

Pseudo-left parties end Cairo sit-in after Islamist protest

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On July 31 a coalition of twenty-six official “opposition” parties signed a joint statement announcing that they would suspend the sit-in on Tahrir Square in Cairo. They said that they would not occupy the square during the month-long Ramadan religious holiday.

The statement was issued only two days after July 29 protests largely dominated by Islamist groups.

The domination of the recent protest by the fundamentally unpopular and right-wing Islamist groups is a warning to the working class. Preparations for repression and right-wing violence against striking workers and protestors are well advanced. The Egyptian revolution can continue only on the basis of the most determined political struggle against these forces, both Islamist and pseudo-“left.”

On July 29, Islamist supporters were brought into Cairo from rural areas in Egypt in a carefully prepared provocation. These parties opposed the protests against the Mubarak regime that began on January 25 and oppose any revolutionary struggle against the US-backed military junta. They have stated their support for the junta’s March 23 ban on strikes and protests.

Nonetheless, Islamist groups like the Muslim Brotherhood, the Salafis and al-Gamaa al-Islamiya rallied their supporters and outnumbered the liberal and “left” groups who participated in the rally.

The biggest stage on Tahrir Square was set up by the right-wing Salafist Nour (Light) Party and another by Muslim Brotherhood, the largest Islamist organization in Egypt.

The Islamists called for an Islamic state and chanted against “secularism” and “communism”. Some reportedly shouted slogans supporting the junta’s leader, Field Marshal Mohammed Hussein Tantawi. “Do you hear us Tantawi, we are the voices of your

children in Tahrir.” Protests dominated by the Islamists took also place in Alexandria, Suez and some smaller cities.

There are several indications of international support from various imperialist or reactionary regimes for Egypt’s Islamist parties. The US recently announced it would establish an “open dialogue” with the Muslim Brotherhood. The Obama administration obviously has identified the right-wing Islamist groups as a potential ally in a struggle to bring Egypt’s revolution to a halt.

Salafist groups in Egypt are widely sponsored by Saudi Arabia, which opposed the removal of Mubarak and regards the Salafist movement as a bulwark against any political change by the working class in Egypt, as well as in Saudi Arabia and throughout the region. Saudi Arabia has sponsored Salafist television channels and trained extremist imams in Egypt.

The main responsibility for the emergence of an imperialist-backed Islamist movement supporting Tantawi lies with the pseudo-“left” forces. They reacted hostilely to popular demands for a “second revolution” against the junta, while working ceaselessly to promote the Islamist parties as part of the official “opposition.”

In recent months, the junta has made clear that it cannot and will not address any of the social and democratic demands of the revolution which led to Mubarak’s ouster. It is plainly evident that the junta aims to continue Mubarak’s policies. Social spending has been cut, military rule remains, and Egypt is still a firm ally of the US and Israel.

Against this background, workers and youth began to raise the call for a “second revolution” during mass protests against the junta on May 27. In the following weeks, a new strike wave emerged as protests continued.

US imperialism and the Egyptian bourgeoisie became increasingly worried. The Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) junta announced on June 8 that it would apply the anti-strike and protest law to “avoid further economic risks and to achieve stability for the country.” On the same day Admiral Michael Mullen, the US chairman of Joint Chiefs of Staff, visited Cairo for talks with Tantawi.

Nonetheless, protests and strikes mounted and culminated in the biggest protests against the junta, accompanied by a strike by thousands of Suez Canal workers. On July 8 millions of workers and youth gathered all over Egypt and demanded the fall of Tantawi, the end of military rule, and a “second revolution.” Sit-ins emerged in all of Egypt’s major cities.

The renewed upsurge of the working class filled the entire political establishment with fear. This included various middle-class, pseudo-“left” forces, who joined the protests in order to steer the protests behind a bankrupt perspective that the military junta could be reformed. Such parties, who were effectively acting to protect the junta from mass opposition, included the parties of the so-called Socialist Front: the Revolutionary Socialists (RS), the Democratic Workers Party and the Socialist Alliance Party.

Their reactionary perspective was best summed up by Mostafa Omar in an article “The new shape of the struggle in Egypt.” The article was published on the web sites of the International Socialist Organization and International Socialist Tendency, only shortly after the Egyptian workers raised the demand for a “second revolution”.

Omar declares that the junta has “no intention of trying to return to the way the regime operated before January 25.” Then he adds that the military “Council aims to reform the political and economic system, allowing it to become more democratic and less oppressive.” His conclusion is that the “left” needs to “pressure the Council and its supporters in the coming few months, while avoiding premature confrontations.”

Amid the mounting class struggle, the pseudo-left groups have moved even further to the right in recent weeks and days. On July 9 the RS issued a statement denouncing a second revolution. It declares: “Not a second revolution but a permanent revolution until the fall of the regime [...]. What is happening on the squares

and streets in Egypt now is not a second revolution but an extension of the revolution of Jan. 25 after the people realized that the revolution does not end with the fall of one of the symbols of the regime.”

Throughout this period, the RS continued jointly issuing statements with various liberal and pro-capitalist parties—like the National Alliance for Change of Mohamed ElBaradei, al-Ghad and the Nasserite parties—who were all also negotiating with the Brotherhood.

Only shortly after these statements were issued, the military violently dispersed a sit-in by the striking Suez Canal workers. It then began a propaganda campaign against the protesters by broad sections of the Egyptian bourgeoisie—amongst them the most reactionary Islamist elements, which opposed any further protests.

Al-Gamaa al-Islamiya—an extremist Islamist group which split from the Muslim Brotherhood after it renounced violence in the 1970s—issued a statement that accused the protesters in Tahrir Square of being “communists and secularists who want to hijack political power by fomenting strife between the people and the army.” Then different Islamist groups worked on establishing a common platform and called for a “pro-stability protest” on July 29.

In order to stop the movement of the working class, the pseudo-left groups went so far as to ally with the Islamists. On July 27 the Revolutionary Socialists, the Democratic Workers Party and the Socialist Alliance Party joined a so-called “United Popular Front” and signed a statement with all major political groups in Egypt, including the Muslim Brotherhood, the Salafis and al-Gamaa al-Islamiya. They agreed to leave all “controversial issues” aside.

By halting political discussion and giving political support to the Islamists and the junta, these forces paved the way for the Islamists’ July 29 provocation, to which they reacted with a cowardly gesture—abandoning their protest.



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