How the German Left Party supports the counterrevolution in Egypt

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To understand the class character of Germany's Left Party and the pseudo-left tendencies which operate inside its ranks, it is necessary to examine their attitude to the dramatic events in Egypt.

The Left Party supports the counter-revolutionary developments in Egypt more openly than any other bourgeois party in Germany. It has close ties to the liberal and "left" forces in Egypt who tried to orient the mass protests against now-deposed Islamist President Mohamed Mursi behind a perspective of supporting the army, and who now defend the generals' brutal repression. The Left Party itself supported the preparation and execution of the coup and the restoration of a military dictatorship in Egypt which aims to drown the revolution in blood.

Like its allies in Egypt, in particular the Revolutionary Socialists (RS) and the Egyptian Socialist Party (ESP), the Left Party has blood on its hands. Thousands of protesters have been murdered in cold blood, wounded, or subjected to arbitrary arrest since the army seized power on 3 July and used repression to restore the old Mubarak regime.

The Left Party supported the Tamarod ("Rebellion") campaign which played the decisive role for the Egyptian military in its effort to harness the mass movement against Mursi and the Islamist Muslim Brotherhood (MB) for its own reactionary goals.

Working closely with their Egyptian affiliates, the Left Party sought to give this right-wing conspiracy a "left" face. It claimed that Tamarod was a movement dedicated to continuing the Egyptian revolution and the struggle of the masses for social and democratic rights. In fact, Tamarod's real program was the return to military dictatorship. Its leaders Mahmoud Badr and Mohammed Abdel Aziz stood at the side of the leader of the coup, General Abdel Fatah al-Sisi, on 3 July, when the latter announced his putsch on state television.

As confirmed by numerous press reports, Tamarod was funded and backed by ex-Mubarak regime elements. In interviews with Bloomberg and the *New York Times*, the Egyptian billionaire and long-time Mubarak ally, Naguib Sawiris, confirmed that he had donated $28 million to Tamarod. Other Tamarod supporters included General Ahmed Shafiq, the last prime minister under Mubarak, and followers of Omar Suleiman, the long-time head of Egypt's notorious Mukhabarat intelligence service.

The most aggressive propaganda on behalf of Tamarod in the Left Party came from the Marx21 group, which is linked to the British Socialist Workers Party and the Revolutionary Socialists in Egypt. On 27 June Christine Buchholz, a leading member of Marx21 who sits on both the national executive of the Left Party and the Defence Committee of the German Bundestag, declared her party's "solidarity with the Tamarod movement."

On June 28, an article appeared on the website of Marx21 with the title "Tamarod - the new Rebellion," welcoming the "stormy birth" of Tamarod, which it described as the "great hope" for the revolution.

On 26 June the newspaper *Junge Welt*, which has close links to the Left Party, published a statement by the foreign policy spokesman of the Egyptian Socialist Party, Mamdouh Habashi. It praised Tamarod and the National Salvation Front—a coalition of liberal and "leftist" parties that backed the coup—as "revolutionary forces." Habashi argued that the "left" could not "play the leading role in Egypt." This "recognition" had "been drawn by most forces, thereby compelling them to undertake more intensive forms of cooperation—indeed, in light of the enormous dangers—forcing them to unify."

Habashi further explained the "unification" he advocated and the "enormous dangers" he feared in a July 23 *Junge Welt* article titled "Revolution reloaded."

Habashi wrote, "The protest movement has now succeeded in winning to its side tentative key sectors in the armed forces who have realized the threat posed by the Muslim Brotherhood and its allies. At the same time, this layer of the army is aware of what could be unleashed by such a mass movement threatening the essence of the existing social order under conditions of a possible radicalisation. With the support of the military, the popular movement ousted the Muslim Brotherhood and their allies from power earlier this month. Thus begins a whole new political chapter."

He adds, "The range of forces that make up the camp of the enemies of the Islamists is varied. It ranges from supporters of the Mubarak regime—here you have to admit for the sake of objectivity that their performance was very powerful in this movement—to liberal-conservatives, leftists and nationalists, including key military figures. This is an extremely complex and extraordinary composition."

Habashi acknowledges that the Left Party's Egyptian allies formed an alliance with more secular representatives of the Egyptian bourgeoisie, including the military and supporters of the Mubarak dictatorship. Their aim was to remove the Muslim Brotherhood from power, but above all to forestall a socialist revolution. In this respect, the military coup was a pre-emptive strike against the working class, organized and carried out with the conscious support of the official liberal and "left" parties in Egypt.

Since the military coup, these same forces have aggressively supported the military junta's repressive measures. The Egyptian Socialist Party was one of the most vocal advocates of the violent dismantling of the protest camps of the Muslim Brotherhood, in which hundreds of peaceful demonstrators, including women and children, were killed by the army and security forces. Shortly before the massacre, leading ESP member Karima al-Hefnawy declared: "This is a violent sit-in. It is the right of every government to dissolve it by law, and the people say if the government does not do it, then they will."

Other representatives of the National Salvation Front, such as the new Prime Minister Hazem al-Beblawi, a founding member of the Social Democratic Party of Egypt, and Labour Minister Kamal Abu Eita, the leader of the Egyptian Federation of Independent Trade Unions (EFITU), entered the transitional government set up by the army and are accessories to the killings.

Tamarod acts as an extended propaganda arm of the military dictatorship. Following the recent massacres, Mahmoud Badr reaffirmed

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his unconditional support for the actions of the military: “I have nothing bad to say about the Army. It has not meddled in politics, I can confirm that from my own experience. I supported their decisions on my own initiative, and I am convinced they are doing the right thing and leading us in the right direction.”

The Left Party supports its Egyptian allies not in spite of, but because of their reactionary character. The sharp turn to the right by liberal and “leftist” organizations articulating the interests of a privileged middle class is an international phenomenon. The depth of the revolutionary development in Egypt—in which the working class plays a decisive role with repercussions far beyond the borders of Egypt—has rocked these organizations to the core. After two and a half years of mass protests and strikes, they are supporting a return to dictatorship in order to defend their wealth and privileges against the danger of socialist revolution.

A strategy paper drafted by the Left Party-affiliated Rosa Luxembourg Foundation with the title “Egypt after Mursi: Joint governing or division of society?” and published in a slightly abridged version in the party organ *Neues Deutschland* on 25 July, summarizes the views of the Left Party and its Egyptian allies. The authors of the article, Peter Schäfer and Mai Choukri, who work in Tunis in the Rosa Luxembourg Foundation’s Regional Office in North Africa, openly oppose a move towards democracy and support the Egyptian military.

They write: “Regarding the argument that democracy in Egypt is not necessary, this is also true, at least if democracy is defined as transparent elections, strong parliaments, and legal and institutional possibilities to replace the government. Democracy has never existed in this form in Egypt before. The elections of 2011-2012 were organized under the rule of the military leadership. They have proven they are able to organise such a poll according to internationally approved rules, and they can do it again.”

Then, the authors ask: “What sense would new elections as soon as possible make when no political force is able to provide a realistic and strategic way out of the crisis? It is easy to call for social justice, when you do not have to provide concrete information and calculations with regard to its implementation.”

Schäfer and Choukri conclude, “The debate about whether what happened in Egypt was a military coup or not, is therefore futile. The issue at this point seems rather: finding a way to implement social justice, while at the same time accommodating the army.”

The Left Party’s demand to come to terms with the military government in Egypt underlines its character as a party of German imperialism.

Germany has substantial political and economic interests in the Middle East, particularly in Egypt, the region’s most populous country. Egypt is not only a political ally of the US, Europe and Israel, but among the most important trading partners of German companies in the Arab world. Germany exported goods worth an annual €2.4 billion to Egypt, which, after Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, is currently the third largest importer of German goods in the region. Some 80 German companies have offices in Egypt, where they employ about 24,000 workers.

The Left Party defends those interests. Its goal is to create “stability” and secure German business interests in Egypt.

A comment in *Neues Deutschland*, titled “What Egypt needs” and published shortly after the coup, declares: “The land on the Nile quickly needs a pro-business cabinet, an authority accepted abroad that can negotiate loans.” It writes that the army “cares about consensus in choosing the head of government, precisely because of the deep divisions that run through Egyptian society.”

These words could have been penned by the German Economics Ministry or the International Monetary Fund (IMF). The Left Party supports the military junta on the basis of cold-blooded political and economic calculations. Behind the arguments of the Left Party lies the hope of the German ruling elite that the new government established by the army will press ahead with further liberalization of the Egyptian economy in cooperation with the International Monetary Fund, thus creating better conditions for foreign companies and investors.

In recent weeks, however, there has been increasing concern expressed in leading circles that the regime’s brutal repression threatens to further destabilize Egypt. According to press reports, leading German companies in Egypt including BASF, ThyssenKrupp and Henkel, have withdrawn their staff from the country.

Prior to the EU foreign ministers’ meeting on Wednesday, German Foreign Minister Guido Westerwelle declared that “all areas of cooperation with Egypt are being re-examined.” The goal of Berlin and its allies was to “ensure or contribute to a return to the negotiating table, though pressure or even maximum pressure.”

The imperialist powers fear that repression in Egypt could provoke a new uprising of the working class. In this regard they share the fear of the Muslim Brotherhood, with which they have worked closely together before the coup to control the working class.

Late last week Muslim Brotherhood spokesman Gehad El-Haddad warned: “The situation is now out of control. There was always this fear and it increased with every massacre. There is a real danger that people who are angry about the loss of their loved ones take to the streets immediately.”

The Left party’s recent statements reflect those concerns. Late last week the foreign affairs spokesman of the Left Party parliamentary group, Jan van Aken, declared that German foreign policy in Egypt faced becoming a “shambles.” In a radio interview, he said he understood the “helplessness” of Westerwelle. It was a “difficult question” to know on which side one should be in Egypt. There were “many, many mistakes made,” including the failure from the beginning to identify the military coup for what it was.

Van Aken said: “But when I support a military government then I strengthen it. Then it feels safe, then it has retreated to an extremely tough stance, was absolutely not prepared to negotiate over the Muslim Brotherhood. This has now led to this escalation, and that was a mistake.”

Van Aken’s comments are both cynical and dishonest. Following weeks in which the Left Party was one of the army’s most open supporters, it is now trying to cover its tracks. In reality, Van Aken’s remarks underscore the Left Party’s political and moral responsibility for the massacres in Egypt. It was the Left Party and its Egyptian allies who supported the junta and thus strengthened their “extremely tough stance.”

Despite his “concerns,” Van Aken makes clear that the Left Party will continue its support for the Egyptian military. “From the outset one should have critically followed the activities of the military government rather than support it. That would have been the correct policy for me,” he concluded.

The cynicism of the Left Party is boundless. Van Aken’s statement that the Left Party merely “critically follow” but not “support” the massacre of the Egyptian army in the future must be seen by the working class as a warning, not only in Egypt but internationally.

The next round of social cuts in Germany and throughout Europe is imminent, following the German parliamentary elections in September. The counterrevolutionary role of the Left Party in the Egyptian revolution reveals the stance the party will adopt in the coming class struggles. It will stop at nothing to stifle an independent revolutionary movement of the working class.

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