

Muslim Brotherhood election ? no victory for Egyptian workers

International Secretariat Wed, 27/06/2012 - 18:31

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The election of Mohammed Morsi, candidate of the Freedom and Justice Party (FJP), the electoral front of the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) - represents a defeat for the Egyptian Revolution, not a limited defence of it or even a ?lesser evil? than a victory for Ahmed Shafiq, the candidate of the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF)

The fact is that Morsi and the Brotherhood do not represent a challenge or an alternative to the military junta now ruling Egypt. They are not a lesser, but simply a different, evil. With 150,000 members and a huge network of charitable and educational institutions, through which they were able to mobilise their vote, and given their fundamentally conservative, pro-capitalist and socially reactionary policy, the MB/FJP is no less formidable an enemy to the working class and revolutionary youth than the decayed and discredited, yet still vicious and dangerous, SCAF.

It is true that, on many issues, Morsi and MB have interests opposed to those of the old regime. But, as against the aspirations of the youth of Egypt for democracy, jobs and a decent education or the hopes of trade unionists to improve their pay and conditions of work or the desire of women for equality and economic independence, the Muslim Brotherhood and the army high command are as one. No wonder that Morsi in his first speech to the nation, whilst praising the Revolution of 25 January, also praised the SCAF.

The state-run news agency MENA said that on the day following the announcement of his election, Morsi met with Field Marshal Hussein Tantawi and deputy chairman Lieutenant General Sami Anan and a number of other council members. Evidently, Morsi ?expressed his genuine appreciation to the SCAF for its wise leadership of the country during the past period, for protecting Egypt from many dangers and for respecting the free will of the great Egyptian people? and ?commended the SCAF for managing the electoral process with the utmost transparency, which made it a model for democracy and fairness??.

To present this man as some sort of barrier to the power of the SCAF, to call for a vote for him and to praise his victory is a cruel deception.

Of course, it is always necessary to strike first at the most immediate danger - and as long as Tantawi and the geriatric remnants of the Mubarak regime control the tanks, guns, prison camps and torture chambers, in which many heroes of the revolution still languish, they are indeed the biggest danger. If the SCAF had dared to declare Shafiq the winner, or if they launch a military coup to depose Morsi, revolutionaries would fight shoulder to shoulder with the activists and supporters of the Brotherhood to defeat them. But they could and should do so without having voted for him, without expressing any sort of political support for, or confidence in, Morsi or his government. They would solely and exclusively be acting in defence of the democratic gains of the 25 January Revolution, no matter how limited, insecure and defaced by the SCAF

these now are.

With 51.7 per cent, as against 48.3 for Shafiq (if these figures can be believed) it is clear that Morsi does not have anything like a majority of the Egyptian electorate. There was, in fact, massive abstention (53.58 per cent in the first round and 48.15 per cent in the second). The population's lack of confidence in him is well justified.

Morsi's victory was in no way preferable to a victory for Shafiq - except in the sense that the majority wishes of those who voted should not be set aside by an electoral commission that has no democratic mandate whatsoever. This is true even though Shafiq - former Air Force chief and Mubarak's last prime minister - was the candidate of the military and stood to ensure its control over the massive apparatus of corruption, illegality and repression.

In the UK Socialist Worker, Hisham Fouad, of the Revolutionary Socialists of Egypt, says "...if Shafiq had won the election this would have led to massive demoralisation." But is that true? Would so obvious a fraud, coming on top of the dissolution of parliament, really demoralise the youth and workers who made the revolution? Over the last fifteen months, they have suffered far worse setbacks than that. Is it not more likely that it would have led to yet another explosion of anger, certainly involving the youth of the MB and the more radical groups, liberal and Islamist?

By contrast, as the cold coup proceeded, the leadership of the Brotherhood, their eyes glued to the prize of the presidency, held back their rank and file from action on the streets. Only when it looked like this too was going to be whisked away from under their noses, did they call for a mobilisation. Even then, this was limited to the occupation of Tahrir Square. Important as the Square is as the symbol of the Revolution, it was not just the occupation of the Square that drove out Mubarak, there was also a mounting wave of strikes and the outbreak of a popular insurrection in Cairo, Suez and the industrial centres of the Delta.

If the electoral commission had declared a "victory" for Shafiq, it would have incensed the masses rather than demoralised them, and both Tantawi and Morsi knew it. It would have made it impossible for the leaders of the Brotherhood, and Salafist parties like Al-Nour, to hold back their rank and file's participation in a new tidal wave of demonstrations and strikes. Moreover, as in January 2011, the generals could not have depended on their troops to open fire on their own people.

Morsi is far from representing a challenge to Field Marshall Hussein Tantawi and the SCAF. They have taken control over the constitution-making process, in violation of the most elementary democratic principles, and their High Court has the capacity to interfere in the re-run of the elections to parliament. Taken together, this means that Morsi is likely find himself a prisoner in the presidential palace - a bird forced to sing praises to the military from a gilded cage.

The supine character of the Brotherhood's leadership, always a licensed opposition to Mubarak, even when its own militants were jailed and tortured, was demonstrated when they accepted the disqualification of their first choice as presidential candidate, Khairat al-Shater, a millionaire businessman and the real head of the 150,000 member organisation. Morsi, however, is his loyal bag carrier.

Morsi's victory was not the result of a "free and fair election", though doubtless he got far more genuine votes than Shafiq. Even less was it primarily the result of the popular mobilisations in Tahrir Square. These played at best an auxiliary role. In reality, it was the result of more than a week of behind-the-scenes haggling between the Brotherhood and the SCAF. Khairat al-Shater met with generals from SCAF and Mohamed El Baradei, former head of the International Atomic Energy Agency, played a brokering role. The generals got what they wanted; Morsi would only enter the presidential palace under heavy restraint, and

within the framework of the pseudo-legal/constitutional coup.

The coup itself took the form of an amendment to the constitutional declaration that was issued back in March 30, 2011, itself dictated by the SCAF and accepted by the MB. Now, Tantawi and Co were tightening the fetters, partly because the MB had broken some of its earlier pledges not to dominate the parliament, constituent assembly and the presidency. With this amendment, the SCAF reasserted its juridical, as well as its actual, control over political life in Egypt. Though they have promised to hand over power on June 30 in a "grand ceremony" their amendment limits the powers of the new president in advance and arrogates to the SCAF all legislative power, control over the writing of the constitution and control over the budget, at least until a new parliament is elected. Their control, therefore, is comprehensive:

? Article 53 further expands the economic and political influence of the military. Article 53b of the decree permits the army to intervene to crush any mass protests that challenge the authority of the generals

"If the country faces internal unrest which requires the intervention of the armed forces, the president can issue a decision to commission the armed forces, with the approval of SCAF, to maintain security and defend public properties."

? Article 60b allows the generals to decide the composition of the constituent assembly and control the drafting of a new constitution. It lays down that "the incumbent SCAF members are responsible for deciding on all issues related to the armed forces, including appointing their leaders and extending the terms in office of the aforesaid leaders. The current head of the SCAF is to act as Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces and minister of defence until a new constitution is drafted.

? Article 53/1 states "the president can declare war only after the approval of SCAF."

The situation which faces the militants of the new trade union movement and the young revolutionaries who have repeatedly occupied the squares is indeed a difficult one ? they are now far from the heady optimism of fifteen months ago when many thought that victory had been won. Today's difficulties are the result of the incomplete character of the January Revolution and the subsequent involvement of the Liberals, the MB, and even some of the young revolutionaries, at first, in the army's so-called ?democratisation process?.

This rapidly turned into the farce of negotiations between fraudulent ?representatives? of the revolution (including the Brotherhood) and genuine representatives of the counterrevolution (the SCAF). The Brotherhood and the Liberals both acted as if the revolution was over - and the wish was doubtless father to the thought. The young revolutionaries were unable to unite in a revolutionary socialist party with deep roots in the working class. The fact that the revolution was unable to field a presidential candidate that truly represented it is a measure of how far it still is from its goals.

The reality was that there was neither democratic constitution nor legitimate judiciary; instead of the murderers of the old regime being tried for their crimes in popular courts, it was the revolutionaries in their thousands who were tried by military tribunals. Plainly, the revolution had not triumphed. Likewise, there could be no free and fair electioneering when the entire process of registering the candidates was still firmly in the hands of the corrupt old regime. Either a revolution creates a new legitimacy and destroys the old or it is not (yet) a victorious revolution. The false revolutionaries, wittingly or unwittingly, played into the hands of Tantawi and the SAF with their bogus constitutionalism

The results are living proof that only the working class, by mass direct action, winning over the rank and file

of the army and ultimately taking power, can accomplish even the most basic democratic tasks of the revolution. Nonetheless, the fact that the revolution has not yet been victorious does not mean it is already defeated. The continued divisions between the civilian and the military forces of counterrevolution can give great opportunities for the working class and the youth to intervene as an independent force. Many of the burning issues remain democratic ones; to drive the SCAF from power, to purge all the judges, police chiefs and bureaucrats of the old regime, to charge the working class and revolutionary youth organisations with convening elections to a sovereign constituent assembly rather than just restoring the Islamist-dominated parliament.

For this, the absolute requirement is a revolutionary party of the working class that has a strategy that expresses the unbroken continuity between the democratic tasks and the socialist goals of the revolution.

The attitude of the Revolutionary Socialists (IST)

The fact that the Revolutionary Socialists, the Egyptian organisation linked to the International Socialist Tendency, IST, which is headed by the UK SWP, hailed the election of Morsi as a "revolutionary victory" is scandalous for people who consider themselves Marxists or Leninists. It is the exact opposite of the truth. Morsi's election was a victory of the counterrevolution - albeit one with a democratic mask (in Marxist terms, a victory of the democratic counterrevolution), and even then a hollow one vis-à-vis the Military. In a statement issued on 24 June the RS stated:

? We should be optimistic today, as our revolution has achieved an important victory along the way by defeating Shafiq, but there are still fateful challenges before us.?

The decision to give "critical support" to a conservative candidate of a bourgeois party that is not even liberal, let alone revolutionary, is rendered even more scandalous by this hailing of his victory as a triumph for the revolution. The SWP's excuse, that this is equivalent to supporting Labour or Social Democratic parties in order to expose them, ignores one little question ? class. Those parties, whilst thoroughly bourgeois in their politics, are nevertheless, in terms of their history and their links to the Labour movement, a product of the working class struggle. That is why they are seen by the working class as ?their? parties, as parties of the working class.

When Marxists refer to these parties as ?reformist? they mean that they have their origins in the recognition that the working class has its own, separate interests, independent of those of the ruling class, but that they have a strategy of achieving these separate interests by means of reform. Such conditions do not apply to the MB, even if it is ?reformist? in the sense that it promises reforms in the social conditions of the masses. Most liberal parties, parties like the US Democrats, make such promises and masses of workers have illusions that they will carry out some of these promises.

For revolutionaries it is a principle, a principle called class independence, not to vote for capitalist parties. The Muslim Brotherhood does not bother to conceal its loyalty to capitalism and represents a huge section of the Egyptian bourgeoisie.

Referring to the fact that the MB had mobilised its supporters in Tahrir Square as a stage army with which to threaten Tantawi, in order to receive the empty husk of executive power (only later to demobilise them after a few fireworks) the RS statement grotesquely claimed;

"Once more the citizens have proven that they are still capable of aborting the plots of the military and the forces of counterrevolution. They have proven that revolutionary legitimacy is capable of seizing the deserved benefits of our democratic and social revolution. Here we see the plans of the military council fall

back before our eyes - even if only temporarily - beneath the pressure of the citizens and their steadfastness in the squares."

This rapturous celebration of Morsi's victory comes despite the fact that none of the measures of the SCAF "coup" have been reversed and it has to be assumed that tolerance, if not whole-hearted acceptance, of them by President Morsi was an integral part of the deal brokered by El Baradei behind the scenes. It is not enough for the RS to then list the seven most important measures for which the masses must fight? Morsi's victory is an obstacle to that fight and should be characterised as such.

The IST, and its leading force, the SWP, have long been making fatal mistakes when it comes to Islamism. This stems back to their seminal work on the subject, the late Chris Harman's *The Prophet and the Proletariat* (1994). Here he says the principle should be; 'Where the Islamists are in opposition, our rule should be, 'with the Islamists sometimes, with the state never'.

Attractive as the simplicity of this motto might seem, as a supposed statement of political principle it is inadequate; neither 'with' nor 'sometimes' tells us anything at all about revolutionary tactics and the use of the united front. Of course, there can be no question of Marxists supporting a bourgeois state in its assaults on Islamist parties and, equally, there can be no objection to joint actions with Islamists for democratic or pro-working class objectives. However, the crucial element of the revolutionary use of the united front, 'March separately, strike together', is that it means ensuring complete independence of programme and organisation and unremitting criticism of all wavering or compromise on the part of the united front ally.

Any use of the united front must therefore presuppose a coincidence of programme, such as defence of democratic rights or resistance to imperialism and its agents? yet, when it comes to the question of government, there can be no coincidence of programme between the working class and the bourgeoisie. That is why there can never be any question of supporting bourgeois candidates or parties.

In the coming weeks and months, revolutionaries in Egypt must prioritise the strengthening of working class organisations, particularly the trades unions but also women's and youth organisations, and their coordination into workers' councils, taking advantage of any breathing space that results from the SCAF and the Brotherhood having to co-exist in government. Even more importantly, those who recognise that fully independent working class action has to extend beyond democratic and economic issues and lead to the overthrow of capitalist rule by the workers' councils must form themselves into a revolutionary party committed to that goal.

The struggle for working class independence has been set back by the whole electoral process, in which parties that declared themselves to be class-based were not even allowed to stand? because the SCAF ruled that they were divisive of the nation. The same arguments will now be used by the MB which we can guarantee will oppose strikes and working class mobilisations as a 'threat to our government?'. The tactics of the RS in the election objectively strengthen that argument. Islamist-influenced workers will be able to justify opposition to strikes and demos against Morsi by pointing out, 'You told us to vote for him? now we must keep him in power!?

Nonetheless, there will be strikes and actions in defence of democratic rights and we do not doubt that the comrades of the RS will be involved, and will continue to risk their necks as they have in the past. Their commitment to the working class struggle, and to the fight to build a revolutionary leadership is not put in question by the error of their electoral tactics or failure to characterise the outcome of the election accurately. However, these errors undoubtedly make those tasks more difficult; to chart an accurate

course you need to know where you are starting from. It is the duty of all internationalists to contribute to the clarification of revolutionary strategy in Egypt, which remains the key country in the Arab world.

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