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Articles

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Dr. Amr Darrag  
Testimonies and Reviews - 3



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## Dr. Amr Darrag: Testimonies and Reviews - 3

### Introduction

In his introduction to this series of episodes, Dr. Amr Darrag said he viewed the invitation to introduce these reviews as, “a good opportunity for taking the first step of narrating and documenting the most important events that I have witnessed over nearly 60 years, the years of my life so far,” Dr. Amr said, adding that through these testimonies, “I was reviewing my most important experiences, successes, or failures, which, shed a lot of light, in a panoramic way, on an important stage of the nation’s history, through my modest narration.”

In [Part 2](#) of “Testimonies and Reviews” (Second Episode), Dr. Amr Darrag indicated the efficiency of the educational process in the government-owned schools at this time, where he received his secondary education. He said he did not engage in politics from an Islamic perspective, but his interest in politics was a general concern. Dr. Darrag said that during the Nasserite period, “religion was not present in the scene, amid moral decay, indecent clothing of women, and fear from going to the mosque.” Dr. Amr also recalled his high school education memories, his hobbies, and the persons that impressed him during that period. “After the death of Nasser, Anwar Sadat assumed power as Egypt’s President in the early 1980s; and within one year, Sadat managed to get rid of all the supporters of the Nasserite current, sent them all to in prison, and was able to control all joints of the state,” Dr. Darrag said, concluding the second episode.

### Third Episode:

In the [third episode](#) of the series of episodes that the London-based Al-Hiwar TV has broadcast (within a program titled: “Reviews”), interviewing Dr. Amr Darrag, the



Egyptian Minister of Planning and International Cooperation in the government of Dr. Hisham Qandil - continued his talk about the university education memories and the Sadat era. During Dr. Amr Darrag's university education, the leftist movement controlled the student unions and the whole university community, which was characterized by moral decay and distance from religion. Dr. Darrag pointed out that these features had extended from the Nasserite era. However, he made it clear that that there were great differences between the leftist thought and the moral practice of the leftists in Egypt at the time.

Dr. Darrag said he witnessed the beginning of Islamist activity in universities when Sadat allowed Islamists to work freely in universities, which led to the growth of religious sentiment and moral commitment, and accordingly to the decline of the leftist current. Commenting on this transformation, Dr. Amr said that if the Egyptian society has got the freedom of choice, it will return to religious commitment.

He stressed that people's return to religion was a general social change that accompanied the victory of October (1973) and the freedom of public Da'wa (preaching) activity, adding that during that era, the Egyptian TV at that time used to broadcast sermons for Sheikh Mohamed Metwalli Al-Shaarawi; and the mosques witnessed Islamist activity in Cairo, [as in Assad Ibn Al-Furat Mosque, where Sheikh Ibrahim Ezzat used to deliver sermons and practice preaching] and in Alexandria, where Sheikh Ahmed Mahallawi used to give religious lectures. Dr. Amr pointed to the emergence of the Muslim Brotherhood in the Egyptian scene at that time, where the Islamist group was able to contain and organize the Islamic activity both in university and in public life. Accordingly, there were great changes in Egypt's university life with the spread of "hijab" among girls. The Islamists were then able to enter into student unions, and even become members of parliament. Dr. Darrag stressed that he used to vote for the Islamist movement as he was convinced of their activity – though he was

not a member of any Islamist group at the time. So, Dr. Amr believes that if the Islamists showed competence in their activity, many people would vote for them.

Then Dr. Darrag talked about the charitable work that has been common among the Islamist movement, particularly the Brotherhood, and discussed the argument that it can be a means to win votes. In this context, Dr. Amr talked about his participation in a book titled “Rethinking Political Islam” upon an invitation by Brookings Institute with 12 other writers from countries where Islamists made progress in elections. In “Rethinking Political Islam”, Dr. Amr wrote a chapter (Politics or piety?) in which he responded to Western researchers who link the achievement of electoral victories by the Islamic trend, and the social services that they provide. Dr. Darrag’s argument was that the motive for charitable work among the Islamists stems from piety and faith as part of religious commitment, and that charity work in the Islamic movement has existed even before the existence of a political agenda for Islamists. He linked people's choices and electoral bias to citizens themselves when they ask themselves questions like: Shall we vote for those who are efficient in providing services for us, or for those who are mere vocal phenomena.

Dr. Amr said that he has practiced political work since he was a student from a national perspective, and did not involve in any activities during the university stage, as he was only interested in his own study, graduation, and appointment as a university tutor to achieve his old dream (of becoming a university professor).

Dr. Darrag also talked about the diversity in his social relations, pointing out that he had strong relations with Egyptian Christians, and stressing the existence of strong social fabric at that time; which continued until Sadat and his security forces invented the so-called “sectarian strife” to cause social splits and exploit this in controlling the Egyptian community.

He spoke about the policy of economic openness during the Sadat era which came after the socialist era during the Nasserite era, where socialism was pervading (Socialism had even been a song that was used to be sung by poets and singers, such as Abdel-Halim Hafez). This policy of openness allowed some Egyptians to make quick profits without providing any real production. Furthermore, the flow of funds that were transferred by Egyptian expatriates working in the rich Gulf countries after the emergence of oil, resulted in a disparity between social classes and a profound social change in a very short span of time. This led to the outbreak of violent protests in January 1977, which were led by the left-wing movement, with the aim of resisting the negative change that was taking place in society, and the prosperity of some at the expense of other toiling social strata. Because these protests were accompanied by violence, including destroying shops and cars – which ironically was fed by the security services – Sadat called the event “Uprising of Thieves” in attempt to limit its spread. Dr. Amr referred to the shock caused by Sadat's visit to Israel, where Sadat announced that he wanted to break the psychological barrier between the Arabs and Israel by delivering a speech in the Israeli Knesset. In reaction to this, there was a community rejection of Sadat’s move. However, Sadat, for his part, continued his move until he signed Camp David Accords with Israel under US auspices. Dr. Amr also referred to Sadat's political openness which he presented through what he called “platforms”, which later evolved into parties. He said this period also witnessed the emergence of great political figures who used to publish articles that young people eagerly followed and read regularly: like Mohamed Helmy Murad, Adel Hussein, Mumtaz Nassar, and Mahmoud Al-Qadi. Dr. Darrag also pointed to Al-Dawa magazine, organ of the Muslim Brotherhood at the time, which used to resist Sadat’s orientation towards Israel.

Dr. Darrag said the government at that time used to organize trips for young Egyptian people, including travelling abroad on summer vacations; and that in this context he joined a trip organized by the government to Germany. Before that journey, Dr. Amr attended a lecture delivered by Minister of Youth and Sports at the time, Dr. Abdel Hamid Hassan, where he was promoting President Sadat's visit to Jerusalem and defaming the Arab nation using insults and obscene words against Arabs, which was shocking to him. This shows the orientation of the country in the direction of the West, the US, and Israel, at that time, amid a broad community rejection of such policies.

When he travelled to Germany within a government program in this context, he met with young people from Western countries belonging to different cultures and morals, which gave him a picture of the ethics of the Western society.

Dr. Darrag also referred to the political and intellectual great figures that were prominent at that time, including Fouad Serageddin as well many other thinkers who had shifted from leftist thought to Islamic thought thanks to the intellectual openness in the Egyptian society then: such as Abdul Wahab Al-Messiri, Adel Hussein, Khaled Mohamed Khaled, Mustafa Mahmoud, Mohamed Emara, and others.

Those prominent political and intellectual figures helped the Egyptian society to stand against the regime's orientations towards the West. Also, the regime at that time pretended to adopt Islamic orientations, and Sadat called himself the "Believer" President. Sadat, then declared his siding with Islamic principles and stated in the Constitution that Islamic Sharia is the main source of legislation. In spite of his recognition that Islam is "a religion and a state at the same time", Sadat contradicted himself by declaring later that: "There is no politics in religion; and there is no religion in politics".

At the end of the third episode, Dr. Amr Darrag said that his uncle, a university professor at the time, was pressured to courtesy Sadat's wife, who was then one of his



university students, in exams and assessment, as an example of Sadat's abuse of power.



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