

Who is the Real Opposition in Egypt?

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Global Research, February 06, 2011

6 February 2011

Region: [Middle East & North Africa](#)

Theme: [Poverty & Social Inequality](#)

The revolution in Egypt erupted like all revolutions do, from the bottom up. It was unemployment and high food prices that propelled working and poor people into action. Now, the media reports that the “opposition” in Egypt is a group of well-to-do folks who have very little in common with the poor of Egypt.

This top down takeover of the revolution is being engineered with the support of the U.S. and European nations, the same allies of the dictatorship that lasted three decades. If this elite group of Egyptians manages to gain power, they’ll soon find themselves confronted with the real opposition of Egypt, the overwhelming majority of working and poor people.

Who are these upper-crust oppositionists? Middle East journalist Robert Fisk explains:

“[the oppositionists] include Amr Moussa, the secretary general of the Arab League, ... the Nobel prize-winner Ahmed Zuwayl, an Egyptian-American who has advised President Barack Obama; Mohamed Selim Al-Awa, a professor and author of Islamic studies, ... and the president of the Wafd party [a tiny political party], Said al-Badawi... Other nominees for the committee... are Nagib Suez, a prominent [super-wealthy] Cairo businessman... Nabil al-Arabi, an Egyptian UN delegate; and even the heart surgeon Magdi Yacoub, who now lives in Cairo.” (February 4, 2011).

<http://www.independent.co.uk/opinion/commentators/fisk/robert-fisk-exhausted-scared-and-trapped-protesters-put-forward-plan-for-future-2205079.html>

What is the task of this committee? Al-Jazeera reports:

“The committee — which was formed last night... proposed that vice president Omar Suleiman [the head of the brutal secret police] preside over a transitional government, and that he pledge to dissolve parliament (whose lower house was elected just last year) and call early elections.” (February 4, 2011).

<http://english.aljazeera.net/news/middleeast/2011/02/20112420435766522.html>

Are these oppositionists so naive to believe that a “pledge” from a snake like Suleiman is worth anything? Is this a man that any respectable person should be negotiating with?

And herein lies the problem. There can be no smooth “peaceful transition,” as Obama and other politicians would like to see, unless nothing in Egypt changes. This is because the ruling political power in the country, the National Democratic Party (NDP), has extremely deep ties to the rich and powerful in Egypt, backed up by both senior military officials and the U.S. government foreign aid program, which enriches various sections of the NDP. The

New York Times explains:

“Since the revolt, the military has surged to the forefront, emerging as the pivotal player in politics it long sought to manage behind the scenes. The beneficiary of nearly \$40 billion in American aid during Mr. Mubarak’s rule, its interests span the gamut of economic life — from the military industry to businesses like road and housing construction, consumer goods and resort management. Even leading opposition leaders, like Mohamed ElBaradei, have acknowledged that the military will have a key role in a transition.”

<http://www.nytimes.com/2011/02/05/world/middleeast/05cairo.html?hp>

To summarize, U.S. aid to Egypt has been the lifeblood of the dictatorship and the ruling party associated with it, while leading opposition figures have no interests in confronting these powerful interests, only removing their current figurehead. The opposition group that plans to negotiate with the NDP must know that any agreed to middle ground will be unacceptable to the majority of Egyptians, since the NDP will work to maintain their own privileges and wealth.

If the ruling party stays intact, then so will the ruling security apparatus, which will eventually steer the wheel of history backwards again. The party of the dictatorship must be crushed and dismembered, so that real democracy can have room to grow. The official “opposition” has no interest in doing this, because they have no interest in real change.

What would real change look like? It would require a drastic departure from the free-market policies that have been implemented for years, including privatizations of state run industries, lowering taxes for the rich and corporations, eliminating regulations, subsidies, and tariffs, etc. These policies were required by the IMF and World Bank, U.S.-led institutions that created in Egypt what exists in the U.S. — an incredible gap between rich and poor.

None of Egypt’s “respectable” opposition are mentioning these policies, because many benefit from them.

If an anti-Mubarak, pro-free-market opposition gains power, they will collide immediately with the majority of working and poor Egyptians, who want a change in the above policies that brought about their misery.

The only opposition group that is expressing the economic demands of the people seems to be the newly-formed Egyptian Federation for Independent Unions, which broke away from the government dominated unions to demand that a “... a minimum wage no less than 1200 LE, with a yearly raise proportionate to inflation; guarantee workers rights to bonuses and benefits according to work value, especially work compensation for those facing work hazards.”

and:

“The right for all Egyptian citizens to fair social security including the right to health care, housing, education ‘ensuring free education and syllabus development to cope with science and technology evolution,’ the right for all retired to decent pensions and benefits.”

It is demands like these that will decide Egypt’s future the day after Mubarak is gone. This will require a complete transformation of Egypt’s political system, including its economic policies that are intimately connected to the billions of U.S. foreign aid. It will also require

that Egypt's poor and working class develop a clear vision of what they want in order to avoid being led astray by enemies acting as friends.

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