

Egypt: Five socialist parties unite

Friday 13 May 2011, by [El HEBEISHY Mohamed](#), [SAMAK Dina](#) (Date first published: 12 May 2011).

In a bid to gain political ground, five of Egypt's socialist movements unite under the new Coalition of Socialist Forces banner

May 11, 2011 — Five Egyptian political parties and movements unite to form the Coalition of Socialist Forces, they announced in a meeting on May 10, 2011. The newly formed coalition is made up of the Social Party of Egypt, the Democratic Labour Party, the Popular Socialist Coalition Party, Egypt Communist Party and the Revolutionary Socialists. It aims to include under its umbrella other socialist movements in Egypt, which are considered fragmented.

"We [social political activists] are optimistic that the Coalition of Socialist Forces will bring a stronger socialist presence onto Egypt's political scene", said Gigi Ibrahim, a political activist.

During the May 10 meeting, there were intense discussions regarding the recent turn of events in the country and how it impacts the revolution.

The Coalition of Socialist Forces has appealed to all Egyptians, irrespective of their ideologies, to amass in Tahrir Square on Friday May 13 in a bid to protect the demands of revolution and for national unity.

By Mohamed El Hebeishy

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<http://english.ahram.org.eg/~NewsContent/1/64/11855/Egypt/Politics-/Five-socialist-parties-unite-to-impact-Egyptian-po.aspx>

Egypt's leftist front, will it survive?

By Dina Samak

After years of working underground, leftists in Egypt are uniting under one front to work for the social justice revolution is meant to spell.

May 12, 2011 — For decades the word "socialism" has aroused scepticism in Egypt. After more than 15 years of Gamal Abdel Nasser's rule, the once esteemed doctrine that was adopted by the one-party ruling establishment until the early 1970s is considered by many as the cause of Egypt's misfortune in the decades since. However, now that Nasser's Arab socialism no longer exists, its adherents, emboldened by the revolution, are trying to find their way back into the political scene.

A few days ago five socialist groups and newly established parties united to form a "socialist front".

According to Yehia Fekry, one of the founders of the Popular Democratic Alliance Party, the front aims at organising the efforts of different socialist groups already working on the ground before and after the January 25 Revolution in order to create a more dominant leftist force. The intention being that such an entity would be able to attract people who already sympathise with the politics and ideas of the left but don't identify themselves as leftists.

"Everyone is in the street", says Fekry, "the question now is who will win the hearts and minds of the masses. The left has a great chance to do so as one of the main demands of the revolution is social justice and one of its main forces are the workers. But will we be able to do this? It remains to be seen."

The new front includes:

- The Popular Democratic Alliance Party, in which members of many leftist organisations united to form one leftist party. This mainly includes former members of the Tagammu Party (the only leftist legal party in Mubarak's Egypt) who left it and later joined the alliance after a split over the party's position on November's parliamentary elections.
- The Socialist Party of Egypt, whose membership includes a number of the major figures from Egyptian politics since the seventies.
- The Egyptian Communist Party that used to organise, mobilise and work through the Tagammu Party as it was considered an illegal party until Mubarak's fall.
- The Workers' Democratic Party, the first workers' party in Egypt founded by worker activists and social labour activists.
- The Revolutionary Socialists, a group of international socialists who worked for years under the umbrella of the Center for Socialist Studies.

The need for a left alternative according to many leftists had become a very important demand even before 25 January. "Wherever there is a capitalist system people need a leftist party", says Gamal Abdel Fattah, a socialist activist who welcomed the step of forming a united leftist front. "But now such a party is of great importance as those who made the revolution (the workers and the poor) are not yet in power and their interests are not well presented yet." But like many others, Fattah remembers that other attempts to create a united front for the left failed.

In 2006, different leftist groups tried to form what was known as the Socialist Alliance. This aimed at creating a leftist alternative to work on the ground, especially with the new wave of industrial action emerging at the time. Yet no sooner had the alliance been announced than the differences between its members paralysed its coordination on the ground.

"We all have negative experience with trying to create a united leftist movement", says Aida Seif, a prominent human rights activist and one of the founders of the Workers' Party. "But the current moment is different than any other that we passed through before. We are in a revolution and every one of us wants to get the best out of it."

Seif believes that the demands are clearer than ever and that any mobilisation based on them will succeed in attracting people to a leftist program. "All political trends are talking about social justice but what kind of justice is what really matters", she says. "Most of the new parties (now) and the state-controlled trade unions are committed to the defence of Egyptian capitalism. I can't understand why people take free market economy for granted after all that the workers suffered in the past decades."

For Seif, the main duty for the left right now is to help mobilise the working classes (to her this encompasses both blue- and white-collar workers) to defend their own rights. Other goals also mentioned in the socialist front's first statement include equal rights for all citizens and a democratic state.

But considering that the parties taking part in the front share similar programs, many ask why doesn't the left have one party instead?

"The whole idea of the Popular Alliance is to create one party for the left", says Fekry. Despite much effort to achieve this, he explains, other parties did not welcome the idea of merging "so we agreed that we should try to build an entity through which we can coordinate and work together."

The Socialist Party was one of those that did not welcome the merge. Ahmed Bahaa Shaaban, one of the party's founders, thinks that it is too early for leftists to start an argument about a united program. "All the parties need to elaborate a concrete program and then we can start talking about unity, but until this happens we need a high level of coordination between us all because this is the only way we can create a leftist pole", says Shaaban. "The existence of four or five leftist parties in a country with a population exceeding 85 million does not mean that the left has a problem in uniting its power. Look at the liberals, how many parties do they have?"

The left in Egypt has been a force on the ground since the beginning of the 20th century, but for decades affiliated organisations have had to operate underground. This is blamed for leftist groups not being able to recruit on a large scale. With a workers' movement that has been gaining momentum since 2006 and an open political ground for all groups to organise, the challenge is bigger than ever.

"We know that talking about a united left can be seen by many as an over blow, especially that every one of these organisations has a membership that does not exceed a few hundred", says Hesham Fouad of the Revolutionary Socialists. "However, there is a huge political opportunity on the ground and we can, with real organisation, be a true force with deep grassroots."

Fouad, like other socialists, believes that the global economic crisis that erupted in 2008 is deepening and that anger over unemployment, poverty and corruption is escalating due to the much reported ostentatious wealth of a narrow ruling elite backed by a political system impassive to the basic needs of the majority of the population. "People now believe that the whole system has to change, what we need, as the left, is explain to the people why this is true and where they can go from here. But after all, it is their battle and the left cannot win it for them even if it wins all the seats in parliament."

With an optimistic yet sceptical smile, Abel Fattah says: "People say that whenever two leftists sit together in the same room they end up disagreeing about something only they see as very important. But we can't afford to have this anymore."

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<http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/1/64/11968/Egypt/Politics-/Egypts-leftist-front,-will-it-survive.aspx>

P.S.

* <http://links.org.au/node/2308>