

The counterrevolutionary role of the Egyptian pseudo-left

Alex Lantier, Johannes Stern
21 November 2011

This autumn's renewed strikes by workers in Egypt against the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) military junta underscore the urgency of drawing a political balance sheet of the Egyptian revolution. Nine months after the fall of Hosni Mubarak, Egypt remains a dictatorship under which workers face poverty wages and political oppression.

This is not because the working class has failed to struggle. The wave of strikes that broke out after the Ramadan holidays in early September is only the latest in a series of workers' struggles following the revolutionary mass strike that toppled Mubarak in February. The Egyptian army has been able to retain power only because parties claiming to be of the left have worked systematically to defend the bloodstained junta and block a political struggle by the working class to overthrow it.

These forces include parties that hark back to the politics of Egypt's former military ruler, Colonel Gamal Abdul Nasser, like the Tagammu and Karama parties; various Stalinist groups, including the Egyptian Communist Party (ECP), which is largely integrated into Tagammu; the leaderships of youth groups like the April 6 Youth Movement; and so-called "far-left" groups such as the Revolutionary Socialists (RS) and Tagdid (Socialist Renewal).

The Revolutionary Socialists are affiliated internationally with parties of the International Socialist Tendency, including the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) in Britain, and unofficially with the International Socialist Organization (ISO) in the United States.

These parties oppose the independent mobilization of the working class against the junta. Politically, they defend the legacy of military rule in Egypt and the Stalinists' nationalist support for it, even after the working class has risen in revolt against Mubarak and, subsequently, the SCAF. Sociologically, these parties draw their membership from affluent sections of the middle class, a social layer tied financially and politically to Western imperialism that seeks to keep the workers under the control of the state and trade union bureaucracies.

They collaborate with bourgeois forces like the right-wing Muslim Brotherhood (MB) and the National Alliance for Change of the former director general of the International Atomic Energy Agency, Mohammed ElBaradei, while working through back channels with Washington.

Such parties are not forces fighting for equality, the historic basis of left-wing politics. Nor do they, like typical bourgeois "left" parties, advance the claim that left-wing conceptions are compatible with imperialism and capitalism. Their party names present them as communists, socialists, or revolutionaries, but they are determined to prevent the working class from taking power or fighting for socialism. Such politics, based on a mixture of phrase mongering and political bad faith, makes them forces not of the left, but of a pseudo-left.

The working class can defeat Egypt's financial aristocracy and its Western imperialist backers, establish democracy, and raise the living standards of the people only by taking power in Egypt as part of the fight

for socialism throughout the Middle East and internationally. This is the only basis for democratically utilizing the resources of the country, the region and the world in the interests of the working masses.

The first step in such a struggle is a political battle to expose the counterrevolutionary role of the pseudo-left and build instead a revolutionary party of the working class. Arming the workers, intellectuals and youth with a Trotskyist critique of these parties will help lay the basis for such a new political leadership in the working class.

The pseudo-left in the Egyptian revolution

The attitude of the entire official Egyptian opposition to the Egyptian revolution was summed up in a statement by ElBaradei shortly after the overthrow of Tunisian president Zine El Abidine Ben Ali as a result of mass protests last January. Hoping that "change would come in an orderly way and not through the Tunisian model," he said, "Things need to be organized and planned properly. I would like to use the means available from within the system to effect change."

Only a week later, there was a revolutionary confrontation between the workers and the Egyptian "system"—that is, Mubarak's police thugs and the army.

The mass response to protests called for January 25, which stunned the political establishment and the police, led to street fighting and the defeat of the police in Cairo on January 28. The next day, Mubarak ordered the army to surround protesters in downtown Cairo. After refusing to step down on February 1, he sent thugs mounted on horses and camels through army lines to attack Tahrir Square. Protesters beat back the thugs.

The Mubarak regime—and US officials with whom it held talks as it tried to crush the protests, including Defense Secretary Robert Gates and former ambassador and corporate lobbyist Frank Wisner—did not dare send the army against the protesters. The risk was too high that the soldiers would refuse to fire and join in the revolt. Instead, it prepared a February 6 meeting with the Muslim Brotherhood, ElBaradei's supporters and Tagammu, hoping that some sort of political deal could be arranged to stabilize the situation and limit the impact of the protests.

The entire pseudo-left, including its "far-left" segments, campaigned in support of this meeting. The day before the meeting, the Revolutionary Socialists published a statement by the Muslim Brotherhood calling for a "dialog round" with the regime and urging the political parties to "take all political and national forces into this dialog." The RS published another statement calling for the "formation of leadership represented by the various national forces."

As it promoted "national forces" like the Muslim Brotherhood, the RS

launched a drive to politically emasculate the popular committees that workers had formed spontaneously to defend their neighborhoods against raids by Mubarak's thugs. They proclaimed that there was "an alternative" to these committees in the form of "democratically elected supreme councils."

This word-juggling masked an attempt to take control of the popular committees by the "national forces" of the Muslim Brotherhood and the pseudo-left. As the RS explained, a "supreme council includes people who are trusted, regardless of their color in the political spectrum, who are able to defend the interests of their council well." They insisted that it was "better to speak to protesters with a cadre"—that is, experienced operatives of the Brotherhood and the pseudo-left parties.

Once again, the working class undermined the plans of the "opposition." A massive strike wave developed in the days before Mubarak's resignation, bringing Egypt to a standstill. Reports reached international media of mass strikes of textile workers in Mahalla and Kafr al-Dawwar, Suez Canal workers and steelworkers in Suez and Port Said, and pharmaceutical workers in Quesna. Strikes also spread into the financial and government sectors in the final days before the ouster of Mubarak.

On February 11, Omar Suleiman—Egypt's vice president, intelligence chief and top CIA liaison officer—announced that Mubarak was "waiving" his office and stepping down.

The Egyptian military arrived at this decision in discussions between Egyptian Army chief of staff Sami Annan and the US chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Adm. Mike Mullen, and between Field Marshal Mohammed Hussein Tantawi and Secretary of Defense Robert Gates.

Mubarak was replaced by the SCAF junta, led by Tantawi, who dissolved parliament on February 13, suspending the constitution and granting the junta dictatorial powers. The next day, as it desperately tried to regain control of the situation and end the strikes, the junta demanded that strikes and protests stop, threatening to invoke martial law.

The main political lie on which the junta based its rule was its claim that it would oversee a transition to democratic, civilian rule, under pressure from Washington and Egypt's official "opposition." It scheduled a referendum for March 19 on a new constitution it was drafting.

The junta's main ally in promoting illusions that it would establish democratic rule was the pseudo-left. It kept a running dialogue with right-wing parties, while promoting the nationalist view that the Egyptian revolution was a campaign to achieve limited democratic reforms within the framework of the Egyptian national state and army. This petty-bourgeois nationalist view was hostile to any strategy based on the objective character of the revolutionary struggles breaking out across the Middle East, which were in essence struggles of the international working class against imperialism.

Even though the working class was in open revolt against the military brass that ruled Egypt under Mubarak, the RS glorified the Egyptian army's supposed past as a "people's army."

In a February 1 statement, it wrote: "Everyone asks: 'Is the army with the people or against them?' The army is not a single block. The interests of the soldiers and junior officers are the same as the interests of the masses. But the senior officers are Mubarak's men, chosen carefully to protect his regime of corruption, wealth, and tyranny. It is an integral part of the system. The army is no longer the people's army. This army is not the one which defeated the Zionist enemy in October 1973."

The statement did not explain how the Egyptian army had gone from allegedly being a "people's army" to being the leading force behind the Mubarak dictatorship, against which the working class was mounting a

revolutionary struggle. This amounted to an appeal to Egyptian nationalism, a call for the army to somehow return to the period of Colonel Gamal Abdul Nasser and his successor Anwar Sadat, who was head of state during the 1973 Yom Kippur War against Israel. The suggestion is that this to be accomplished by firing some of "Mubarak's men" at the top—i.e., those officers whom the RS did not dare publicly defend.

The view outlined in the RS's statement—that "the interests of the soldiers and junior officers are the same as the interests of the masses"—is utterly false. Soldiers and junior officers are drawn from sections of the population, such as the middle class and the rural population, to which the working class can make a revolutionary appeal. However, the RS disregards the most obvious condition facing the soldiers: they are under the military discipline of the top officers, who are the linchpin of Egyptian capitalism and Egypt's ties to US imperialism.

The basic task facing the revolutionary proletariat is to shatter the discipline of the army and thus the hold of the generals over the soldiers. The RS statement takes a directly opposite line. If the basic task at hand is to return the army to the role it played under Nasser or Sadat, there can be no talk of breaking its discipline and winning the Egyptian soldiers to a working class revolution.

The RS and other non-Islamist opposition forces formally called for a no vote on the military's proposed constitution, proposing modifications or a new constitution drafted by the opposition. But the RS's opposition to the military constitution was hollow, as it simultaneously deepened ties to Islamist groups that were backing the junta's constitution.

On February 25, it issued a statement, "Towards the Foundation of a Workers' Coalition of the January 25 Revolution." The document was signed by members of the RS, the ECP, Tagdid and the Muslim Brotherhood. It was published by the online magazine *International Viewpoint*, the international organ of the Pabloite United Secretariat of the Fourth International, which includes groups such as France's New Anti-Capitalist Party (NPA).

The proposal to invite the Brotherhood—a right-wing group historically associated with violent strike-breaking and Islamist terrorism—into a coalition supposedly associated with the working class was deeply reactionary.

The pseudo-left spared no effort in promoting illusions about the junta and the old regime. When protests forced the resignation of Prime Minister Ahmed Shafiq and his replacement on March 3 by Essam Sharaf—a former transport minister under Mubarak who had briefly attended protests on Tahrir Square—the RS enthusiastically praised Sharaf. Noting that he "participated in the liberation protests," the RS added, "To appease the protesters, the new prime minister immediately replaced most of the ministers in the old government who were unpopular."

In the event, the constitutional referendum passed on March 19 with 77 percent of the vote, on a low turnout. The Egyptian junta's stabilization, assisted by the pseudo-left, helped give the counterrevolution breathing space to regroup and launch offensives throughout the Middle East.

That same day, US, British and French forces began bombarding Libya.

A few days earlier, a bloody crackdown had begun with Saudi aid and tacit US backing against protesters in Bahrain. On March 23, the SCAF junta issued a ban on strikes and protests. Though this did not halt the protests, thousands of Egyptian workers and youth have since been detained and tortured or convicted in summary military trials for opposition to the junta.

The referendum did not halt the protests against the SCAF junta, which continued on April 1 and April 8. However, the junta reacted more violently, crushing a sit-in on Tahrir Square after 20 young army officers

reportedly joined the protesters and demanded the SCAF's overthrow.

Over the ensuing months, dissatisfaction rose in the Egyptian population over the lack of effective prosecution of officials responsible for killing protesters during the revolution, the continuation of military trials, and poor living conditions. These demands coalesced around calls for a "Second Revolution" and a "Second Revolution" protest on May 27.

The RS opposed this demand, which cut across its portrayal of the junta as a "pro-democratic" force. On May 31, RS member Mustafa Omar published an article titled "The New Shape of the Struggle in Egypt" in the American ISO's publication, *Socialist Worker*. He wrote: "Despite its repressive measures, the Supreme Council understands that the January 25 uprising has changed Egypt once and for all in certain ways.... The Council aims to reform the political and economic system, allowing it to become more democratic and less oppressive."

As if to prove that he had learned nothing from the recent protests and bloodshed, al-Hamalawy echoed his February comments for the junta in a June 22 Reuters interview. He said, "I do feel they (the generals of the SCAF) are sincere about handing over power to a civilian government. But that does not mean that they will give up...their role in the Egyptian political arena."

This comment is cynical and absurd. The army brass was the political and corporate backbone of the Mubarak regime. From a legal standpoint, it now wields absolute dictatorial authority under the SCAF regime. If a civilian government was installed but the military did not give up its "role in the Egyptian political arena," this would not be a civilian regime but a façade for a continuing military dictatorship.

In the event, the class struggle paid no more attention to al-Hamalawy's fantasizing about the junta's democratic inclinations than it had to ElBaradei's pious hopes for "orderly change." A mass protest on June 27 was attacked by the junta and led to large-scale fighting, with dozens of deaths and more than 1,000 protesters injured. Strikes and protests grew, with demonstrations by millions of workers throughout Egypt on July 8 and protest sit-ins in many public squares, notably a sit-in by families of martyrs of the revolution in Tahrir Square in Cairo.

This eruption of the class struggle threw the pseudo-left groups even more openly into the arms of the counterrevolution. On July 27, they joined a "United Popular Front" involving nearly every force in the Egyptian political spectrum—"left," liberal and Islamist. It included the RS, the Revolutionary Youth Coalition and the Egyptian Socialist Party as well as the Islamist Salafist Youth and ("incredibly," in the words of the state-owned daily *Al Ahram*) the fascistic Islamist party, Gamaa Islamiya. The parties of the "United Popular Front" agreed not to discuss "controversial issues."

On July 29, the United Popular Front called a demonstration in Tahrir Square. Gamaa Islamiya, having trucked in its supporters from around Egypt, dominated the rally, shouting slogans openly promoting the junta: "Do you hear us Tantawi, we are the voices of your children in Tahrir!"

Feigning surprise and anger that the fascists had supported the junta, the pseudo-left parties announced on July 31 that they were suspending their participation in the sit-in. They did not say why they had expected the Gamaa Islamiya to keep its word and not raise "controversial issues," or why they had expected it to do anything other than what it did. Nor did they disavow their alliance with a fascist party.

On August 1, the army attacked and beat the martyrs' families—the last forces remaining on Tahrir Square—ending the sit-in. This defeat, together with the beginning of the Ramadan holidays, temporarily halted political struggle until the outbreak of the current struggles at the beginning of the school year.

The treachery of the pseudo-left and its middle-class perspective

The pseudo-left's record in Egypt is one of rank treachery. While posing as left or even socialist, it has sought to provide democratic credentials for a dictatorial US-backed junta, allying with right-wing and fascistic forces. It has opposed a political struggle to discredit the SCAF and arm the working class with a revolutionary, internationalist program—instead allying itself with openly pro-military forces against the threat of a working-class overthrow of the junta.

These right-wing policies reflect the outlook of affluent middle-class layers that view a workers' uprising with barely disguised fear. This emerges most clearly in the articles of Anne Alexander, a writer on the Middle East for the RS-affiliated SWP of Britain. In her article "The Growing Social Soul of Egypt's Democratic Revolution," she asks how to "protect and extend the gains in political democracy made during the uprising." She recommends precisely the methods the pseudo-left has actually employed in Egypt—alliances with right-wing parties and the trade union bureaucracy.

Alexander sees the task of the working class as maintaining political pressure on the junta to project a democratic façade. She writes: "There is not space here to explore the question of how far the military leadership and its civilian allies will work to consolidate a façade of bourgeois democracy, and to what extent this will be an enlarged democratic space in comparison with the pre-revolutionary situation. Certainly, if the principal architects of this new political order are the generals...it is likely that the bounds of this stabilized 'democratic' system will be very precisely determined by the degree to which the masses are prepared and organized to fight to keep it open."

This raises more questions than it answers. Why should workers be satisfied with a "façade of bourgeois democracy?" If workers were truly "prepared and organized to fight"—which is not Alexander's perspective—why does the SWP not want them to overthrow the junta and establish a workers state to carry out socialist policies?

Such proposals would not occur to Alexander or her co-thinkers. They are focusing on the prospect of an "enlarged democratic space," compliments of the junta. Whatever this undefined formula means, it is not the satisfaction of the demands on which the workers entered the revolution. Though workers have provided a heroic example of struggle, they are still grossly underpaid and exploited; they still risk beatings and military trials if they protest the junta's reactionary policies.

An "enlarged democratic space" under the SCAF dictatorship or some other repressive bourgeois regime in Egypt is no gain for the working class in Egypt or internationally. However, it presents definite benefits to the more affluent layers for whom the pseudo-left parties speak. The RS leadership is invited to meetings with right-wing parties, gives statements to the Egyptian and international press, and has access to unprecedented publicity and revenues.

Mr. Al-Hamalawy regularly places his articles in the *Guardian* and appears on the BBC. An interview on the American TV channel *Comedy Central*—appropriately enough—turned the RS's inconsequential Gigi Ibrahim into the "face of the revolution," and she now joins Hamalawy on news shows discussing Egypt. Their role offers them definite rewards, as long as they do nothing to anger the BBC's bosses in the British government or Viacom, *Comedy Central's* corporate owner in the United States.

The "enlarged democratic space" is, in fact, the opening offered by the ruling class to middle-class pseudo-left elements in times of political crisis—when their services are required to strangle the struggles of the proletariat. This is what Alexander wants to protect.

She insists that workers be controlled through alliances with the state bureaucracy and right-wing forces and inoculated against a Marxist critique of such alliances.

She praises Egypt's trade unions, which served the Mubarak regime and whose bureaucrats occupied top positions within it. The unions' ability to fight, she writes, "does not depend...on the nature of their leadership, or on their internal organizational arrangements, but on their connection to workers' struggles and the overall balance of forces in revolution. Even undemocratic, bureaucratic trade unions can be a launch-pad for struggles for the narrowest of demands, which are capable of rapidly bursting the bounds of sectionalism."

This statement falsifies the events of the Egyptian revolution. The overwhelming majority of Egypt's industrial unions in January were controlled by the yellow Egyptian Trade Union Federation (ETUF). The proletariat struggled not through, but against the ETUF. Indeed, during the first protests, ETUF chairman Hussein Mogawer demanded that union officials "prevent workers from participating in all demonstrations at this time," and that they inform him around the clock of attempts by workers to join the protests.

The crux of Alexander's reactionary argument is that even "undemocratic, bureaucratic" organizations are good enough for the working class. This means, as she explains, that the RS and similar parties need not limit themselves to "organizations that are to some extent initiatives of the left." She continues, "On the contrary, [it] means above all being where the masses are."

The inescapable conclusion is that the RS can and should work with (or even inside) right-wing groups, like the Muslim Brotherhood or Gamaa Islamiya. Alexander even insists that such alliances must be protected from any Marxist criticism of their right-wing character. She demands that the RS "stop the virus of sectarianism from infecting the workers' movement and undermining the unity needed to defeat the boss, for example."

This is a barely concealed call for censorship and proscriptions. Political criticism does not involve breaking the unity of workers in industrial struggles or street demonstrations. It offers a perspective to defeat Tantawi, overthrow the junta, and fight for socialism in Egypt and internationally. This requires a political offensive to discredit the right-wing alliances of the pseudo-left parties—which is what Alexander's preemptive attack against so-called "sectarianism" seeks to prevent.

The Egyptian pseudo-left unanimously dismisses the perspective of building a party fighting for socialism and Marxism in the working class. The RS has founded the Workers Democratic Party (WDP), through which it hopes to recruit members on a pro-capitalist basis. RS leader Kamal Khalil insisted that the WDP is not a socialist party because the workers are not "prepared to support socialism."

As for Tagdid, it similarly insists that "the majority of radicalized workers and left-leaning activists would not want to belong to a small Leninist revolutionary socialist group."

When the pseudo-left activists like Tagdid's leaders claim they do not want to participate in a Marxist party, they are telling the truth. Their statements that workers do not want to join a socialist movement because it would be a small organization, not a mass party, are—on the other hand—an effort at deception and the sowing of political demoralization.

In toppling Mubarak, the working class has shown its readiness for revolutionary measures and demonstrated the degree to which the inveterate pessimists of the "far left" underestimate its willingness to engage in political struggle. In any event, the objective logic of events pushes the working class towards socialism. It provides the only basis for the working class to turn its opposition to poverty and dictatorship into a conscious struggle to defeat capitalism's drive for social austerity and war.

As for claims that a revolutionary party would be unviable because it

would initially be small, this is simply an argument for inaction or unbridled opportunism. No Egyptian party, including the pseudo-left parties, currently has a large following, especially in the working class. A mass party remains to be built, and the statements of Tagdid and RS indicate only their hostility to building a mass workers' party on a socialist basis.

Alexander's comments shatter the pseudo-left's claims to be struggling for democracy. For the RS and the SWP, "undemocratic, bureaucratic" organizations are good enough for the workers. They also manifestly believe that a military dictatorship can be good enough for Egypt. The only goal they defend is the lucrative "enlarged democratic space" the junta's rule offers the upper middle classes.

Western imperialism and Egypt's middle-class "opposition"

RS journalists' newfound celebrity is only the tip of the iceberg, in terms of the opportunities the "enlarged democratic space" offers to Egypt's affluent middle class. As the pseudo-left has taken on a greater role in politically strangling the working class, Western powers anxious to halt the Middle Eastern revolution have poured funds into this social layer. These forces have, in turn, rushed to get onto the gravy train of Western, and especially US, funding.

This alliance is built on shared class interests between Western imperialism and the Egyptian middle-class "opposition." Both seek to suppress and politically demobilize the working class by peddling illusions that the junta will create democracy. Imperialism has richly rewarded—or, to speak more plainly, bribed—these middle-class layers.

Thus, in April, newly appointed US ambassador to Cairo Anne Patterson announced that Washington had allocated \$105 million to "various non-governmental organizations [NGOs] to assist with their participation in the political life of the country." The *Jerusalem Post* cited reports that US authorities had already received 1,000 applications for funding from Egyptian organizations.

Such funding has been available to pro-US NGOs for some time. *Al-Ahram* quoted Professor Gamal Zahran of Suez Canal University, who said that during the second term of the Bush administration (2005-2009), Washington directed its civilian funding for Egypt away from infrastructure projects towards "strengthening civil society organizations working in fields of monitoring elections and surveying the situation of human rights."

This became sufficiently well known that the Egyptian military—which receives \$1.3 billion in yearly funding from the United States—has cynically tried to justify crackdowns by citing US funding of NGOs to claim that the Egyptian revolution was all a foreign plot.

This is, of course, absurd. The main force in the revolution was the struggle of millions of workers and youth, not the few thousand members of the pseudo-left parties. However, the ties between Western imperialism and the Egyptian middle-class groups were too obvious to deny, and on August 12 Jim Bever, the Egypt chief of the US Agency for International Development (USAID), was forced to resign.

It is clear that there are significant ties—financial, but also operational—between the Western powers and elements of the Egyptian pseudo-left. Thus, according to the *New York Times*, some April 6 youth movement members were trained by the Serbian organization Otpor. A group that helped lead the NATO-backed coup against Serbian president Slobodan Milosevic in 2000, Otpor trained organizers of the "color revolutions" in eastern Europe—political putsches that installed pro-Western regimes, notably in Georgia (2003) and Ukraine (2004).

A secret December 2008 US diplomatic cable published by WikiLeaks confirms that direct ties exist between April 6 leaders and US officials. The cable reveals that US diplomats in Cairo received briefings from an apparently well-connected member of the April 6 movement, who gave detailed reports on the Egyptian “opposition.” This individual, whose name was redacted, was returning from an “Alliance of Youth Movements” summit in Washington, during which he held talks with several congressional staffers.

According to the cable, “[Name redacted] claimed that several opposition forces—including the Wafd, Nasserite, Karama, and Tagammu parties, and the Muslim Brotherhood, Kifaya, and Revolutionary Socialists—have agreed to support an unwritten plan for a transition to a parliamentary democracy, involving a weakened presidency and an empowered prime minister and parliament, before the scheduled 2011 presidential elections. According to [name redacted], the opposition is interested in receiving support from the army and the police for a transitional government prior to the 2011 elections. [Name redacted] asserted that this plan is so sensitive it cannot be written down.”

If this is accurate, it seems the pseudo-left was devising an alliance with sections of the Egyptian army, who, like many US diplomats at the time, disapproved of Mubarak’s plans to install his son Gamal to replace him as head of state. The RS, Tagammu and the other parties named in the WikiLeaks cable have not commented on these revelations.

Another pseudo-left initiative—plans to set up so-called “independent trade unions” not tied to the ETUF—is also backed by Western imperialism. At a February 23 press conference, US secretary of state Hillary Clinton publicly confirmed this: “As many people know, the United States supported civil society in Egypt. We gave grants that the government did not like to support union organizing, to support organizing on behalf of political opposition to the regime. That goes back many years.”

In May, officials of France’s SUD (Solidarity, Unity, Democracy) union, affiliated to the French New Anti-Capitalist Party (NPA), traveled to Egypt. They promoted “independent” unions and met with groups in Egypt that are trying to build them.

SUD explained that the Center for Trade Union and Workers Services (CTUWS)—the main NGO trying to build “independent” unions in Egypt—receives its funding from Oxfam, the Euro-Maghreb union alliance (including SUD, the Spanish CGT, and the Algerian SNAPAP unions), the European Confederation of Trade Unions, and the American AFL-CIO.

They discovered that Egyptian workers are unenthusiastic about plans for new unions. SUD’s report quoted a work inspector and member of Tagdid, Fatma Ramadan, who is trying to build them: “We do not have a heritage on which we can base ourselves, or what is worse, the heritage we do have is a bad one, which makes workers doubt the interest of having unions. They have a hard time understanding how the unions could be any different from the old.”

Egyptian workers comprehend social reality far more correctly than pseudo-left SUD bureaucrats, who peddle Washington’s plans to the workers.

So long as the working class is ruled by the junta—and controlled in the workplace by the junta’s yellow unions, or by “independent” unions funded by the junta’s backers in Washington—the “new” conditions for workers will not be different from the old. The critical task facing the workers is not the creation of new unions to bargain with the junta, but the overthrow of the junta and the seizure of power. Only placing the resources of the Egyptian and the world economy under the control of working people can provide the resources to end the social deprivation overseen by Mubarak and Washington.

How the pseudo-left attacks Marxism to oppose the revolution

A major factor in the pseudo-left’s ability to pose as a left-wing tendency is its use of socialistic rhetoric. It does so, however, only the better to repudiate the historical principles and revolutionary content of Marxism. Precisely because Marxism is the proletariat’s historically developed guide to action in revolutionary struggle, the pseudo-left is forced to distort, contradict and attack it at every turn.

The pseudo-left’s attempts to hide its support for the junta with phrases drawn from the lexicon of Marxism show only its ignorance and bad faith. Thus, Tagdid’s Fatma Ramadan, speaking to SUD bureaucrats, quoted Fath Allah Mahrous of the Egyptian Socialist Party: “He likes to say we are in a situation of dual power, with on the one side the street and on the other the army.”

In fact, dual power—as Marxists use the term—does not exist in Egypt. Responsibility for this situation lies largely with Tagdid, the RS and similar groups. They intervened to disband popular committees and prevent the development of organs of workers’ power that could form the basis of a new state power fighting to overthrow the Egyptian junta.

Tagdid’s attempt to obscure this fact by calling street protests “dual power” is a cynical dodge. In the *History of the Russian Revolution*, Leon Trotsky notes that the inevitable conflict between the wishes of the oppressed masses and the policy of the capitalist state does not constitute dual power. He explains, “Antagonistic classes exist in society everywhere, and a class deprived of power inevitably strives to some extent to swerve the governmental course in its favor. This does not yet mean, however, that two or more powers are ruling in society.”

Trotsky explains dual power as follows: “The historic preparation of a revolution brings about, in the pre-revolutionary period, a situation in which the class which is called upon to realize the new social system, although not yet master of the country, has actually concentrated in its hands a significant share of the state power, while the official apparatus of government is still in the hands of the old lords. That is the initial dual power in every revolution.”

One must ask: have the workers in Egypt concentrated in their hands a “significant share of the state power,” or any share at all? Have they created institutions like the *soviets* (councils) of the revolutionary Russian proletariat in 1917, which formed a competing center of power to the bourgeois Provisional Government, and eventually, under the leadership of the Bolshevik Party, overthrew it? Unfortunately, the answer is no.

Popular neighborhood committees, spontaneously formed during the struggle against Mubarak and his thugs, had the potential to develop into such institutions. However, as we have seen, the pseudo-left groups fought to break up these committees, insisting that they give way to councils staffed by members of the Muslim Brotherhood and their own leading personnel.

Dual power does not exist in Egypt—not because the workers were not ready for it, but because Egypt’s political organizations (above all, the pseudo-left parties) fought against it. Instead, they insisted that workers confine themselves to the “enlarged democratic space” supposedly provided by the Egyptian military dictatorship.

The Egyptian revolution, like all others, posed the question of the army with extraordinary sharpness. The generals run the state, own much of the economy, plot with Washington, and command large bodies of army conscripts who are, in the final analysis, the only force in Egypt large enough to drown a popular uprising in blood. The task of any serious struggle for democracy in Egypt would be to win over the soldiers to the struggle for socialist revolution and smash the authority of the officer corps.

The fundamental reason why the pseudo-left opposed such a perspective is clear from the comments of al-Hamalawy and other RS members: they

see the junta and the officer corps as the linchpin of a transition to democracy. From this standpoint, a struggle to destroy the authority of the officers over the soldiers is dangerous. It risks alienating the military despots whom the pseudo-left is counting on to lead the so-called democratic transition!

The writings of the great Marxists are crystal clear on the attitude of the revolutionary proletariat to the army and the state. In *The State and Revolution*, Lenin cited approvingly “Marx’s idea that the working class must break up, smash the ‘ready-made state machinery’ and not confine itself to merely laying hold of it.”

As for the army, Friedrich Engels wrote in a letter of September 26, 1851, to Karl Marx: “A disorganized army and a complete breakdown of discipline have been the condition as well as the result of every victorious revolution.”

The pseudo-left’s support for the junta and the Egyptian officer corps reflects not only its ties to the Egyptian ruling class and world imperialism, but its deep hostility to Marxism’s emphasis on the revolutionary role of the working class. As Anne Alexander makes clear in her 2006 article, “Suez and the High Tide of Arab Nationalism,” the SWP and the pseudo-left believe Marxism’s insistence on the leading role of the working class in the revolution was wrong.

She cites the role of Nasser, who came to power in a 1952 coup against King Farouk that ended British rule in Egypt, focusing on the 1956 Suez crisis. At that time, Nasser nationalized the Suez Canal and Egypt fought off an attempt by Britain, France and Israel to retake the Canal by force. Nasser turned to the Stalinist Egyptian Communist Party to organize popular resistance in Port Suez and beyond, confident that the Stalinists would not organize any revolutionary opposition to his regime. Popular opposition, together with the threat of Soviet intervention and the US decision to withdraw its support for the British pound to show its disapproval, stopped the Franco-British invasion.

For Alexander, the fact that Nasser kept power invalidates the perspective of socialist revolution in the colonial countries formulated by Leon Trotsky, who insisted on the leading role of the working class.

Trotsky, she writes, “agreed with Lenin that the working class was the only class capable of leading the democratic revolution to success, but argued that once in power, the working class could not simply limit itself to constructing a bourgeois democratic state. Instead he said, ‘the democratic revolution grows over immediately into the socialist, and thereby becomes a permanent revolution.’... Trotsky’s predictions were not borne out in the wave of national revolutions after the Second World War. In country after country, the old pro-colonial regimes were overthrown, but not by the working class or the peasantry. Instead, sections of the intelligentsia or factions of the army seized control of the state.”

This comment epitomizes the middle-class, nationalist outlook of the SWP and its international co-thinkers. They view the officers and intellectuals as the driving forces of history. They take the fact that Nasser came to power in Egypt in 1952 as proof that a socialist perspective is misguided, and as legitimization for their own orientation to the SCAF junta, the Egyptian national state, and behind them to Western imperialism.

Alexander does not explain why, if the democratic revolution was truly carried out by Nasser as she claims, the working class now finds itself in the vanguard of a revolutionary struggle against a corrupt dictatorship led by Nasser’s political heirs. In fact, the suppression of the working class in Egypt of the 1950s signified the abortion of any struggle for democracy. Alexander does not raise these issues, however, because her middle-class outlook leads her to an unprincipled criticism of Trotsky and a political adaptation to Nasserism and Stalinism.

Externally, Nasser relied initially on Washington’s hostility to attempts by British imperialism to maintain its hold over Egypt, then increasingly

on an alliance with the Soviet bureaucracy to limit the threat of imperialist intervention. Internally, he relied on the reactionary role of the Egyptian Communist Party, which, in line with the policy of the Kremlin, opposed socialist revolution in the Arab world. This political support was abetted by the social concessions the post-colonial regime offered the workers.

At the same time, the Nasser regime brutally crushed independent struggles by the workers. It executed two workers, Mustafa Khamis and Muhammad al-Baqri, for their role in the famous 1952 Misr textile company strike. The Egyptian Communist Party nonetheless supported him. It tried to limit working class opposition to Nasser, justifying its self-dissolution in 1956 by claiming that Nasser was building socialism.

The historical period during which the Nasserite regime could suppress the independent struggles of the working class and balance between imperialism and the Soviet Union proved to be short-lived. After the Yom Kippur War—only 22 years after Nasser came to power—his successor, Anwar Sadat, began a policy of *infitah* (opening) to foreign capital and a diplomatic alignment with US imperialism. This included Sadat’s signing of the 1978 Camp David accords, establishing peace with Israel on the basis of suppressing any appeal by the Egyptian workers to the Israeli proletariat for a common struggle against imperialism and Zionism.

Egypt’s integration into the world capitalist economy under the aegis of Washington led to a further growth in both the social power and economic oppression of the working class. These class contradictions building up under the surface of Egyptian political life have now exploded in revolutionary struggles whose reverberations have spread throughout the world.

Alexander, the SWP and their international co-thinkers are silent on the questions of imperialism and Stalinism due to their own petty-bourgeois outlook. Politically mesmerized by Nasser and the Egyptian military, they are struggling to subordinate the working class to the army as the Egyptian Communist Party did in Nasser’s day, though today the Egyptian regime functions as a direct agency of imperialism.

This orientation has been dealt a massive blow by the Egyptian revolution of 2011, which confirmed Trotsky’s insistence on the leading role of the working class in revolutionary struggle. It was the working class that toppled Mubarak, whose regime was utterly hostile to any sort of democratic reform and completely subservient to imperialism.

Trotsky’s theory of permanent revolution holds that the capitalist class can no longer lead the struggles for democracy as it did in the bourgeois revolutions of the eighteenth century in the United States and France. Fearful of the proletariat and—in ex-colonial countries like Egypt—dependent on foreign imperialism, the capitalists oppose democratic rule in their own country. Democracy can be established only by the working class as part of its struggle for world socialist revolution, to place all the resources of the national and international economy under the control of the workers and oppressed masses.

It is characteristic of the pseudo-left’s treachery that it has tried to discredit the theory of permanent revolution in the working class by presenting it as a theory opposed to political struggle. As demands built up in the working class for a Second Revolution this summer, the RS issued an infamous statement titled “Not a Second Revolution but a Permanent Revolution Until the Fall of the Regime.”

Presenting workers’ demands for a second revolution as being opposed to Trotskyism and the theory of permanent revolution is utterly dishonest. The struggle to realize permanent revolution can only take the form of a renewed offensive by the working class to overthrow the junta—which is precisely what the workers were demanding with calls for a “second revolution.” In this struggle, the workers will find the pseudo-left to be a determined opponent: right-wing, petty-bourgeois, and anti-Marxist.

The working class needs a new political leadership

The initial months of the Egyptian revolution have shown the enormous social power of the working class: its ability to topple dictators, bring entire countries to a standstill, and organize itself for struggle against state repression.

The revolution has also shown, however, the limits of spontaneous action. Deprived of political leadership, strike committees and popular self-defense groups were disbanded or left to wither. Political initiative was ceded to the junta and its imperialist co-conspirators, who were left in control of the army, the banks and the state apparatus.

The revolution could not triumph, or even go forward, under the existing political parties, which are fundamentally hostile to it. Their support for the state and trade union bureaucracy has left the Egyptian ruling class free to plot repression and counter-revolution with emissaries of Western imperialism, which carried out a neo-colonial war for regime change in Libya and is now threatening war in Syria, Iran and beyond.

The workers in Egypt need a new, revolutionary party to overthrow the SCAF junta, establish a workers state and mount the fight to end imperialist rule in the Middle East, as part of an international struggle for socialism.

Global capitalism is mired in the deepest economic slump since the Great Depression, particularly in the imperialist centers in America and Europe, creating a global social crisis and rising opposition in the international working class. The objective prerequisites for a struggle for world socialist revolution, as Trotsky and other leading Marxists had envisaged and explained in the theory of permanent revolution, are coming together.

The central unresolved problem remains the crisis of leadership of the working class. The first months of revolutionary struggle in Egypt constitute a devastating exposure of the pseudo-left parties. They do not constitute the basis for building such a leadership, but an obstacle that must be subjected to ruthless political criticism so as to rearm of the working class with a revolutionary perspective.

Tied to class forces deeply hostile to the proletariat—Western imperialism, the Islamist movements and the junta itself—they pursue policies and promote perspectives violently opposed to a struggle for socialism. To the extent that they maintain influence over the struggles of the working class, they produce defeats and demoralization and the danger of the triumph of counterrevolution.

The first task facing socialist-minded workers, intellectuals and youth in Egypt and throughout the Middle East is to shatter the influence of these parties over the most politically conscious workers and build in these layers a revolutionary party to lead the working class in struggle.

The political basis for this is the theory of permanent revolution and the struggle of the International Committee of the Fourth International to defend the revolutionary continuity of Trotskyism and historical and programmatic foundations of Marxism.

The ICFI is convinced that the Egyptian revolution marks the first great experience in a new period of international revolutionary struggles. It has created the *World Socialist Web Site* as a political organ to report on, unify and provide political leadership to the struggles of the working class around the world. It calls upon its readers in Egypt, the Middle East and internationally to fight for the perspective of permanent revolution and to join the ICFI.



To contact the WSWs and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact