

Egypt's Revolutionary Socialists seek to cover up support for military coup

By Johannes Stern
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As the military regime in Egypt intensifies its crackdown on all opposition, and as the former elements of the Mubarak dictatorship are integrated into positions of power, the counter-revolutionary role of the “left” supporters of the coup is ever more clearly exposed. Among the most corrupt of the pro-military organizations of the affluent middle class is the misnamed Revolutionary Socialists (RS)—a pseudo-left group allied to the International Socialist Organization (ISO) in the US and the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) in Britain.

A July 19 article in the *Christian Science Monitor* (CSM) by Geert Van Langendonck, the Middle Eastern and North Africa correspondent for the Dutch daily newspaper *NRC Handelsblad*, reported that the RS were one of the groups lining up behind the military. He wrote, “Egyptian activists have rallied around the military since it ousted Mohamed Morsi,” adding that, “even the Revolutionary Socialists supported the coup.”

The RS has responded with a desperate campaign to cover up their support for the coup and a military dictatorship.

Leading RS member Hossam El Hamalawy immediately attacked Langendonck. Shortly after the article appeared, Hamalawy claimed on Twitter that Langendonck’s statement that the RS supported the coup is “incorrect,” adding: “If you don’t know Arabic, that’s not an excuse. Kindly refer to our statements re: the military.”

Hamalawy sent a commentary titled “Egypt Revolutionary Socialist position on Egypt’s recent coup” to his friend Dan Murphy, a staff writer for the *CSM*. Murphy subsequently “adjusted” Langendonck’s original article and published Hamalawy’s comment on July 20. In this compendium of lies about the RS’ policies, Hamalawy desperately tries to deny the truth: that the RS supported the US-backed military coup in alliance with remnants of the Mubarak regime.

Hamalawy writes: “Your article ‘In Egypt, lonely voices warn of too much love for the military’, implied that the Egyptian Revolutionary Socialists (the group I belong to) were in the pro-military camp. This is incorrect, and the anti-Morsi opposition camp should not be lumped up in one basket.”

In fact, the RS’ statements and alliances in recent months conclusively establish that the RS were part of the “pro-military camp,” sitting in “one basket” with reaction.

Before the coup, the RS supported the Tamarod alliance that called upon the military to oust Mursi. Tamarod included the National Salvation Front (NSF) of liberal leader Mohamed El

Baradei and the Free Egypt Party of billionaire tycoon Naguib Sawiris. It was also supported by former officials of the Mubarak regime such as General Ahmed Shafiq, the last prime minister sworn in by Mubarak, and followers of Omar Suleiman, long-time Mubarak-ally and former head of Egypt’s notorious Mukhabarat, or secret service.

Before the coup, the RS repeatedly issued statements supporting Tamarod and its program. On May 19, they praised Tamarod as “a way to complete the Revolution” stating: “We declare the intention of our full participation in this campaign and call on all activists for democracy and justice to join us.”

Only several days later, the RS organized a joint meeting with Tamarod at RS headquarters in Giza, cheering Tamarod leaders Mahmoud Badr and Mohamed Abdel-Aziz. Badr and Abdel-Aziz later stood beside General al-Sisi as he announced the coup on television on July 3. The “road map” for the coup laid out by al-Sisi that night—the dissolution of the Islamist-dominated upper house of parliament; the appointment of the chief of the judiciary as president; and the installation of a free market technocratic interim government—was drawn from Tamarod’s program.

The RS’ reaction to the military takeover confirms that they stand in the “pro-military camp”. They hailed the coup as a “second revolution,” calling upon protesters to “protect their revolution.” As the army seeks to reestablish the repressive structures of the Mubarak regime, the RS claim that the military-backed government can be pressured for democratic and social reforms. In a July 11 statement, the RS called for “pressure on the new government to take measures immediately for achieving social justice for the benefit of the millions of poor Egyptians.”

Responding to the *Christian Science Monitor*, Hamalawy also seeks to cover-up the RS’ longstanding support for the military, claiming that “in fact, the RS was the first revolutionary group to warn of the army’s role in the events in a statement from Tahrir Square as early as 1 Feb 2011.”

Mr. Hamalawy assumes that no one reads the RS’ statements. In reality, the RS were already in 2011 amongst the foremost apologists of the Egyptian military, constantly arguing that Mubarak’s former generals could be pressured to grant democratic and social reforms.

In the February 1, 2011 statement to which Hamalawy refers, the RS declared: “Everyone asks: ‘Is the army with the people or against them?’ The army is not a single block. The interests of the

soldiers and junior officers are the same as the interests of the masses. But the senior officers are Mubarak's men, chosen carefully to protect his regime of corruption, wealth, and tyranny. It is an integral part of the system. The army is no longer the people's army. This army is not the one which defeated the Zionist enemy in October 1973."

The purpose of the statement was to weaken popular distrust in the military, just as the Egyptian ruling class was deploying the army all over the country to suppress the revolutionary upheaval of the working class. Far from "warning from the army's role," the RS was promoting illusions in elements of the officer corps that were not directly tied to Mubarak. In fact, the Egyptian army was never a "people's army" but is the linchpin of Egyptian capitalism and the main repressive instrument of the Egyptian ruling elite since the military coup led by the Free Officers Movement under Gamal Abdel Nasser in 1952.

Their reactionary ambiguity towards the Egyptian military led the RS to promote the military junta that came to power after Mubarak's ouster as a force for democracy and social rights.

On May 31, 2011, one of the leading RS members, Mustafa Omar, declared in a comment for *Socialist Worker* that the military junta "aims to reform the political and economic system, allowing it to become more democratic and less oppressive."

One of the most outspoken promoters of the Egyptian military's alleged "democratic" goals was Mr. Hamalawy himself. In a June 22 Reuters interview, he declared, "I do feel they [the generals of the SCAF military junta] 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."

Hamalawy's musings about the generals' democratic sensibilities have been comprehensively refuted by events. The generals have made their reactionary role clear by launching the recent coup and crackdown, while preparing cuts to energy and bread subsidies on which millions of Egyptians depend.

Replying to Langendonck, Hamalawy declares that he finds "it bizarre to be labeled as 'military coup supporters' in your article... as bizarre as the accusation we also hear from other political groups in Egypt that we are 'MB supporters' because we refuse to stand with the military."

In fact "accusations" that the RS are "MB supporters" are as factually correct as the observation that the RS are "military coup supporters."

Only one year ago, the RS were amongst the most enthusiastic supporters of Mursi and the MB.

In the presidential elections, they produced countless statements promoting the MB as "the right wing of the revolution" and Mursi as a "revolutionary candidate." When Mursi was inaugurated, they hailed it as a "victory for the revolution" and a "great achievement in pushing back the counterrevolution." They even wrote an "Open letter to Mohammed Mursi," posing as advisors of the president and recommending the formation of a "coalition government."

It was again Mr. Hamalawy himself who sought to provide cynical explanations to justify the RS' support for Mursi and the MB. In a June 30 comment titled "Mursi, SCAF and the revolutionary left," he claimed that the "MB is a reformist

organization" with an opportunistic leadership and revolutionary base and thus has to be supported.

Unable to provide any coherent account for the staggering shifts in the RS' political line, Hamalawy has to lie. In fact, an analysis of the RS' policies reveals only one striking consistency: the RS' twists and turns always reflect the shifts of American foreign policy.

The RS' initial support for the military corresponded to Washington's support for the military junta to suppress the working class and defend its strategic and economic interests in the region against the threat of a socialist revolution. When the US then established close ties to the MB and Mursi to restructure the Middle East in its interests, the RS also threw their support behind Mursi. Finally, as renewed mass struggles against Mursi exploded and the US administration was forced to give the green light to the army for a preemptive coup against the working class, the RS shifted their support back to the military.

Hamalawy's unwillingness and inability to account for the political shifts of his organization are rooted in the class interests of the affluent, pro-Western middle class layers the RS represents, and which Hamalawy personifies. These layers are hostile to a socialist revolution in Egypt, as it would cut across their lucrative ties to Western imperialism and encroach upon their own not inconsiderable wealth.

Hamalawy studied and taught at the American University in Cairo, developing an uncanny ability to attract the attention of Western media, bourgeois newspapers and news agencies. In fact, most of his professional ties also involve the US, British or the Egyptian governments.

His career includes stints as a visiting scholar in UC Berkeley and at the *Los Angeles Times*, Bloomberg News and Human Rights Watch. In Egypt, he was a founding member of *Al Masry Al Youm's* English Edition and *Ahram Online*, the English web site of Egypt's biggest state-controlled newspaper. He publishes columns in the *Guardian* and appears on the BBC, Al-Jazeera and especially ONTV, a liberal channel in Egypt owned by Sawiris. He is a welcome guest, as he only says or does things that serve the interests of the ruling elite.

While the middle class affluentsia in Egypt opts for outright military dictatorship to defend its political and financial interests, the working class has to draw its own political conclusions. To achieve its social and democratic aspirations, it has to establish its political independence from reactionary forces such as the RS and develop its own revolutionary leadership. This requires the building of an Egyptian section of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI).

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