Interview with Dr. Samer Soliman of SDP

This had been copied from Dr. Wariga Bowman’s Blog. Dr. Wariga Bowam is a Visiting Assistant professor at AUC and I worked with her as her research assistant during the year of the revolution in 2011. An interview with Dr. Samer Soliman, Professor of Political Science at AUC, which was conducted on Aug 14, 2011 and Aug 16, 2011 by Heba Galal who is my masters’ student and did very well in leadership class this summer. She is a budding academic, and a very hard worker. She came up with almost all of these questions herself. I left almost the entire interview in Heba’s voice. I think you will find it very informative.

Date
Thursday, August 18, 2011

Me

1. Could you please give me a quick brief about yourself and why do you choose this party in particular to participate in?

Dr. Samer Soliman

I was born in 1968, I graduated from faculty of Political Science in 1986, and I got my master’s degree in 1993, then I travelled to Paris where I got my PhD. I wrote many articles in Shorouk news, Al-Tagamo, Islam online, El Destor, and El Masry El Youm. I felt more comfortable while I was writing in Shorouk news, but I did not feel comfortable while I was writing in El-Masry El Youm as they always object writing some specific articles. I’m founder of Egyptian Social Democratic Party and I’m also member of Journalists’ syndicate and also I was a member of popular campaign of change and many campaigns like this. I am a founder of this party which mainly based on the idea of a liberal and leftist and social democracy which means that we take the concept of democracy based on a wide definition. Social democracy can deliver people’s rights and achieve them.

Me

2. What is the main platform of the party and what make it different than other parties? Don’t you think that the phrases that used to express the main objectives and principles of the party are very long and the party itself stated that in its formal page in Facebook? Did the party make any change so far?

Dr. Samer Soliman

As I told you previously it is based on a background of a liberal and leftist. The liberal ideas are based on social justice whereas the leftist ideas are based on the economy of the market since we encourage the private sectors, but we did not encourage privatization. Private sectors should work on development and moving toward progress.

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The party is trying to reach power through elections and also the parliament. The party can [work with] other parties to reach the power or it can reach the power individually. The main role of the party to [attain] power or argue with the government to reach the power. What do you mean that the principles are so long? I do not know about this announcement, but I guess what is really important is that our actions in the situations, there is no need to memorize them, for instance, we have taken action toward the minimum rate of wages. The party established in March 18 and then it formally announced its principles and formed all of its members at the end of June or in the beginning of July when it reached 5000 members and also [received] the authorization.

Me

3. Although the members of this party started to be active in the media lately still their appearance in media is very weak, do you have any justification for that?

Dr. Samer Soliman

I agree with you that there is a weakness regarding their appearance in the media, but they participate in many talk shows though. Let me tell you that the Freedom and Justice party, for instance, or Muslim Brotherhood had been there for a long time and also Free Egyptians Party has strong funds behind their appearance in media since they can finance their advertisements on TV and also you can add to this the Adel party. All of them have strong financial resources, but our party has a limited source of funds. I like the image when we are reflecting the source of poverty as it is not good to show that they have so much money. I feel with more honesty when we try to achieve our principles of our party with using so little source of funds. The main goal of the party to help [the] poor and stand beside workers. I guess you noticed our medical campaigns to help people in different districts.

Me

4. Do you have a preference for the order of parliamentary elections, constitution writing, and presidential elections? Is the SCAF foreclosing a parliamentary and PM system by saying we should hold presidential elections? Is the SCAF serious about elections? What is the way out for the SCAF and what do you think of their attempt to have their role written into the constitution in a forceful way?

Dr. Samer Soliman

Our party promoted the elections by party’s list not by individual candidacy, the SCAF tried to satisfy all the sides. We are concerned by what has been taken from decisions by SCAF, but we still are going to participate in elections.

Our first demand was that constitution first. We tried to make our voices reach to SCAF, but [there is nothing we can do]. Writing [the] constitution is a very important step, we should agree on the rules
first, so it can be like a fair competition to reach power whether it is civilian or not. The constitution is not supposed to be written by the majority of parliamentary group, but it should be written by [a] founding committee which is going to include different sectors, such as all the parties, social sectors, Al Azhar, The Church, and labor unions.

Well, in our party we do not have someone in particular we recommend, but most of the members tend to elect El Baradei as we have many members in the party who are in the campaign to support El Baradei, but this is not officially announced.

No one knows when the elections will be and I do not think that SCAF is planning to stay in the power for a long period of time and they did not prefer to stay for along in the power as they have another issues, they need to work on. SCAF has another plan that they are probably planning to stay in power until the constitution is written. The SCAF needs some kinds stuff, for instance, Mamdouh Shahin, SCAF’s legal adviser needs constitutional articles that are going to be on the behalf of the army and does not give any authorities to the new head of the state to do anything regarding the army. The army has economical empire or in other words the army always tries to maintain its budget confidential and they try to keep its budget independent.

The SCAF needs to participate in writing the constitution to interfere [participate?] in the policies of the country when it is required. The SCAF has some kinds of limits and did not accept some kinds of stuff, for example, he can choose between parliamentary system or presidential system. As parliamentary system has one advantage that it has no president, so he can address the issues that face the country from different aspects whereas presidential system permits SCAF to address the issues that face the country through its president, so it makes the things more obvious to them.

5.July 29 was a Friday of unifying all demands and set all the differences aside. This was the name that all the parties and all the political forces agreed upon it. However, what happened was different as many Islamists and Muslim brotherhood supporters dominated Tahrir square and called for an Islamic state and Sharia law. Do you agree with Sawiris that Islamists hijacked the revolution in El Masry El Youm in Aug 14?

Dr. Samer Soliman

The Islamic groups were marginalized in the last decades as the liberal and leftist groups were highlighted in the media so this was a normal reaction from them. I was not surprised or even shocked. The Islamic groups represent a very great [issue]. The Islamic flows is the strongest power in Egypt but what we have seen in the Tahrir in July 29 cannot be ignored. There were almost 600 thousands out of 85 million there in Tahrir which means nothing, but still we should admit that they still there. Their
attitude toward democracy is not obvious and their situation toward constitutional principles document still ambiguous.

Me

6. All the people were calling for civilian country during the 25th of Jan, however, what we saw in Friday July 29 that the majority but not all are calling for religious country. This caused me confusion and made me asked you this question "what country you prefer a religious or secular or civilian?" Could you please mention the differences between them?

Dr. Samer Soliman

First let me tell you the main difference between all of them. First, religious country this reminds me by what Muslims Brotherhood called for in 2005 when they launched a program for the party in which religious scientists monitor all the legislations of the country so each law issued by the country should be passed by those scientists which is unelected group. The democratic county should base its legislations form its people which is considered an elected group.

[A] secular country is a country [which] separates the religion from the state, so the article 2 should be excluded. All the religious institutions in Egypt should be separated from the state’s policies. US, for instance, is using politics with religion as long as we separate between religion and country’s polices, so it is considered secular country whereas civilian country achieves the equality among all people and the religious people have no control over the country’s polices.

I think I prefer civilian country, however, I think I tend to choose [a] secular country which is a more [realistic] one and needs more development.

Me

7. The trial of ex-president Mubarak and his two sons and also ex-interior minister Habib Al Adly and six of his deputies was shown live on the Egyptian state television, what do you think of this? Do you think that SCAF is trying to regain its trust from people again or what? What is your response toward investigations with political activists such as Asmaa Mahfouz and Loai Naghti and many activists like this?

Dr. Samer Soliman

First of all the trial of the figureheads of the old regime was revolutionary demand and was one of the demands of the revolution. Absolutely SCAF tried to gain its trust from its people and they try to calm people down and let them take revenge from those people. They tried to silence people by doing this toward many activists, but now everyone can talk and express what he /she thinks freely. No one will be
silent now and the media start to encourage people to do so. The SCAF played a dictatorship [dictatorial role] and this is not acceptable at all.

**Me**

8. After all the parties and political forces announced their suspension of sit-ins at Tahrir square, the military police forcibly removed all the protesters from Tahrir square on Aug 2, which coincided with the trial of ex president Mubarak, what is your comment about that? Are you with or against sit-ins and demonstrations at Tahrir Square? Do you think all the demands of the revolutions have been achieved?

**Dr. Samer Soliman**

Well, I think dispers[ing] people with force is not acceptable, but I supported ending the sit ins ]at Tahrir as the number of people started to be reduced and people started to convert from being strong to be weak. I do not think that all the demands of the revolutions have achieved but I know that revolution is still there and nothing will stop us to go again to Tahrir if we feel that there is something wrong.

**Me**

9. What do you think of the new reshuffle of the governors and what is your response toward excluding women and Copts?

**Dr. Samer Soliman**

I think they try to follow the same style of the old regime as most of the candidates are previous Generals in the army and part of the old regime. They try to follow the same steps without any significant criteria.

**Me**

10. What is your comment of the law of perfidy, law No. 344 of 1952 which is going to be applied to people who corrupted the political life in Egypt, do you think that we are in need for this law in these days?

**Dr. Samer Soliman**

No I don’t think so, it is not [an] appropriate law which violates [human rights] and there are many articles in this law can be used against anyone whereas this law has been rejected by Al-Tagamoa party and also human rights organizations. The articles of this law are conformed in a way that can harm anyone without a proper reason. Let me give you an example, for instance, there is something called hatred of religions and insult of military forces and many articles which do not make any sense.
Thank you for your time Dr. Samer. I have enjoyed speaking with you