Islamist Muslim Brotherhood.

Like these forces, the WDP strives for a bourgeois government that will make minor changes in foreign policy, which exclusively reflect the interests of the Egyptian bourgeoisie.

The WDP ends its programs by stating that it is ready to participate in such a government: “We will continue to strive to achieve the vision of Egyptian workers, and involve them in the revolutionary government, which truly represents the interests of the majority of the popular masses of Egyptian people.”

In order to better understand the WDP’s character, it is necessary to take a closer look at the political group that initiated its founding. The WDP is the project of the Revolutionary Socialists (RS), the Egyptian section of the International Socialist Tendency (IST), whose most important national group is the British Socialist Workers Party (SWP).

The SWP was founded by Tony Cliff, who broke with Marxism in the late 1940s based on his conception that the Soviet Union was not a degenerate workers’ state, as Leon Trotsky had analyzed, but rather a form of state capitalism.

Since its foundation, the IST’s policies can be summarized as a history of opportunist adaptation to social democratic and union bureaucracies.

The state capitalists have gone so far as to take up important positions in the bourgeois state. In Germany, Christine Buchholz from Marx 21, (an

organization affiliated to the SWP), is a member of the German government’s Defence Commission, supporting German military crimes in the imperialist war in Afghanistan. The German faction of IST has fully dissolved into the Left Party, which consist of aging social democrats and Stalinists and has been active for many years in organizing the dismantling of Germany’s welfare state.

The political perspective of the Egyptian state capitalists’ is no better. For years they have been collaborating with the Muslim Brotherhood, a reactionary Islamist group deeply hostile towards the working class. The RS tries to justify its collaboration with the Brotherhood on the basis of “Marxist traditions” that they have either failed to understand or have deliberately distorted.

In an interview with *International Socialism*, Sameh Naguib, a leading representative of RS, and a sociologist at the American University in Cairo, explained that the collaboration with the Muslim Brotherhood was based on the “Marxist tradition of the united front”. In practice, he said, this means “entering joint struggles alongside reformist organizations such as the Muslim Brotherhood, for certain goals; and without giving up one’s own independence or open criticism.”

In reality, a united front with the Muslim Brotherhood has nothing to do with a Marxist policy. Originally, the united front was a tactic developed by the Comintern at its Third World Congress in 1921, with the goal of breaking the majority of workers, who still trusted Social Democratic parties, from these old organisations and winning them to a revolutionary policy. Unlike the Social Democrats of the 1920s, the Muslim Brotherhood is neither a “reformist” party, nor does it have any traditions or roots within the working class; and, one might add, the RS, unlike the Comintern before its Stalinization, does not represent a revolutionary program.

The “united front” advocated by RS has much more in common with the Stalinist popular front of the mid-1930s, when the Communist Parties of France and Spain entered bourgeois governments that strangled the workers’ revolutionary movements and enabled the fascist powers to drown the revolutions in blood.

Today, like the Stalinists before them, the Revolutionary Socialists stand on the side of counterrevolution. Their policies are playing into the hands of the Egyptian military, which is preparing to suffocate the revolution by force.

In the midst of a revolution in which the task of the working class can be nothing less than the establishment of a workers’ government to defend their democratic and social interests, the Egyptian state capitalists are trying to establish a bourgeois party to derail workers from waging their own class struggle.

Their justification for such a policy could hardly be more cynical. In an interview on the RS’s web site on March 31, the leader of RS and WDP, Kamal Khalil, claims that the WDP is not a socialist party, because the workers themselves are not “prepared to support socialism”.

Instead of fighting for the development of a socialist perspective and an international socialist program in the working class, the RS simply declares the Egyptian workers hostile to socialism, and, on that basis, justifies its own orientation to bourgeois politics.

The Egyptian state capitalists do not represent the Egyptian workers’ interests, but rather those of the bourgeoisie and the upper middle classes, whose greatest fear is that the workers will take power and establish a socialist society. Thus it comes as no surprise that the RS and WDP are being wooed with overtly positive articles in the Egyptian and international bourgeois media, from *Al Masty*, *Al Youm* and *Al Ahram*, to the British *Guardian* and Al-Jazeera, with its leading representatives, such as Hossam al-Hamalawy, provided a forum for their articles and columns.



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