

# Foda's party fights for legality

While they struggle to establish their own political party, the political heirs of assassinated writer Farag Foda are also preparing for a confrontation with the Islamist groups, reports **Abdel-Azim Darwish**

The associates of Dr Farag Foda, the secularist writer who was assassinated by Islamist gunmen last June, are increasing their efforts to establish an anti-Islamist party under the name of Al-Mustaqbal (the Future). But these efforts hit a snag when the semi-governmental Political Parties Committee objected to the party's formation on the basis of a legal technicality. The Committee claimed that the signatures of the party's founders had not been certified legally and, therefore, their application must be rejected.

But Ahmed Talaat, a lawyer, who was chosen by Foda's political heirs to head the party, has vowed to fight the Committee's decision. He took the case to the Political Parties Tribunal, requesting it to overrule the Committee's decision.

In Talaat's view, however, the "real" battle of the new party, once it obtains a license, will be fought against "those who try to politicise religion or, conversely, who inject religion into politics." Talaat objects to the slogan "Islam is the solution" which is raised by the alliance of the Socialist Labour Party and the outlawed Muslim Brotherhood. Unless it is rendered into a concrete plan of action, he argues, this slogan "represents a type of intellectual intimidation."

Talaat lists five basic principles of democracy which it enshrines; Egypt's international relations must be respected; only the national interest may justify the demand for altering these commitments; Egyptians have their roots in Pharaonic Egypt but their future is inextricably tied to that of the Arab nation; geographically they are located in Africa but they are culturally linked to the Mediterranean. All four factors — Pharaonic, Arab, African and Mediterranean — must serve as the basis of Egypt's regional and international role; — the new party's objective is to give expression to positions that would serve the nation and also serve to unite, rather than divide, the people's ranks; and finally national commitment to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which also serve as one of the documents binding on the party.

Asked about the recent spate of terrorist activity, Talaat said: "I believe that the condition we have reached is due to the absence of democracy for long years under the shadow of the one-party system. People had lost hope that things could be changed peacefully by means of the ballot box. As a result, the majority of people adopted a negative attitude regarding the nation's problems while an extremist minority embraced the belief that change must be imposed by force."

To emerge from this impasse, democratic practice must be broadened and restrictions on the freedom of expression must be removed, Talaat said.

Talaat said the confrontation of extremism "requires a division of roles between the majority and minority parties... The brunt should be borne by the majority that has faith in democratic dialogue and persuading the people by means of reason and logic."

Talaat warned that the alternative would be the emergence of an "organised minority that would seek to impose its will and destroy the very foundations of democracy."