Egyptian Revolutionary Socialists support US-backed military coup

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As the army tightens its grip on Egypt, the reactionary implications of the July 3 coup are becoming ever more apparent. Pseudo-left groups who backed the coup—Egypt's Revolutionary Socialists (RS) and their co-thinkers, the International Socialist Organization (ISO) in the US and Britain's Socialist Workers Party (SWP)—stand exposed as counterrevolutionary organizations.

They are responding by trying to cover up their complicity in the army's moves to re-establish the political structures that existed before the overthrow of the Mubarak dictatorship, and by seeking to deny the obvious reality that a coup has taken place.

Early last week, the Egyptian military massacred at least 51 protesters in Cairo, wounding hundreds. Hundreds of Muslim Brotherhood (MB) members have been arrested, including President Mohamed Mursi. The army junta, led by General Abdel-Fatah Khalil al-Sisi, is cobbling together a new government to enforce austerity policies demanded by international finance capital even more ruthlessly than Mubarak and Mursi before it.

The new government will largely consist of generals, ex-Mubarak regime officials, bankers and free market economists who aggressively advocate repression against their political opponents. They will impose the conditions demanded for a new loan from the International Monetary Fund (IMF). The loan will lead to cuts to bread and fuel subsidies on which millions of impoverished workers and peasants depend.

During the coup, the RS functioned as a front group for the Egyptian military and its imperialist backers as part of the Tamarod ("Rebellion") alliance. By backing the coup, Tamarod provided the military with the opening it needed to oust Mursi and create the conditions for a crackdown against the working class.

In recent days, detailed accounts in the bourgeois media have showed how, in the absence of a revolutionary leadership in the working class, old Mubarak regime elements were able to use Tamarod to derail the mass movement and help them carry out the coup.

On July 10, the *New York Times* ran an article reporting that remnants of the Mubarak regime were heavily involved in "preparing for the coup." The *Times* writes: "Working behind the scenes, members of the old establishment, some of them close to Mr. Mubarak and the country's top generals, also helped finance and organize those determined to topple the Islamist leadership, including Naguib Sawiris, a billionaire and an outspoken foe of the Brotherhood; Tahani el-Gebali, a former judge on the Supreme Constitutional Court who is close to the ruling generals; and Shawki al-Sayed, a legal adviser to Ahmed Shafiq, Mr. Mubarak's last prime minister, who lost the presidential race to Mr. Mursi."

The article explains how these elements sought to rely on Tamarod to realize their aims. "Mr. Sawiris, one of Egypt's richest men and a titan of the old establishment, said…that he had supported an upstart group called 'tamarrod'" and "donated use of the nationwide offices and infrastructure of the political party he built, the Free Egyptians." The article contiued, "He provided publicity through a popular television network he founded [Orascom Television] and his major interest in Egypt's largest private newspaper," *Al Masry Al Youm*.

Tamarod was never anything besides a platform for the bourgeois opposition and a brainchild of more secular sections of the ruling elite opposed to the MB on various political and economic issues, including questions of lifestyle. From the beginning, Tamarod aimed to rely on the military to oust Mursi and hand back power to former Mubarak allies.

According to the *Times*, the former judge Gebali said in a telephone interview that "she and other legal experts helped tamarrod create its strategy to appeal directly to the military to oust Mr. Morsi and pass the interim presidency to the chief of the constitutional court."

Moreover, a July 15 account in the *Times*, titled "Egyptian Liberals Embrace the Military, Brooking No Dissent," acknowledges that this backing for the military coup is bound up with a rightward swing in the affluent milieu of Egyptian liberal and "left" forces. It notes that "the vast majority of liberals, leftists and intellectuals in Egypt have joined in the jubilation at the defeat of Muslim Brotherhood, slamming any dissenters." They support the army, claiming it is needed to protect the homeland against retaliatory terrorist attacks by the MB.

Summing up this rightward shift, Rabab el-Mahdi, a scholar at the American University in Cairo, declared: "We are moving from the bearded, chauvinistic right to the clean-shaven, chauvinistic right." Another political scientist, Amr Hamzawy, described the celebration of the military takeover after the mass shooting as "fascism under the false pretense of democracy and liberalism."

These accounts shed light on the reactionary character of the RS' efforts to cover for the coup. These include the recent interview with RS spokesman Hossam El Hamalawy published on July 12 on the *Jadaliyya* web site. Hamalawy begins by downplaying the fact that there was a coup in Egypt. He cynically declares that he is "not really interested in getting into this semantics game about whether it is a coup or not. Because it seems this has become the obsession of most of the spectators and the commentators at the moment, as well as the revolutionaries."

He adds, "So when you say that this is a military coup (or period), and you just stop there, you give the wrong impression that the military had woken up one day and decided to take over. So that is why I am really cautious when it comes to using these terms, and I actually do not want to indulge a lot into the description."

Hamalawy's attitude reflects the indifference and hostility of the RS' middle class elements to the democratic and social aspirations of the working class. Dismissing the question of whether a reactionary coup has even occurred, he is effectively indicating that he considers the difference between revolution and counterrevolution as merely a trivial question of words.

In fact, Hamalawy and the RS are conscious of the counterrevolutionary character of their allies. In the interview, Hamalawy states that "the camp that was anti-Morsi basically contained this mish-mash of groups. Those who lined up against Morsi included the opposition parties from the

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National Salvation Front [(NSF)], and that would include Hamdeen Sabahi's al-Tayyar al-Sha'bi, El Baradei's al-Dustur Party, as well as remnants of the Mubarak regime represented by Amr Mousa and others. Even among the anti-Morsi camp, there was definitely a presence also by the *fuloul* [i.e., members of the old Mubarak regime] represented by the supporters of [General] Ahmad Shafiq, the supporters of the deceased General Omar Suleiman, and by elements from the Egyptian upper class that are definitely against Muslim Brotherhood (but they are for the return of the old regime, or the Mubarak regime as it was)."

Hamalawy seeks to conceal the counterrevolutionary character of the RS' collaboration with Tamarod by dishonestly claiming that these forces were not "the ones calling the shots." He continues, "It would be a great mistake to say that it was the counterrevolutionaries who were at the top of or spearheading the movement."

This is simply an absurd lie. As a military dictatorship rapidly takes shape in Egypt, it is obvious that the Tamarod movement was a political instrument of counterrevolutionary forces that mounted a coup aiming to restore the old Mubarak regime. In fact, Hamalawy's own account shows that the RS cooperated closely with the forces that he acknowledges were "counterrevolutionaries."

He says, "In so many governorates and provinces it was different political and revolutionary groups that took up the task of collecting the signatures from the people on the streets. It was not just some online operation. Some were done in coordination with the centralized committee of Tamarod, and other initiatives were done totally independent from it. So it would be difficult to put your finger on what exactly Tamarod is thinking. I mean, which Tamarod? Do you mean the Tamarod of the three cofounders and their official Facebook page? Or do you mean the local activists on the ground? So to say that the activists from the beginning had the intention of handing the country over to the military is also false."

Hamalawy's attempt to introduce a certain distinction between the political program of Tamarod's leadership and that of its "local activists on the ground" is a fraud.

In fact, the RS wrote countless documents praising Tamarod as a "way to complete the revolution." Its members campaigned for Tamarod in the streets. At the same time, the RS kept close ties to the Tamarod leadership, issuing joint statements supporting its program.

On May 28, the RS cheered Tamarod leaders Mahmoud Badr and Mohamed Abdel-Aziz at their headquarters in Giza. Badr and Abdel-Aziz later flanked General al-Sisi as al-Sisi announced his "road map" for the coup on July 3. It included all of Tamarod's key demands, such as the dissolution of the Islamist-dominated upper house of parliament; the appointment of the chief of the judiciary as president; and the appointment of a free market technocratic government.

Immediately after the military takeover, the RS hailed the coup as a "second revolution" and sought to mobilize protesters to "protect their revolution" against the MB. In a statement on July 6, the RS asked the junta to take "immediate steps to achieve social justice… and write a civil, democratic constitution which entrenches the values of freedom and social justice."

The RS' fraudulent attempt to portray a US-backed military coup against the MB as a "second revolution" for social justice and democracy is all the more grotesque in that, only one year ago, the RS supported the MB as a revolutionary force against the military.

In the first presidential elections after the revolutionary ouster of Mubarak, the RS supported the MB candidate, Mursi, against General Ahmed Shafiq, the preferred candidate of the military and the remnants of the Mubarak-regime. In a statement titled "Down with Shafiq... Down with the new Mubarak," the RS claimed that a Mursi vote was a means to defend "democratic and social gains" of the revolution against the "counterrevolutionary candidate" Shafiq.

When Mursi became president, the RS and their international allies praised Mursi and the MB to the skies. At the ISO's Socialism 2012 conference, RS leader Sameh Naguib declared that "the victory of Mursi, the Muslim Brotherhood candidate, is a great achievement in pushing back the counterrevolution and pushing back this coup d'état... Whenever there is the threat of counterrevolution, the Islamists will run toward the masses, will mobilize in the hundreds of thousands against the military regime."

The RS' support for Mursi and the MB was in line with their long-standing orientation to Islamist politics. When the Islamists were in opposition under Mubarak, the RS advanced the slogan "Sometimes with the Islamists, never with the State." Were the RS to state their position honestly, their slogan would be "Sometimes with the Islamists, always with the state and US imperialism."

While the RS never give any explanation for their extraordinary political shifts, there is one striking consistency in their political line: the RS' twists and turns always mirror the shifts in American foreign policy.

Since the beginning of the protests against Mubarak in January 2011, the RS always supported the section of the Egyptian bourgeoisie backed by the US to suppress the working class. Initially, the RS joined with ElBaradei and other bourgeois factions in calling not for the downfall of the US-backed regime, but asking Mubarak to allow "democracy, civil liberties and free and fair elections," in a joint statement issued on January 21.

After the protests developed into a mass revolutionary movement of the working class that toppled Mubarak, the RS spread illusions in the US-backed military that had taken power. They claimed that the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces junta "aims to reform the political and economic system, allowing it to become more democratic and less oppressive."

When renewed mass protests erupted against the junta, the RS opposed a "second revolution," and—in line with the policies of the US state department, which established open relations with the Islamists—shifted to support Mursi and the MB.

The political oscillations of the RS in line with the policies of the US State Department are rooted in the class interests the RS represents. It speaks for corrupt sections of the Egyptian middle class, closely tied to the bourgeois state and to imperialism.

Its membership is largely drawn from among Western-oriented students, academics and journalists working for Western-backed Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), think-tanks and media outlets. Its most prominent members—such as Hamalawy, Naguib and Gigi Ibrahim—studied or teach at the American University in Cairo.

Others, such as Ahmed Ali and Haitham Mohammadein, work for NGOs like the Budgetary and Human Rights Observatory and the Nadim Center for the Management and Rehabilitation of Victims of Violence. These NGOs cooperate with the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), an organization directly funded by the US government.

In a report last week titled "US bankrolled anti-Mursi activists," *Al Jazeera* revealed the close financial ties between this petty-bourgeois NGO milieu and US imperialism. Citing documents obtained under the Freedom of Information Act by the Investigative Reporting Program at the University of California, Berkeley, it established that the Obama administration "quietly funded senior Egyptian opposition figures who called for toppling of the country's now-deposed president Mohamed Morsi."

The list of US organizations funding "anti-Mursi activists" includes the NED; the Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI); the State Department's Bureau for Democracy, Human Rights and Labor (DRL); and the US Agency for International Development (USAID).

The Egyptian Revolution is only two-and-a-half years old, but the RS are already exposed as servants of the Egyptian bourgeoisie and of world imperialism. At every stage of the Egyptian revolution, they have allied

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themselves with reactionary forces seeking to suppress the working class in order to improve the conditions for international finance capital in Egypt.

Socialist-minded workers and youth in Egypt and internationally must draw the necessary conclusions from the record of pseudo-left groups like the RS. A revolutionary struggle for democratic rights and social equality requires the independent mobilization of the working class on a socialist program against such reactionary forces.

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