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On Egypt

— an interview with Gilbert Achcar

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Following the August 14 crackdown on supporters of Morsi and the Muslim Brotherhood, we asked Gilbert Achcar a followup on the explosive turn of events. His response, sent August 19, follows.

ATC: You had said that forcibly suppressing the Muslim Brotherhood “would be very costly for Egyptian economy and society.” After the massacre of August 14 and the events that have followed, what’s the hope for a democratic revolutionary process continuing in Egypt? What should be the response of the Egyptian and international left to this escalating and deadly crisis?]

GA: The repression of the Muslim Brotherhood proved very costly indeed, both in human lives and for its impact on the Egyptian economy, not to mention the serious deterioration of the country’s image. But note that I spoke before of a suppression of the Muslim Brotherhood, which to this date is still not what is going on.

Escalating the repression to the level of suppressing the Brotherhood would definitely entail an even higher and more lasting cost. Under such conditions, the best scenario remains a return to the political track, with a compromise between the military and the Muslim Brotherhood. This would require that the Brothers depart from their intransigent attitude.

Most of the Egyptian left (the Revolutionary Socialists being one exception) have welcomed the repression after having welcomed the coup. This shows their weakness and failure to design a truly independent third way rejecting both the old regime and the Islamic fundamentalists.

“No military and no Brothers, the revolution is still in the square” was a major slogan of the leftwing mobilizations in the weeks before and after the election of Morsi. Unfortunately, most of the left proved incapable of sticking to this line and focusing on building a mass movement centered on social demands. Instead, they shifted from allying with the Muslim Brotherhood in the fight against the old regime to allying with the latter’s main apparatus in the fight against the MB.

The international left should avoid this same pitfall of swinging between these two poles, as unfortunately some have done, suddenly shifting to what amounts, to all intents and purposes, to blanket support of the Muslim Brotherhood depicted as “innocent victims.” Both the military — who, on top of their very heavy-handed bloody repression, are busy reestablishing many of the old regime’s positions that were overtaken by the 2011 uprising — and the Muslim Brotherhood who, on top of what they did during their stint in power, are resorting to disgusting sectarian agitation and attacks, must equally be condemned.

The hatred of the Christian Copts in Egypt plays the same function that anti-Semitism played in Weimar Germany.

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