

Egyptian presidential candidates outline counterrevolutionary programs in TV debate

Johannes Stern
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Amr Moussa and Abdel Moneim Aboul Fotouh, the two leading Egyptian presidential candidates, outlined anti-working class programs in a TV debate last Thursday night, held in advance of the first round of the presidential elections scheduled for May 23-24.

The two candidates are experienced bourgeois politicians. Moussa, a liberal and secular candidate, was the head of the Arab League between 2001 and 2011. Before that he served for ten years as Egypt's minister of foreign affairs under ousted US-backed dictator Hosni Mubarak. Because of his secular outlook and close ties to the Mubarak regime, Moussa is considered to be one of the ruling military junta's preferred candidates.

Aboul Fotouh, a long-time leader of the Muslim Brotherhood (MB), was expelled from the MB only last year after he announced plans to run for the presidency. His candidacy is supported by moderate Islamists critical of MB candidate Mohamed Mursi. Recently he was also endorsed by the Salafist Nour (Light) Party and the far-right Islamist party al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya.

Moussa and Fotouh, who are both running as independent candidates, made clear in their statements that they are hostile to the revolutionary struggles of the Egyptian working masses. They speak for Egypt's narrow and super-wealthy ruling elite, which seeks to defend Egyptian capitalism and the imperialist set-up throughout the Middle East.

The two candidates agreed basically on all the major questions regarding economic policy and domestic and foreign issues. Conflicts erupted only when Fotouh accused Moussa of being "a candidate of the former regime" and the latter described Fotouh as a "violent Islamist."

Both candidates hailed the Egyptian army, which established a brutal dictatorship after Egyptian workers

and youth ousted Mubarak on February 11, 2011. They also indicated that they would not touch the military's financial privileges or economic interests after the elections, while seeking at the same time to suppress strikes and protests.

Asked about the military's role over the next five years, Moussa called on Egyptians "to respect the armed forces and separate it from the insults." He insisted that the military budget should be discussed by a national security committee "behind closed doors because of national security."

Fotouh announced that "in the current unstable situation," he planned to appoint a "military man" as defense minister. He added that it was not possible to "build a state without defense" and a strong army.

This insistence on the continued political influence of the military exposes the real character of the elections. They are not, as claimed by the bourgeois media and the bourgeois political parties, aimed at handing over power to a "civilian government" and establishing a democratic and just society, but rather at ensuring continued military rule in a different form.

The military is the backbone of the Egyptian capitalist state, and large sections of the Egyptian ruling elite sense that they have to continue to rely on it to control the Egyptian masses.

The same day as the presidential debate, the ruling Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) imposed a curfew in the Abbaseya area of Cairo, where the ministry of defense is located. Last weekend, the junta launched a large-scale crackdown on anti-SCAF protesters in front of the ministry.

Both candidates made clear that they support and are even willing to escalate the junta's repressive measures. Moussa described the Abbaseya protests as "very serious," stating that he wouldn't have waited to

send “the police to enter and prevent the deterioration of the situation.”

Fotouh declared that the protests would not have happened under his presidency. Both candidates pledged to “bring back security” to the country and restructure the interior ministry and police.

Moussa and Fotouh made clear that their economic policies will be directed against the working class. Moussa stressed that a restructured tax system should “encourage investors,” and both candidates proposed to cut subsidies if elected, mentioning food, energy and support for factories. Subsidy cuts will further impoverish the Egyptian masses, who depend in particular on subsidized bread.

On foreign policy, the two candidates signaled to the West that Egypt will maintain its strategic relations with US imperialism. Both agreed that the peace treaty with Israel should be maintained. Moussa stressed “the obligation of the president to deal with such things responsibly.” Fotouh claimed to be an “enemy” of Israel and proposed to “revise the agreement,” but keep the parts that are in Egypt’s interests.

Fotouh’s position, intended to win credibility amongst the Egyptian masses, who are deeply hostile to the treaty, is a fraud. His call for a “revision” but not a cancellation of the treaty makes clear that he, just as Moussa, is willing to accept the basic pro-imperialist and anti-working class policies connected with the treaty. The peace treaty was signed between Israel and Egypt in 1979 under the auspices of the US in order to put the Arab and Jewish populations under the direct yoke of imperialism and suppress the Palestinians.

The debate was aired by two private satellite channels, which presented the elections as an achievement of the revolution and an important step towards democracy and social justice in Egypt. TV anchors claimed that the Egyptians will now be “the ones who will select at the ballot box and decide the future of the country.”

This is a lie. The TV debate made clear that the Egyptian workers and youth who ousted Mubarak will have no real voice in the elections. They take place under a brutal military dictatorship and all authorized candidates—liberal, Islamist and petty-bourgeois “left”—defend the basic interests of the Egyptian ruling elite.

The elections are not a means for the masses to

achieve their social and democratic aspirations, but rather a means for different sections of the bourgeoisie to contend for influence. The controlled character of the poll is underscored by the fact that the junta disqualified the ultra-conservative Salafist candidate Hazem Salah Abu Ismail and the MB’s initial candidate, billionaire tycoon Kheirat al-Shater.

The army views the MB as a threat to its economic interests. Both the army and the MB control large parts of the economy, and the MB’s policies favor foreign investment and privatization. The military is unwilling to give up any of its business interests and recently vowed to “fight to defend” its projects. Significantly, MB candidate Mohamed Mursi was not invited to the debate.

The fight between the military and certain sections of the bourgeoisie is likely to grow during and after the elections. This must be a warning to the Egyptian workers and youth. A violent confrontation between the military and the Islamists would be used by the military to further crack down on the Egyptian masses and even more brutally suppress their social and political struggles.

The Egyptian workers must have no illusions in the elections, but prepare for a struggle to overthrow the junta and the incoming president and establish a workers’ government fighting for socialist policies in Egypt and throughout the region.



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