

# Egyptian Revolutionary Socialists' reaction to army coup: Complacency and tacit support

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The coup launched Thursday by Egypt's ruling military junta, dissolving the parliament and the constituent assembly on the eve of today's presidential elections, has exposed the bankruptcy of the Revolutionary Socialists (RS) and Egypt's entire petty-bourgeois ex-left milieu.

Since mass working class protests forced out US-backed President Hosni Mubarak in February 2011, these organizations have insisted that workers seek to establish democracy under the junta, rather than mounting a revolutionary struggle for socialism and the overthrow of the capitalist state. As the junta crushes the hollow "democratic" institutions on which this perspective depended, however, the RS reacts with a mixture of complacency and tacit support.

These are the basic themes of RS journalist Hossam al-Hamalawy's article published yesterday and titled "The Troubled Revolutionary Path in Egypt: a Return to Basics."

Hamalawy dismisses the significance of the events in Cairo, brazenly denying that a coup is taking place. Even as press reports in Cairo are describing army units surrounding the parliament and setting up checkpoints around the city, Hamalawy insists it is impermissible to talk of a coup.

He writes: "To talk about a military coup in June 2012 is to assume that Egypt was run by a civilian government since the toppling of Mubarak, which is completely farcical. The coup, more or less, has been in effect since February 11, 2011, when revolutionaries managed to overthrow Mubarak and he was replaced by handpicked army generals."

This comment is made in utter bad faith. Having spent over a year telling workers to hope that the junta will produce democratic reforms, the RS suddenly admits that the junta is a military dictatorship. The

purpose of this unexplained flip flop is to downplay the significance of the junta's use of force to assert full and open control of Egyptian public life.

Hamalawy makes no effort to reconcile his latest statement with the numerous times he and other RS members sang the praises of the supposed democratic sensibilities of the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) junta.

In May 2011, the RS's Mustafa Omar wrote a piece in *Socialist Worker*—the publication of the RS's American co-thinkers, the International Socialist Organization (ISO)—at a time when the RS was opposing popular calls for a "Second Revolution" to overthrow the junta. He said, "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."

A month later, Hamalawy reassured journalists: "I do feel they (the generals of 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."

Once mass protests developed against SCAF, the RS turned to the right-wing Muslim Brotherhood, seeking to promote illusions that electing them to office could promote the goals of the revolution. They initially endorsed MB candidate Mohammed Mursi as the lesser evil in the presidential elections. Only last month, the RS stressed the "importance of active participation" in the elections to "prevent the coming of *feloul*," or remnants of the old regime, to power.

In fact, neither the parliamentary elections nor the election of a president, whose constitutional powers now are to be defined by the junta, offered anything to

the working class. As the army coup has made clear, this was a cynical attempt to contain the initial upsurge of working class protests while leaving the generals in a dominant position in the Egyptian state.

If the RS backed the junta in this, it is because many of its members—including Hamalawy himself—found opportunities for personal advancement and celebrity as international media commentators or speakers promoting the “democratic transition.”

Now Hamalawy downplays the significance of the coup even as he acknowledges that there will be a “coming wave of repression.” Still, he claims, the army will need a pseudo-democratic façade for its policies.

He writes, “The military junta are the most keen among all the political players to ‘hand over power’ to a civilian government.” He cites as proof the fact that army forces are still traveling around Cairo “encouraging people to vote in the second round.”

That Hamalawy can praise the army for supposedly wanting to hand over power precisely as it launches a coup and prepares for mass repression testifies to the mendacity of the RS’s politics. However, there is a political logic to Hamalawy’s position.

The privileged middle-class layers for which the RS speaks tacitly support the coup, preferring it to the prospect of intensified class struggles against the junta. They see the coup as changing only certain aspects of the work they will continue doing in favor of the junta’s “democratic transition” and against the working class.

This emerges in an RS statement published yesterday on the ISO web site. It states that the RS’s new aim is to build “bridges” between protesting workers and what it euphemistically calls “the revolutionaries of the squares”—that is, Islamist parties, youth groups and petty-bourgeois ex-left parties like the Egyptian Communist Party, the Socialist Popular Alliance, and similar forces active in street protests but cut off from the working class.

It writes: “The revolutionaries of the squares do not assemble other than in the squares, or in short coordinating meetings, refusing organization and politics... So the bridges remain cut off between the two armies of the revolution. To build these bridges is our orientation in the second round of the revolution. The building of a united revolutionary front of all those who have a stake in the victory of the revolution ... is our

task today.”

In fact, the Islamist and ex-left parties are not “armies of the revolution,” but forces trying to disorient the working class and channel it behind the Egyptian ruling class. Several of the ex-left parties made this quite explicit, signing a “pledge document” recognizing the legitimacy of Egypt’s 1971 constitution and “the role of the Armed Forces and its sacred function to protect Egypt’s national security.” Their decision to sign such a document exposes them as political tools of the junta and political enemies of the working class.

The RS’s attempt to extend the influence of these pro-establishment forces over the workers, precisely as the army prepares for mass repression, testifies to its own counterrevolutionary role.

Hamalawy concludes his piece by writing: “It will take several years for the dust to settle. The revolutionary camp lacks the essential tools to fight back, in other words, a national organization for the most advanced sections of the labor and youth movements, and a coherent united front that coordinates between different revolutionary groups in the capital and the provinces. And in such tough times, when the counterrevolution is in full steam, the need for such an organization becomes more urgent.”

Hamalawy’s comment, though presenting itself as a call to action, is simply an acknowledgement that the RS perspective is a failure. During the most explosive upsurge of revolutionary struggle in decades, it has been able to create no real organization in the working class. This is intimately bound up with its political perspective and role as apologist for the junta, a role it continues to play by minimizing the significance of the coup.

In the coming struggles against the Egyptian military junta, the watchword of class conscious workers must be: no confidence in the petty-bourgeois publicists of the coup plotters’ “democratic transition.”



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