

Presentation of the Socialist Popular Alliance Party

Sunday 11 December 2011, by [Jadaliyya](#) (Date first published: 18 November 2011).

[Note: The Revolution Continues Alliance, of which the Socialist Popular Alliance Party is a member, has announced on 20 November 2011 that it suspended its election campaigns in protest of the recent clampdown against protesters in Tahrir Square.]

The Socialist Popular Alliance Party (SPA)—founded immediately following the ouster of former President Hosni Mubarak—was the first Egyptian leftist party to be legally recognized after the January 25 Revolution. On 28 September 2011, the party was officially registered, having met the quota of 5,000 signatures needed for licensing.

Before the Revolution

The SPA had no presence before the revolution but it brings together a number of leftist groups, which were active prior to the revolution, including the Socialist Renewal Current, Democratic Left, and Al-Tagammu Party. Activists associated with the 1970s student movement have also joined SPA's ranks.

The SPA has attracted many of the Al-Tagammu members who left their party after Egypt's 2010 elections to protest the party's participation in what were clearly fraudulent elections. They have been joined by members of the Socialist Renewal Movement. The latter is a splinter group of the Revolutionary Socialists, which was created in 1995 by Trotskyite student groups. Another group that joined the SPA includes members of the Democratic Left, an organization that was established in 2007 and modeled after Europe's social democratic parties.

After the January 25 Revolution, the Revolutionary Socialists quickly split up and the majority of its members founded the Egyptian Social Democratic Party, while a minority joined the new Democratic Workers' Party and SPA.

SPA's main objective is to serve as a unifying platform for the Egyptian left, which is the function that Al-Tagammu used to serve. Before the 2011 revolution, Al-Tagammu was viewed as the left's uniting front and had been able to rally together leftists of all leanings.

A thorn in the side of former President Anwar Sadat during its early years, Al-Tagammu adopted a more conciliatory tone toward the regime during the 1980s, thereby risking its credibility as the voice of the Egyptian left. Some say that Al-Tagammu was co-opted by the Mubarak regime, as evidenced by its strong opposition to Islamist groups like the Muslim Brotherhood.

The SPA has not, however, been able to co-opt all leftist platforms in the country. Leftist parties that were formed after the ouster of Mubarak, including the Democratic Workers' Party and the Egyptian Socialist Party, remain outside the SPA. Older leftist groups, including the Egyptian Communist Party, have also refrained from joining SPA.

Party Structure

The SPA has a Constituent Assembly and a Secretariat. Assembly members are elected by local committees from various governorates, as well as function-based committees (e.g., student and media committees). The SPA Assembly elects the Secretariat, which includes at least one member from each local and function-based committee.

Parliamentary Elections

The SPA initially planned to participate in the elections through common lists with the Egyptian Bloc, an electoral alliance founded by a group of liberal and leftist forces. However, SPA chose to leave the Egyptian Bloc, allegedly because other participating parties allowed former ruling National Democratic Party members to run on the Bloc's lists.

The SPA decided instead to run on shared lists with the Revolution's Youth Coalition, Egyptian Current Party, Egypt Freedom Party, Equality and Development Party, and Egyptian Alliance Party. The lists of these parties are called Al-Thawra Mostammera ('The Revolution Continues'). According to its members, the Revolution Continues Alliance (RCA) comprises an ideologically diverse set of actors, namely liberal, Islamists and socialists, including the youth of the Muslim Brotherhood who defected from the group and helped form the Egyptian Current Party.

Through 280 candidates (out of a possible 332), the RCA is contesting thirty-four (out of a possible forty-six) party list races for the 508-member lower house of parliament. Additionally, twenty-six (out of a possible 166) candidates will contest single-winner seats. The legal framework governing the elections gives the ruling Supreme Council of the Armed Forces the right to appoint ten of the 508 members of the lower house.

Click here to learn more about the election rules and dates.

<http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/3192/the-concise-idiots-guide-to-the-egyptian-elections>

According to Egyptian Current Party leader and former Muslim Brotherhood member, Islam Lotfy, 100 of these candidates are below the age of forty. The majority of candidates that the alliance will field belong to the SPA, according to RCA member Khaled Abdel Hamid. Some thirty-two are affiliates of the Egyptian Current Party.

Titled "Security, Freedom, and Social Justice," the RCA's platform, which it announced in early November, focuses on re-establishing law and order, promoting social justice and closing the income gap between the rich and the poor. It also calls for securing a swift transfer of power from the ruling military council to an elected civilian authority by mid-2012.

Relationship with Other Political Parties

The SPA was previously part of the Egyptian Bloc electoral coalition, which also included the Free Egyptians Party, Egyptian Social Democratic Party, Egypt Freedom Party, Al-Tagammu, Egyptian Communist Party, Democratic Front Party, Awareness Party, Sufi Tahrir Party and Socialist Party of Egypt. The alliance has been formed by several liberal, social democratic, and leftist groups, and is commonly viewed as an attempt to counterbalance Islamist trends in the upcoming legislative election. However, the Socialist Popular Alliance, among others, left the Egyptian Bloc when other parties in the coalition began accepting former NDP members into their ranks. The only remaining parties in the Bloc today are the Free Egyptians Party, Al-Tagammu, and the Egyptian Social Democratic Party.

The decision to join the Egyptian Bloc was already the subject of controversy within the SPA, as many members objected to joining a coalition that is primarily counter-Islamist in its orientation and one that includes pro-business parties such as the Free Egyptians Party. The majority of the party's

members, however, supported the decision to join the Egyptian Bloc initially when it was created on 15 August 2011. The decision to withdraw came less than two months later.

The SPA ultimately decided to field its candidates through RCA electoral coalition. As the only licensed party in the RCA, the SPA is the only member of that alliance with the right to field party lists in the elections, and thus all other groups in the coalition are obligated to field their party list candidates through the SPA. The RYC and the Egyptian Current Party almost withdrew from the RCA one week before the candidate registration deadline, objecting that the SPA was dominating the top positions of all lists at the expense of the youth groups. The problem was quickly renegotiated to allow more youth members to head lists and the RCA was able to submit its candidate rosters before the official registration deadline.

On 10 May 2011, the SPA and four other parties declared the formation of the Coalition of Socialist Forces. This new coalition is meant to act as a coordinating body for all “socialist” groups and includes the Socialist Party of Egypt, Democratic Labor Party, Egyptian Communist Party and the Revolutionary Socialists. However, the Coalition for Socialist Forces does not seem to be particularly active so far.

Additionally, the SPA coordinates efforts and issues joint statements with other groups, including the Justice and Freedom Youth Movement whose members overlap with those of the Socialist Renewal Current, No to Military Trials Campaign, Revolutionary Youth Coalition, as well as many other left-leaning, liberal movements and human rights organizations.

Stances on Salient Issues

Social Justice

The SPA supports a minimum wage in addition to a maximum wage that does not exceed fifteen times the minimum wage. It has taken part in demonstrations calling for the minimum wage to match the 2010 court-mandated level of 1,200 EGP per month.

Economic Policy

The SPA is committed to a social welfare state with free health care and education, as well as state support for cultural and artistic activities.

Its economic program advocates for ending privatization initiatives launched under the Mubarak regime. It also seeks to ensure previous privatization deals are audited to ascertain the presence or absence of corruption.

The SPA further calls for restructuring Egypt’s social insurance and pension program. Social security programs, the party maintains, must be managed by the National Organization for Social Security and supervised by program beneficiaries.

Religion and the State

The party supports a civil democratic state and its members are mostly proponents of the separation of religion and state.

Minorities

The SPA program also upholds a constitution that does not discriminate between its citizens on grounds of religion, beliefs, gender or race. Some party members helped create the nonprofit

Egyptians Against Religious Discrimination.

Military Trials

The SPA is firmly against military trials of civilians. The party has participated in numerous activities protesting this practice and signed several statements condemning the use of military tribunals.

Strikes and Labor Movements

The party is a strong supporter of labor movements and workers' right to strike. The party and its members have supported labor movements and demands for better working conditions and more just wages.

Foreign Relations

On foreign relations, the SPA is for ending the Qualified Industrial Zone agreement with Israel and for terminating the exportation of Egyptian gas and cement to that country. It also urges the severing of all trade and economic relations with Israel.

Media Image and Controversies

According to SPA member Gihan Shabaan, conflicts inside the party so far center on how to relate to Islamist groups and pro-business liberal parties. Members are split between those who wish to go into an alliance with pro-business liberal parties such as the Free Egyptians Party and those who argue that alliances should be based on social and economic considerations only rather than one's position on the Islamist/non-Islamist divide.

Key Figures

Emad Ateyya

Emad Ateyya was a leftist student activist during the 1970s and a member of one of the underground organizations that eventually formed the Egyptian Communist Party. He left the Egyptian Communist Party in 1987 to help create the People's Party (Hezb Al-Shaab).

Ateyya was one of the organizers of the Egyptian Popular Committee in Solidarity with the Intifada, an Egyptian movement created in solidarity with the second Palestinian Intifada.

Ateyya also played a major role in the Engineers against Guardianship, a movement advocating the lifting of court-ordered custodianship of the Egypt's Engineers' Syndicate. Judicial guardianship was imposed on the syndicate in 1995 on grounds that the Syndicate's General Assembly had committed financial violations. Engineers against Guardianship, in which Ateyya was an active member, argued that this order was part of a regime-sponsored scheme to restrict dissent and political freedoms.

Ateyya took part in several other initiatives to unite the left, including a 2005 attempt to rally leftist forces under an umbrella organization called the Leftist Union. The initiative ultimately failed due to disagreements among its various factions. In 2005, Ateyya, along with other activists, founded an anti-Mubarak movement similar to the Kefaya Movement called the Popular Campaign for Change. This campaign was disbanded in early 2006.

Born in 1951, Ateyya studied at the Engineering Faculty at Cairo University and traveled to the Soviet Union during the mid-seventies to study at Moscow's Petroleum Institute.

Khaled Al-Sayed

Khaled Al-Sayyed is a member of the Renewal Socialist Current, one of the main groups that contributed to the founding of the SPA. He is also a member of the Revolution's Youth Coalition Board and an active member of the Justice and Freedom Youth Movement. In the upcoming elections, Al-Sayyed is running in his hometown district of Helwan.

Wael Gamal

Wael Gamal is the Managing Editor of Al Shorouk daily in Egypt. Gamal is known for his pro-labor and pro-social welfare views. He has written several articles calling for minimum and maximum wages. After the ouster of Mubarak, activists used these articles to refute the government's claims that workers were wrong to protest.

Abdel Ghaffar Shukr

Abdel Ghaffar Shukr is Deputy President of the Arab and African Research Center in Cairo and a former member of the Political Bureau of Al-Tagammu Party. He has written several books on Egyptian politics, including Political Coalitions in Egypt 1976-1993 and The Role of Civil Society in Democratic Change.

Amr Abdel Rahman

Amr Abdel Rahman is one of the founding members of the SPA. Born in 1980, Abdel Rahman is a former political analyst for the European Union Commission in Cairo and a currently a researcher at Essex University in the United Kingdom. He often criticizes the commitment of the country's conventional left to classical Marxism. Additionally, Abdel Rahman was one of the founders of the Democratic Left, a group that emerged in 2007 and modeled itself after Europe's social democratic parties.

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[Developed in partnership with Ahram Online.]

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