

How Egypt's Revolutionary Socialists helped pave the way for military repression

By Chris Marsden
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In a display of naked cynicism, Egypt's Revolutionary Socialists group is advancing itself as an opponent of the brutal crackdown on supporters of the Muslim Brotherhood and deposed President Mohamed Mursi, which has claimed hundreds of lives. The RS now declare themselves to be part of a so-called "Third Square" movement, which claims not to side with either the military or the Muslim Brotherhood.

Their August 14 statement proclaims, "The Revolutionary Socialists did not defend the regime of Mohamed Mursi and the Muslim Brotherhood for a single day."

They denounce "many who described themselves as liberals and leftists [who] have betrayed the Egyptian Revolution, led by those who took part in Al-Sisi's government." The RS statement continues: "They have sold the blood of the martyrs to whitewash the military and the counter-revolution. These people have blood on their hands."

But the Revolutionary Socialists and their international co-thinkers, the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) in Britain and the International Socialist Organisation (ISO) in the United States, are likewise up to their elbows in blood. An extensive public record shows that they not merely supported, but played a vital part in, a political conspiracy against the Egyptian working class. This conspiracy consisted of the setting up of a front organization, known as Tamarod (Rebellion), by the Egyptian military and sections of the bourgeoisie closest to the former regime of Hosni Mubarak and opposed to those sections allied with the Muslim Brotherhood. Through Tamarod, the RS maintained its own connections to these bourgeois layers, working to ensure their triumph in the coup of July 3.

Tamarod is the most vocal supporter of military rule and the bloody crackdown it is implementing, which has cost hundreds of lives. It has urged Egyptians to form vigilante groups to aid the military in suppressing the Muslim Brotherhood and "protect Egypt and the revolution and to defend the future of our children against terrorism."

Its leader, Mohamed Badr, declared that Egypt was in the process of "getting rid of the Brotherhood's fascist group before it takes over everything and ousts us all." He added that he "did not see anything bad from the army. They did not interfere in politics and I am witness to that. I back its decisions on my own and without any instructions, as I think they are right and getting us where we want."

The RS is still seeking to portray this backing for the military as a turn on the part of Tamarod and other pseudo-liberal and pseudo-left forces with which they have long been allied. On July 29, RS leader Sameh Naguib gave an interview with *Open Democracy*, asserting that "Tamarod started off as a simple kind of democratic initiative that spread very rapidly."

It was only "once Tamarod's main leaders came out on television" alongside the coup's leader Al-Sisi that it served to isolate "any revolutionary forces," Naguib said.

"So, now you are either a supporter of the army or you're counted as being one with the Muslim Brotherhood. It's very difficult now, in Egypt,

to have any kind of independent line against both."

In fact, the RS never had an "independent line". In the past two-and-a-half years of bitter revolutionary struggles in Egypt, it has played a key role for the bourgeoisie and its imperialist backers in containing the revolutionary movement of the working class. At every stage, the RS sought to subordinate the working class to one or another section of the Egyptian bourgeoisie, in order to block it from developing its own political leadership and organising a conscious political struggle against capitalism and imperialism.

The RS has performed numerous political gyrations to this end. It first hailed the formation of a front government for the military junta which took power after Mubarak's ouster. In the ensuing presidential elections, it switched to backing the Muslim Brotherhood, promoting it as "the right wing of the revolution." Mursi's election was hailed as a "victory for the revolution" and a "great achievement in pushing back the counterrevolution."

In recent months, the RS emerged as the most strident advocate of the revolutionary *bona fides* of Tamarod. This provided it with the means of supporting by the back door the "liberal" opposition National Salvation Front and the military itself, which dictated events behind the scenes.

Tamarod was from the outset a political operation mounted and controlled at the highest levels of the Egyptian state apparatus. Its aim was to place the military at the head of the mass movement developing against Mursi and the Brotherhood.

There have been numerous articles in the *New York Times*, *Al Jazeera*, the *Washington Post* and the *Daily Beast* showing that Tamarod was controlled by the military and *feloul* elements close to the former Mubarak regime. It was tasked with insisting that the only way to depose Mursi was to support the armed forces. It took its orders directly from coup leader General Abdel Fatah al-Sisi.

Mike Giglio in the *Daily Beast* noted July 12 how "Tamarod's Waleed al-Masry, a central organizer, was in regular contact with a group of retired military officers," who "were reaching out on behalf of the Army's current commanders."

Moheb Doss, one of Tamarod's co-founders, told Giglio that they received "individual communications between Tamarod people and state institutions."

"It is normal to communicate with the Army before the revolution," he said.

Meetings were held with former military officers "in the basement of a popular Cairo restaurant in the week before the protests." A Tamarod activist says the former officers "were the bridge between us and the Army during the preparations for June 30."

The campaign was funded, according to Yusuf Sayman in the *New York Times*, by "members of the old establishment, some of them close to Mr. Mubarak and the country's top generals." This included Naguib Sawiris, a billionaire who donated use of nationwide offices and provided publicity through a popular television network he founded,

Orascom/ONTV, and his major interest in Egypt's largest private newspaper, *Al Masry Al Youm*.

The RS consistently portrayed Tamarod as the unchallenged leadership of the Egyptian masses. A May 19 statement of the RS, published in the ISO's newspaper and entitled "Mobilizing the opposition to Morsi", describes Tamarod as a campaign "launched by a group of revolutionary youth... What is completely new and different about the Rebellion Campaign is that it stems from a popular initiative, opening up space for revolutionary work and experience from below."

The RS stressed, "We must build this campaign and engage with it where it is effective and open our headquarters to it, so that our mission and our huge responsibility is to be a vehicle for it... Therefore, we announce our full and determined participation in this campaign and call all those struggling for democracy and justice to participate with us and with the entire working class movement in carrying out this battle."

At the end of May, the RS organized a joint meeting with Tamarod at its headquarters in Giza. Among the Tamarod leaders cheered by the RS membership was Badr. (See: video)

The RS issued a June 27 statement urging support for the June 30 protest against Mursi called by Tamarod. The statement was entitled "The revolution and the counterrevolution." The RS noted, "Among the increasing demands of liberal commentators and leaders, sometimes implied, other times hidden, is the necessity of military intervention to get rid of Brotherhood rule. This means nothing other than a demand for a military coup."

By endorsing a political coalition that the RS knew to be associated to demands for a military coup, the RS were signaling that they themselves also supported a coup. They went on to hail the "genius of the name and the simplicity" of Tamarod's campaign, which has ignited "the fuse of that movement on a national level heretofore unseen."

The RS is forced to acknowledge that those active in Tamarod include the "remnants of the old regime," acting under the cover of the "liberal bourgeois opposition" who want nothing less than "the complete victory of the counterrevolution as well as bloody retribution against the revolution and all who participated in it."

But this changed nothing for the RS, which proposed to continue collaborating with these layers within Tamarod based upon a spurious call for "complete independence *within the movement* from those opportunists and traitors." [Emphasis added]

The RS sought to promote Tamarod and block an independent political struggle of the working class, though they knew this would ultimately strengthen the Muslim Brotherhood's prestige among layers of the population. They wrote that "among a section of the population, the Muslim Brotherhood is able to depict the battle as if it were a battle between the Brotherhood and the old regime remnants."

On July 1, in the immediate aftermath of the June 30 demonstration that finally precipitated Mursi's downfall, the RS noted that the military had "issued its own ultimatum: The government must satisfy the demands of protesters, or the army would impose its own 'road map' to resolve the crisis."

The RS hailed Tamarod—this time as an alliance of "young people from the Revolutionary Socialists, from the Egyptian Social Democratic Party, from the Socialist Popular Alliance Party, from the Constitution Party of Mohamed ElBaradei. Plus, of course, there were young people from the April 6th Youth Movement and other groups. These youth succeeded in working together..."

This is a list of the very forces that supported the imposition of military rule, most of which joined the government it set up. Hazem Al-Beblawi, the current prime minister, is a founding member of the Egyptian Social Democratic Party and one of the most aggressive advocates of repression. His deputy, until his recent face-saving resignation, was Mohamed ElBaradei, with whom the RS has repeatedly formed alliances, including

within Tamarod.

In "The fall of the Brotherhood," written July 4, the ISO noted in an anodyne statement, "Some political forces active in the movement against Morsi celebrated the military's action."

However, on July 5, the RS all but dismissed any threat of military dictatorship. They wrote of the liberal bourgeois elite wanting to "overthrow the rule of the Islamist elite, in order to themselves reach power with the endorsement and support of the military establishment," and of the remnants of the old regime wanting "to return to the political scene."

"But," they insisted, "there is a special logic to popular revolutions that will not submit to the illusions or schemes of the liberals or *feloul*..."

An accompanying interview with Ahmed Shawki, editor of the *International Socialist Review*, declared, "The Tamarod movement broke the dam by providing a vehicle by which the mass of the Egyptian population were able to make Morsi pay a political price for his actions."

He was posed the question, "Military coups usually herald the defeat of the revolutionary process—they are often the most extreme representation of the counterrevolution. Does the military's intervention to remove Morsi, appoint a new president and promise new elections represent the victory of counterrevolution?"

He replied: "Absolutely not". Shawki described the army's intervention as merely an effort to "contain the movement... So while the military is in the streets and has overstepped the constitutional limits to its power, I believe that it will seek some means to quickly return power to a civilian authority. I don't think it wants to hold state power."

The first massacre of Muslim Brotherhood supporters took place on July 8, when the RS were still promoting pro-army protests to defend what they repeatedly referred to as the "second revolution."

Thus, immediately after the military takeover, leading RS member Sameh Naguib hailed the coup as a "second revolution" in a statement on the British SWP's *Socialist Worker* web site. He declared that "this is not the end of democracy, nor a simple military coup," writing that "people feel empowered and entitled by the events of the last few days."

The RS was fully backed in its efforts to politically disarm the working class by the ISO in the US, which published all the statements cited above, and by the SWP in the UK. Thus, Judith Orr, writing in the British *Socialist Worker* as late as July 9, insisted, "The army's takeover was more than the simple military coup much of the media are describing it as. It does not signal the 'end of democracy.' The unprecedented mass rallies were the fullest expression of a movement from below demanding real change."

Just two days later, in a July 11 statement entitled "Resisting anew the theft of the revolution", the RS wrote of Egypt's newly installed interim government advancing "the same policies of the Mubarak-Morsi regime." They bemoaned a "Dictatorial Constitutional Declaration" that was, in reality, little different from that previously advanced by Tamarod.

Their real complaint was their own isolation from power, noting that the constitutional declaration "came without any consultation with the revolutionary political groups that the Minister of Defense and interim president had confirmed as partners in endorsing the roadmap."

By July 26, massacres by the military had killed hundreds of Muslim Brotherhood supporters. This prompted a warning from the RS, which wrote of an impending pro-military demonstration: "The masses going into the street on Friday is damaging to the revolution, whatever the participants in the protests might think... Giving the army a popular mandate to finish off the Muslim Brotherhood will inevitably lead to the consolidation of the regime, which the revolution arose to overthrow."

The RS again failed to identify those who sought to provide this "mandate" to the military—Tamarod and its backers, including the RS themselves.

"The omens of a return of Mubarak's dictatorial regime are lost on no

one,” they wrote the following day, citing “the threat to use the emergency law to disperse the sit-ins, and the intervention of the army in the workers’ sit-in at Suez Steel, among others.”

Even then they wrote only of “our doubts about the role of the current government and the extent of its involvement in these crimes.”

It was only on August 14, with hundreds dead in the streets, that the RS finally denounced “liberals and leftists” for having “betrayed the Egyptian Revolution”—again, without citing Tamarod.

The RS’ “critique” of these forces is entirely fraudulent. The liberal bourgeoisie did not “betray” the revolution, but acted according to its class interests. In the face of the danger of socialist revolution, they opted for a return to military dictatorship.

The RS were part of this operation. It is made up of prominent and affluent petty bourgeois layers, largely drawn from academia and the media. Their motivation is their own personal advancement, professing “revolution” only as a bargaining chip to secure a comfortable niche for themselves within the existing social order, which they are determined to defend against the working class.

It is striking that the constant twists in the Revolutionary Socialists’ political line always dovetail neatly with the requirements of American foreign policy.

When Washington supported the Muslim Brotherhood as its chosen political instrument, the RS sang Mursi’s revolutionary praises. When it endorsed the military’s coup against the Brotherhood, in order to pre-empt renewed revolutionary struggles by the working class, the RS lined up with Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) by backing Tamarod.

Especially since the coup, its statements have a truly uncanny relationship to political thrust of statements produced in the White House. Today, Washington is increasingly concerned that the junta’s massive violence will backfire and provoke a further radicalisation of the masses—not just in Egypt but throughout the Middle East. And, once again, this concern is shared by the RS, who fear nothing more than a socialist revolution and who are desperately urging some form of accommodation between the military and the Brotherhood to avert civil war.

The RS functions as nothing less than a political instrument of the counterrevolution. Beneath a thin veneer of leftist rhetoric, it serves as an apologist for whatever faction of the bourgeoisie is presently in the ascendancy—before moving once more to a position of “opposition.”

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