

# The Egyptian Revolution, the Muslim Brotherhood and the apologetics of the Revolutionary Socialists

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Nine months after the fall of Hosni Mubarak, Islamist parties secured a majority in the first two rounds of Egypt's parliamentary elections.

With a working class and rural poor more numerous than the rest of the Middle East, aside from Iran and Turkey, Egypt is by far the most important and influential country in the region. The powerful movement of the Egyptian people that brought down Mubarak was therefore an enormous blow to US imperialism and its regional allies.

Despite this, Egypt remains a dictatorship under which workers face poverty wages and political oppression. The movement that began the "Arab Spring" is being hijacked and perverted by the ruling elite, primarily by resort to an alliance with Islamist parties that have worked systematically to defend the junta and, secondly, the nominally "democratic" and left parties that block any political struggle by the working class to overthrow the junta.

The elections are a fraud designed to legitimise Egypt's continued domination by a handful of billionaires, the military, the transnational banks and corporations. They will formally hand over power to parties sidelined by the revolutionary upsurge of workers and youth that toppled Mubarak in February. These parties are hostile to the revolution's basic demands: social equality, better living standards, and political freedom.

On a low turnout of just over 50 percent in the first round and 42 percent in the second round, the Muslim Brotherhood's Freedom and Justice Party (FJP) obtained about 40 percent of the vote, the Salafists' Al-Nour 24 percent of the vote, the liberal Egyptian Bloc and Al Wafd parties 14 and 11 percent of the vote. The Revolution Continues bloc of middle class ex-left and youth parties received just four percent.

The ruling Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) has ensured that it will control political life in Egypt, reserving the power to appoint four-fifths of the delegates to a constituent assembly and veto any part of the new constitution. It has kept in place the full apparatus of repression and torture developed under Mubarak, outlawing strikes and protests and arresting and trying over 12,000 people in military tribunals over the last nine months.

According to the SCAF's 2011 Constitutional Declaration, the junta will retain power to promulgate or object to legislation, to issue public policy for the state and the public budget, appoint members of the People's Assembly, call and adjourn its sessions and sign international treaties and represent the Egyptian state abroad.

The junta intends to establish a working partnership with the now-dominant party in the parliament, the Muslim Brotherhood. Its leader Mohammed Badie has courted the generals, posing as a moderate party in contrast to the more extreme Salafist al-Nour party. He has promised to work with the junta: "We must live in harmony not only with the military council, but with all of Egypt's factions, or else the conclusion is zero.

There will be reconciliation between the three powers: the parliament, the government, and the military ruling council."

Moreover, there are signs that the Brotherhood would be willing to protect the special role of the military in order to reach a deal with the generals. According to the privately owned Egyptian daily *Al-Tahrir*, Essam Al-Erian, the vice chairman of the FJP, announced that, "the military has the right to enjoy a special position in the upcoming constitution, more than in previous ones." He also stated that the transfer of power to an elected civilian authority "should not result in the disappearance of the junta from the political scene".

Formed in 1928, the Brotherhood represents a powerful faction of the Egyptian bourgeoisie. Its founder, Hanna al-Banna, developed the idea that a Sunni-based Islamism could be fashioned as a bulwark against Western influence, an alternative to the secular nationalism of the main bourgeois Wafd party, and above all as a weapon against the rise of communism after the Russian Revolution. He called for an Islamic state based on Sharia law and advocated corporatism and paternalism on the part of the landowners and employers, as a counterweight to the class struggle.

The Brothers used religious sectarianism and anti-Semitism to combat the growing influence of the socialist and communist left—many of whom were Jewish—within the national movement, and to divide the working class. This was particularly evident in the ethnically diverse industrial city of Alexandria, where it built up a network of paramilitary groups that became notorious for their attacks on workers and secularists.

The Brotherhood married nationalism and religion with a reactionary social programme. While women would be educated and allowed to work, they would be kept separate from men. Religion would be at the core of social and economic life. To this end, the Brotherhood set up a network of schools, clinics, factories and mosques.

A party with such a programme and origins is incapable of resolving the deep going social problems that confront Egypt today. The Islamists, despite their anti-imperialist rhetoric, are in fact being courted by the Obama administration. They have become a key instrument of US foreign policy in the Middle East—most recently in the NATO war in Libya and the ongoing civil war in Syria—and beyond. Not the least of their merits, from Washington's perspective, is their role in whipping up sectarianism to divide the working class.

A key element in the electoral rise of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt after the fall of Mubarak is the support they have received from nominally left parties, such as the Tagammu and Karama, the various Stalinist groups, including the Egyptian Communist Party which is largely integrated into Tagammu, and above all the Revolutionary Socialists (RS).

The RS 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. Their specific role has been to provide a fake Trotskyist benediction for the Brotherhood, describing the subordination of the working class to the Islamists, “democrats” and other factions of the bourgeoisie as a “united front” and even as an application of Trotsky’s Theory of the Permanent Revolution.

In reality, everything the RS does is a repudiation of the policies historically advanced by Trotsky’s Fourth International, which the International Socialists broke with in 1950.

The Theory of Permanent Revolution demonstrates that the Egyptian people cannot achieve any of their most basic needs—freedom from imperialist oppression, democratic rights, jobs, and social equality—by aligning with any section of the national bourgeoisie. In the imperialist epoch, the realization of the basic democratic and national tasks in the oppressed nations—tasks associated in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries with the rise of the bourgeoisie—posed the taking of power by the working class. This in turn could only be achieved as part of the 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.

The IST and its RS offshoot repudiated this perspective long ago, asserting that the national bourgeoisie could realise independence from imperialism and developing a viable and essentially independent economy based upon capitalist property relations and state regulation. Rejecting any possibility of socialism for decades to come, the IST instead advances a perspective historically associated with Stalinism—the advocacy of alliances with the parties of the bourgeoisie, in order to achieve limited democratic reforms.

The RS enjoys particularly close relations with the younger supposedly “reform” wing of the Brotherhood, which it lauds. Despite the Brothers’ hostility to the working class and support for capitalism, the RS have followed in the footsteps of their sister organisation, the British SWP in boosting them.

From the late 1990s, the SWP began to collaborate with the group, utilising its opposition to US air strikes on Iraq and support for the Palestinians’ intifada, the uprising that followed Ariel Sharon’s provocative march into the Al Aqsa mosque compound in September 2000. The RS justified this alliance with the slogan, advanced by Chris Harman in his *The Prophet and the Proletariat*: “Sometimes with the Islamists, never with the state.”

The anti-war movement that emerged in 2001 against US-led wars in Afghanistan and then Iraq provided the political vehicle to cement relations with the Islamists, not just in Egypt but internationally, and bring the SWP firmly into mainstream politics—particularly in the Middle East. In the process, it provided the SWP with access to substantial funds.

The Stop the War Coalition (STWC), made up of the SWP, the Muslim Association of Britain, the Stalinist Communist Party of Britain, the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament and a number of smaller pseudo-left parties, participated in the Egyptian anti-war conferences held annually in Cairo from 2002 to 2008.

The Brothers and other Islamist parties were the predominant political tendency. Having formed a political alliance with antiwar Labour MP George Galloway in the Respect coalition, the SWP joined him in soliciting monies from various Muslim businessmen. In return, the SWP and its affiliates such as RS lauded uncritically the role of the Hamas in Gaza and the Hezbollah in Lebanon in “resisting” imperialism—keeping quiet about the sectarian strife the Islamists whipped up to divide the working class in Egypt, Lebanon, Iraq and Syria.

The SWP and STWC’s agenda was wholly in line with bourgeois interests in the Middle East. They sought to dragoon the antiwar movement behind support for German and French imperialism, who wanted to revive the United Nations as a vehicle to restrain American

militarism.

The Cairo anti-war conferences were held alongside the Social Forum movement conference, which the Islamists also dominated. The participation of the SWP, RS and similar groups gave political cover for the pro-capitalist, anti-working class programme of the Islamists.

The RS set up the National Alliance for Change in June 2005 to coordinate joint protests with the Brotherhood and the Free Students Union in November 2005. It boasted that “the places where the FSU operates have witnessed another great improvement between the Brothers and the radical left”.

The RS justified their rapprochement with the claim that the Brotherhood’s composition and character had changed, due to the emergence of a younger, more pragmatic and liberal layer.

These “reform” layers are in reality a section of the bourgeoisie that finds more overt religious symbols and ideology an obstacle to closer relations with Washington and the international financial elite. They advance as their model the Justice and Development Party (AKP) of Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan. They are wholly indifferent to the desperate social conditions in Turkey the AKP presides over on behalf of the business elite, its brutal assault on the Kurdish population in Turkey and Iraq, and its detention of journalists, human rights activists and political opponents.

The ISO in America boasted of the role of the RS in assembling another coalition of liberal and Islamic forces in 2006, saying: “It has to be said that the alliance might have been quite difficult to maintain if the left had taken the sectarian attitudes of some of the older layers of Marxists, who basically maintained that the Brothers were a tool of the capitalist class, simply an ally of neo-liberalism, and so on. *The Revolutionary Socialists played a key role in overcoming that*” [emphasis added].

### The 1952 Free Officers’ Coup

To refute the claims of the Revolutionary Socialists as to the Muslim Brotherhood’s supposedly “progressive” and left-leaning character, it is worth examining the political and social forces that brought the military to power in 1952. This provides many striking parallels with events today, not least the role of the type of Popular Frontism now advanced by the RS in blocking the working class from intervening independently in a revolutionary situation.

Egypt, like many colonial and semi-colonial countries, was in political ferment after World War II. Its economy had collapsed and almost all social layers sought to throw off the yoke of British imperialism, which continued to rule Egypt via its puppet, King Farouk and which, together with France, owned and controlled the Suez Canal, Egypt’s major source of income and employment.

In government, the secular bourgeois nationalist Wafd—which had led the national movement since the 1919 uprising against the British and had put down the working class uprising in Alexandria in 1924—proved incapable of implementing serious social reform. This led to mass strikes, demonstrations, political unrest and instability that posed the question of the working class taking power.

But the Stalinist bureaucracy’s betrayal of world socialist revolution under the fraudulent guise of building “socialism in one country” was to prevent this possibility from being realised.

Following the collapse of the Hitler-Stalin pact and Nazi Germany’s invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941, having joined forces with Britain and the Allied Powers, Stalin ordered Communist Party members to drop their support for anti-colonial movements that saw the war as opportunity

to throw out the British. The Soviet Union's later support for the partition of Palestine and the establishment of Israel was met with anger throughout the Arab world.

Within Egypt, the Communist Party, and its various offshoots, had in the 1930s swung between an ultra-left perspective and an embrace of bourgeois parties in a Popular Front. On occasions, they courted the Islamists as revolutionaries until they were attacked by them, when they called them fascists.

Despite this, the Democratic Movement for National Liberation (DMNL), formed by the Egyptian Communist movement in 1947, still enjoyed considerable support. But while claiming to be "the fighting organisation of the working class," it stressed that it defended the interests of "all classes and all patriotic groups of the nation". It adopted Stalin's "two-stage" theory that insisted that in colonial and semi-colonial countries such as Egypt, the struggle for socialism had first to pass through the stage of "democratic capitalism".

During the social upheavals of 1948-54, the DMNL argued that the revolutionary strivings of the masses had to be suppressed and subordinated to a "popular" and "national" front with the Wafd and the Muslim Brotherhood. The struggle for socialism could only begin after the bourgeois democratic revolution had triumphed.

The supporters of the Fourth International in Egypt fought against this line, but were among the first to be arrested and suppressed.

As the Wafd collapsed, broader layers of the bourgeoisie switched to the Muslim Brotherhood as a means of combating communist influence in the working class. The King called upon the army to put down the working class, but the army was seething with discontent over its defeat in Palestine. In 1949, sections inside the army had formed the Free Officers Movement. Many were influenced by the Muslim Brotherhood, including Colonel Gamal Abdel Nasser; future President Anwar Sadat was a member of the organisation.

The Free Officers feared that political opposition to King Farouk would lead to a socialist revolution. They mounted a pre-emptive strike under the banner of Egyptian nationalism and sent Farouk packing. They installed General Muhammad Naguib as President of their junta, the Revolutionary Command Council (RCC).

On taking power, the RCC suppressed strikes and demonstrations by textile workers in Alexandria. The strike leaders were hung on the factory grounds, as a message that the RCC would not tolerate any independent action by the working class.

By the time the DMNL opposed Naguib's regime, it had lost much of its influence in the workers' movement. The political vacuum this created ultimately led to the victory in 1954 of Nasser in a power struggle against Naguib. Nasser proceeded to outlaw all political parties including the DMNL, the Communist and Socialist parties and the Wafd, jailing the Stalinist leaders and severely circumscribing the trade unions.

Only the Muslim Brotherhood escaped the political ban. The Brotherhood's leaders were at first supportive of the Free Officers coup in 1952 and worked to promote support for the military. Only when Nasser insisted upon a secular constitution did the Brothers turn against the military and attempt to assassinate Nasser, who outlawed the group in December 1954.

For many years, the Brotherhood went into political decline as movements such as Nasser's were able to utilise the Cold War conflict between the Soviet Union and US imperialism to secure a degree of apparent independence and to pursue policies that lent them an anti-imperialist coloration. In Egypt this included the overthrow of the monarchy, the removal of British troops, the nationalisation of the Suez Canal, and Britain and France's forced pull-out from Suez in 1956. This inaugurated a period of economic and social reforms, including the limited secularisation of the state and break-up of the large estates, the nationalisation of basic industry, and the development of education, basic

infrastructure and social services.

## Islamism's re-emergence

The 1970s saw a political re-emergence of Islamist groups, including the Brotherhood, who were to benefit from the determined reorientation of the Egyptian bourgeoisie towards an accommodation with US imperialism. The signing of the Camp David Accords and recognition of Israel in 1978 marked an end to Egyptian pretensions to advance a Pan-Arab and even socialist alternative for the Middle East.

The political vacuum created by the Stalinists' insistence that the working class had no independent political role to play allowed the Islamists to dominate anti-imperialist movements throughout the Middle East. Popular support for Islamic groups grew, particularly among the most impoverished layers and the rural poor.

The deposing of the Shah's tyrannical regime in Iran and the 1979 revolution inspired and promoted a network of Shi'ite groups, including Amal and Hezbollah in Lebanon, Shi'ite opposition elements to the Iraqi regime, and Shi'ite minorities in the Gulf States.

Washington's regional ally Saudi Arabia responded by helping promote Sunni groups, including the Muslim Brotherhood. The ruling elite in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States poured money into both the Brotherhood and Salafists, who adhere to a form of Islam closer to Saudi Wahhabism, to counter and suppress progressive political tendencies in the working class. They invested in businesses in Egypt and throughout the Middle East and set up banks and financial institutions in Egypt, London and Geneva. Islamic finance was crucial in bringing together wealthy businessmen, political Islamists and Islamic scholars. Riyadh provided aid to governments, along with stringent conditions on economic reforms.

Washington supported the growth of Sunni movements as a counter to Moscow's influence, as a political weapon against Iran or radical nationalists such as the Ba'ath Parties in Syria and Iraq considered to be pro-Soviet, and as an explicitly anti-Communist force to disorient the oppressed masses with radical-sounding rhetoric.

From 1980-89, the CIA provided the largest covert aid programme in US history to Afghanistan in order to destabilise the Soviet Union. It financed and armed the most extreme mujahidin groups, including Osama bin Laden's Al Qaeda network, fighting the Soviet-backed regime in Kabul. Similarly, the Jordanian monarchy encouraged the Brotherhood and mobilised them against the Palestine Liberation Organisation in Black September 1970. Israel also helped the Brotherhood establish itself in Gaza and the West Bank to counter the PLO. The Brothers were later to provide the basis of Hamas. Jordan and Israel supported the Syrian Brotherhood in their civil war against the Ba'athist regime from 1976 to 1982.

Within Egypt, in line with his realignment with Washington, President Anwar Sadat sought to open up the economy to free-market reforms and encourage foreign investment. This led to a rapid decline in living standards for the broad mass of the population, while spawning a new business elite, many of whom were aligned with or sympathetic to the Brotherhood.

It was estimated that, by the 1980s, as much as 40 percent of private businesses were linked to the group—chiefly in real estate and foreign currency speculation. Many of the emerging Islamic business class invested in banking and finance, setting up investment firms based on Gulf oil money. The new Islamic business class also included the small and medium size businesses, merchants, manufacturers and labour contractors.

With estimates that the military controls up to 40 percent of the

economy, these two groups constitute the bulk of the Egyptian bourgeoisie.

In 1980 Sadat also amended the constitution to acknowledge Sharia as a main source of law. He recruited Muslim Brothers and Islamic student activists and used them to gain the leadership of the student movements. As well as a re-energised Muslim Brotherhood, other Islamic groups emerged such as the Salafist groups around *al-Dawa* (the Call) and groups like *al-Gama'a al-Islamiya*.

The Muslim Brotherhood remained illegal under the constitution, but it was allowed to operate as long as it concentrated on the provision of social welfare attached to the mosques. This assumed ever-greater importance as the masses sank into poverty. With all legal opposition parties severely circumscribed, support for Islamist groups began to grow as the only existing opposition to the regime.

The US attitude towards Islamic tendencies changed after they began to cut across the strategic interests of Washington and its regional allies. In November 1979, a group of militant Islamists took over the Grand Mosque in Mecca in an uprising that was brutally suppressed by the Saudi regime. Over the next few years, several Shi'ite militias held US personnel and other Westerners as hostages, while Hezbollah launched raids against Israeli troops in occupied south Lebanon. Islamic Jihad also destroyed the US Embassy in Lebanon in 1983. In October, another suicide mission destroyed the US Marine Corps barracks, forcing the withdrawal of a US military detachment there in 1984.

In Egypt the Brotherhood spawned small groups calling for an armed uprising against the Sadat government. In September 1981, Sadat ordered a crackdown on political opposition. Shortly afterwards he was assassinated by Islamic Jihad, which opposed Egypt's peace treaty with Israel. Between the late 1970s and 2000, militant Islamists carried out over 700 attacks in Egypt, particularly economic targets and on Christian Copts, killing over 2,000 people.

The Brotherhood was still given significant leeway, however. It was not allowed to officially stand candidates in elections, but Brotherhood-backed candidates could stand as "independents". By the early 1990s, in an alliance with the Islamic Labour Party, it had achieved some success in local elections. The regime of President Hosni Mubarak responded with a bloody crackdown, with mass arrests, jailing and torture.

By the end of the 1990s, the Brotherhood began to fashion itself as a political party, issuing a draft manifesto and consistently outperformed the legal opposition parties in elections. In the 2005 elections, it was virtually the sole organised opposition party to Mubarak's ruling National Democratic Party (NDP), winning 88 seats, about one fifth of the parliament. The government arrested thousands of its members, trying many in military courts. It amended the constitution to prevent independents from running for Parliament, making it impossible for the Brotherhood to stand in November 2010 elections characterised by massive fraud.

### **The Brotherhood and the revolutionary developments of 2011**

Despite the persecution it suffered, the Muslim Brotherhood continued to seek accommodation with the Mubarak regime, not its overthrow. When mass demonstrations began last January, the Brothers and other Islamist groups refused to come out against the junta. Only at the end of January, as it became clear that Mubarak could not survive, did the Brothers come forward—with the goal of helping to prop up the political order.

The Obama administration was working behind the scenes to shore up

the military and intelligence apparatus, forcing Mubarak to appoint Omar Suleiman, the intelligence chief and former general, as vice president. It also began to prepare for a political alternative to Mubarak, should his removal become necessary. One candidate for the job was Mohamed ElBaradei, the former head of the United Nations nuclear watchdog, who had returned to Egypt from his home in Vienna for the express purpose of preventing the protests from getting out of hand.

Either way, Washington could retain control of the situation only with the help of the Brotherhood, which led the only political party with significant support. The White House initiated contact with the Brothers, who were equally keen to work with Washington. One leader said publicly in an interview with *NBC News* that they could "work with the US". They promised not to stand a candidate in any presidential elections and agreed to back ElBaradei.

The Revolutionary Socialists played a key political role for the Obama administration in this endeavour. Their promotion of the Islamists as allies in the struggle for "social justice" dovetailed with the needs of US imperialism.

When Suleiman announced that he would meet with representatives of oppositional groups February 6 to find a way out of the crisis, he included the Brothers, the Wafd, Tagammu, members of a committee chosen by youth groups and various political and business figures.

The RS presented the Brothers as a reformist and progressive tendency. They published its statement urging the political parties to "take all political and national forces into this dialogue" with the regime. The RS sought to corral workers behind the Brothers and other capitalist parties by calling for the "formation of leadership represented by the various national forces", which they described as "a United Front of a special type".

Exploiting and misappropriating terminology associated historically with Trotsky's call for a United Front between Germany's Social Democratic Party and Communist Party, both parties with a mass working class base, to oppose the Nazis, the RS formed an alliance with the Muslim Brothers even as they broke up the popular committees set up to defend neighbourhoods against raids by Mubarak's thugs.

Their aim was to stifle the development of genuinely popular organisations and place workers under the control of the "national forces" of the Muslim Brotherhood, ElBaradei and his ilk, and the trade union bureaucracy. The RS championed the creation of a "supreme council" that "includes people who are trusted, regardless of their colour 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 company.

On February 11, Mubarak was replaced by the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) junta, led by Defence Minister Mohamed Hussein Tantawi. Two days later, Tantawi dissolved parliament, suspended the constitution and granted the junta dictatorial powers.

The junta claimed that it would oversee a transition to democratic, civilian rule and scheduled a referendum for March 19 on a new constitution. The sham of its democratic pretensions was evidenced by its demands for strikes and protests to stop, and threats to invoke martial law. The Brotherhood supported the military junta's March referendum, which legalised it as a political party and proposed parliamentary elections in November.

While the RS and other non-Islamist opposition groups formally called for a no vote on the junta's constitution, they did not break with the Brothers. Instead, on February 25, the RS issued a joint statement, "Towards the Foundation of a Workers' Coalition of the January 25 Revolution" proposing an alliance between "left forces" and the Muslim Brotherhood.

The Islamists mobilised their supporters and the constitutional referendum passed on March 19, with 77 percent of the vote on a low

turnout.

In May, the Salafists formed the leading contingent in an anti-Christian demonstration that led to sectarian fighting in which at least a dozen people died and 240 were wounded, including 65 who were shot. The attack was green-lighted by the junta as a means of whipping up sectarian strife to divide the working class and provide the military an excuse for a clamp down on popular protests.

Mass protests grew throughout the summer, and workers and youth began to raise the call for a “second revolution” to overthrow the junta. Washington responded by announcing it would establish an “open dialogue” with the Muslim Brotherhood. Saudi Arabia sponsored the Salafist groups as its proxies. Together, the Islamists, including Al-Gama’a al-Islamiya—a fascistic party—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.” Different Islamist groups worked on establishing a common platform and called for a “pro-stability protest” on July 29.

Still, the Islamists continued to receive vital help from the liberals and pseudo-left groups.

The RS denounced a second revolution, declaring ludicrously, “Not a second revolution but a permanent revolution until the fall of the regime...”

This attempt to counterpose demands for a second revolution to Trotsky’s Theory of Permanent Revolution was thoroughly dishonest. The struggle for permanent revolution can only realised through a second revolution by the working class to overthrow the junta. For the RS, the real aim was to sanction the continued domination of the bourgeois forces supporting the junta by making their dictatorship “permanent”.

On July 27 the RS, the Democratic Workers Party and the Socialist Alliance Party joined the United Popular Front and signed a statement with all major political groups in Egypt, including the Muslim Brotherhood, the Salafists and al-Gama’a al-Islamiya. They agreed to leave all “controversial issues” aside. The Islamists responded by mobilising their supporters to a rally called by the United Popular Front, far outnumbering the liberal and “left” groups. The biggest contingents came from the Salafist al-Nour (The Light) Party and the Muslim Brotherhood. They called for an Islamic state and chanted against “secularism” and “communism”.

The RS and other pseudo-left parties feigned shock and outrage, announcing on July 31 that they would no longer take part in the on-going Tahrir Square sit-in. This paved the way for the army to use lethal force to clear the Square.

The RS has also promoted the Muslim Brotherhood within the so-called independent trade unions. After a wave of mass strikes broke out in September, these organisations called them off to prevent demands for the overthrow of the SCAF threatening bourgeois rule. These “independent” unions are in fact backed by the US State Department through the fervently anti-communist AFL-CIO. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton told Egyptian activists, “We gave grants that the government did not like to support unions organizing on behalf of the political opposition to the regime... what we hoped for is what happened”.

The RS are anxious to get on board the gravy train provided by the AFL-CIO in Egypt.

As popular hostility to the SCAF mounted, on October 2, 13 political parties, including the Freedom and Justice Party (the political arm of the Muslim Brotherhood), the Salafist al-Nour Party, the Wafd and the Nasserite Karama Party, signed an agreement to parliamentary elections in November, praising them as an important step towards democracy. This was done even though the military will keep power at least until the end of 2012, overturning initial pledges to stand down after six months. According to *Al Ahram Online*, the signatories of the document “also declared their full support for the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces and their appreciation of its role in protecting the revolution and its

process of transferring power to the people.”

This rotten agreement has helped the SCAF to tighten its grip on power, step up repression and violent attacks on workers and extend the emergency laws.

Renewed mass protests have laid bare the huge gap between the working class and the entire political establishment. The Brotherhood publicly criticized the anti-junta protests, leading protestors to eject Mohamed El Beltagi, the Muslim Brotherhood leader, from Tahrir Square. In the run-up to the elections, there were mass protests, triggered by the junta’s violent crackdown on November 19 against families of martyrs of the revolution, during which security forces killed over 40. Demonstrations in cities throughout the country demanded the overthrow of the SCAF.

Under these conditions, a number of bourgeois and petty-bourgeois political figures and organizations, including ElBaradei, called for a “national salvation government.” The Islamists endorsed this demand. Such a government, installed by the same Egyptian military command that has carried out the bloody repression, would have as its central task the strangling of the independent struggles of the working class, supposedly in the name of preserving the unity of the “revolution.” But in the short term, it again handed political initiative to the junta. It enabled the Islamists to dominate the elections in the face of a hopelessly compromised liberal opposition and its pseudo-left appendages.

In the final analysis, the growth of political Islam in Egypt and internationally is the price that the working class has paid for its subordination to the various national bourgeois organisations that were organically incapable of leading any independent struggle against imperialism along a progressive and democratic route.

Nationalism, secular or religious, serves only to divide the working class from their international brothers and sisters and subordinate it to the interests of capitalism. This, coupled with the ideological confusion and political disorientation created by the betrayals of first the Stalinists and latterly the RS and other ex-left groups, prevents the working class from adopting an effective means of struggle against their own ruling class and imperialism.

The RS perspective of working with the Islamists and pushing for “democratic space” under the junta poses enormous dangers. The formation of a parliament dominated by the Brothers, al-Nour and the liberals sets the stage for explosive new struggles between the junta and its imperialist backers—now supported by Egypt’s official “opposition” parties—and the working class.

The demands for social equality and genuine democratic rights can be won only through a conscious revolutionary struggle of workers and peasants against the junta and its defenders, from the right and nominal left. It means building a mass movement aimed at bringing a workers’ government to power.

To conduct this struggle, Egyptian workers need two things: an international socialist strategy and their own independent fighting organisations. The way forward lies in the fight to unite Egyptian workers and the rural poor with their brothers and sisters throughout the region in a combined struggle against capitalist exploitation and imperialist oppression, for the United Socialist States of the Middle East, as part of a struggle for world socialist revolution. This requires the building of the revolutionary leadership of the International Committee of the Fourth International.



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