

## AGRARIAN PROGRAM OF THE LEBANESE COMMUNIST PARTY

In June 1973, the Lebanese Communist Party held a national conference on the agrarian question, with the participation of representatives of Party branches and the Central Committee membership. The participants heard and discussed the CC report made by Nicolas Chaoui, General Secretary of the CC LCP, a report of the CC LCP agrarian commission on amendments to the Party Program on the agrarian question, a report of the Central Committee organizational department on the organization of Party work in the countryside, five reports by representatives of regional Party organizations, as well as numerous contributions on various aspects of the agrarian question in Lebanon. After the discussion, the participants adopted the final text of the new LCP program on the agrarian question.

At a press conference held in Beirut on January 15, Nicolas Chaoui, General Secretary of the CC LCP, explained the objective reasons for the delay in publishing the conference documents, due to events in the country and region. He told how the Party's agrarian program was drawn up and analyzed its contents. Following are excerpts from his speech, the full text of which was published in *An-Nida* on January 16, 1974.

### FIRST SCIENTIFIC AGRARIAN PROGRAM IN LEBANON

Our Party's agrarian program is the first document of its kind in Lebanon which makes an all-round study of the agrarian question from the Marxist-Leninist standpoint. Its elaboration, together with other investigations and documents, took several years of research, effort and work. The decision to draw up an agrarian program was adopted at our Party's Second Congress. For this purpose, a commission was set up consisting of a number of high-level workers of the central Party apparatus and provincial organizations, as well as agricultural specialists. The commission thoroughly studied various aspects of the agrarian question and submitted the draft program to the CC LCP, which, after discussion, adopted this document.

Taking into consideration the complexity of the agrarian question in Lebanon and the fact that our membership did not have adequate time at its disposal for discussing the draft program, the Third LCP Congress decided to postpone its adoption and recommended that the CC hold a special Party conference for this purpose.

In the period after the Third Congress the draft program was again thoroughly discussed and a number of formulations and provisions were changed. Moreover, "The Agrarian Question in Lebanon in the Light of Marxism," a collection of articles comprehensively analyzing

the main aspects of the agrarian program was of great help to Party members in leading the struggle of the rural masses, particularly that of the tobacco growers, in broadening and strengthening the cooperative movement in the country, etc. Our Party was able to make the agrarian question a national cause, drawing the attention of the broadest social sections in Lebanon.

### THREE SECTIONS OF THE AGRARIAN PROGRAM

The LCP agrarian program consists of three sections.

The *first section* is devoted to an analysis of Lebanon's agrarian problems. It deals with such issues as the productive forces and production relations, the causes for agriculture's lag compared to other branches of the economy, the shortages experienced by agricultural workers, peasants and farmers, government policy in the sphere of agriculture, class struggle in the countryside, the position and interests of various social strata in the rural communities.

The *second section* contains the Party's alternative solutions to the existing conditions. These proposals of the LCP for improving conditions in agriculture consist of two parts. The first one, dealing with the present-day situation, sets forth immediate demands and proposes temporary (palliative) solutions. The second deals with the general principles of democratic agrarian reform, which would fundamentally resolve the agrarian question in the interests of agricultural workers, in the interests of developing agricultural production, a basic component of the national economy.

The *third and final section* of the LCP agrarian program is devoted to the methods of Party activity in putting the program into effect.

Our Party's agrarian program expresses the objective demands of a particular stage in Lebanon's development, characterized by the widespread development of capitalism in the countryside and substitution of the old, semi-feudal forms of exploitation by modern methods of capitalist exploitation, the scourge of farm laborers, small and medium peasants, resulting in aggravation of the class struggle in the countryside.

### SOME DATA ON THE SITUATION IN LEBANESE AGRICULTURE

N. Chaoui noted that agriculture's share in the country's national income is declining from year to year: whereas in 1950 it was 20 per cent, now it is less than 10 per cent. The share of domestic agriculture in meeting the population's demands in staple food is also diminishing. At present, 75 per cent of the bread, 80 per cent of the meat and 60 per cent of the milk products Lebanon needs are imported, while the income from the export of vegetables, fruit and tobacco accounts for only half the outlay for acquiring food staples.

At the same time, despite the limited amount of arable land in the country, sowing areas are not being expanded; on the contrary, they are steadily diminishing. During the past few years, cultivation of

some 70,000 hectares was abandoned and it is being bought up cheaply by big landowners and capitalists. Altogether there are about 170,000 hectares of arable land, i.e. the area of long-fallow and arable lands exceeds that now being cultivated.

And it is not only the land that is not being fully used, but also the available water for irrigation. Irrigation increases the harvest by at least three to five times. However, a large part of the water in Lebanon is wasted. In the years since independence, the country's irrigated lands have increased by only 16,000 hectares. Moreover, mainly privately-owned artesian wells are used for this purpose.

The cost of agricultural production in Lebanon is very high despite the diminishing costs of labor. The reason is that the big landowners have raised the land rent; also, the farmers, particularly the small and medium ones, inevitably become entangled in the exploiters' net: first they get credits to buy seed, buy or rent farm machines, fertilizers, agricultural chemicals, and then fall prey to the owners of refrigeration and processing plants.

The Agricultural and Industrial Credit Bank's share in the total amount of credits granted to agriculture has dropped to three per cent. Moreover, this bank credits to the big owners first, while the small and medium farmers have no alternative but to turn to private banks or usurers, who charge 12-15 per cent. and sometimes even up to 50 per cent interest.

Farm machines cost approximately 20 per cent more in Lebanon than in other countries, and fertilizers and agricultural chemicals go at more than twice the price they are sold at in the producer countries. Yearly, approximately 20 per cent of the agricultural crop is lost owing to ineffective methods and means of combating natural disasters and plant diseases.

This forces the small and medium farmers to raise the price of agricultural products in order to cover production costs. Moreover, agricultural products get to the consumer only through middlemen — merchants, firms owning refrigeration plants and factories for processing farm products, etc. As a result, prices are doubled or trebled.

Anarchy of production and the absence of a serious government program further increases the difficulties of agriculture. In particular, government foreign trade policy creates a perpetual problem in the sale of a number of farm products, causing considerable losses to the farmers.

The rural communities are more backward than is generally supposed. Take, for instance, the following data. The 1,900 Lebanese doctors are distributed in the country as follows: 60 in Al-Beka, 100 in the south, 190 in the north, 300 in the Lebanese mountains, 1,250 in Beirut.

The problems connected with receiving an education, widespread

illiteracy and absence of public utilities are common knowledge. It is not surprising therefore that there is an influx of the rural population into Beirut or that large numbers emigrate.

The reasons for this stem from the production relations and government policy, which serves the interests first of all of the finance oligarchy and big landowners. Our agrarian program provides concrete data confirming this opinion.

It is often said that there are no feudal or big landowners in Lebanon, that all the land has been distributed, etc. But this is refuted even by official data. True, most holdings are small or medium. But there are also 439 big landowners who own more than 91,000 small holders.

Its statements, declarations and promises notwithstanding, the government is doing nothing to change the situation in the country. Furthermore, objectively, government policy and its apparatus serve the interests of the big owners and capitalists.

### IMMEDIATE DEMANDS

The part of the LCP agrarian program dealing with immediate measures contains proposals for improving the condition of the agricultural workers and peasants, including the demand to extend health care and social security to the agricultural workers and peasants, and the right to organize trade unions. This part also presupposes the introduction of modern legislation regulating land tenures, determining the rights of peasants, leaseholders and sharecroppers, the setting up of a national fund for supplying the population with farm products. The program also demands improvement of social conditions in the countryside, with the establishment of democratic norms and institutions, etc.

This section also includes a number of proposals for the development of agriculture: concrete proposals for improving land usage and water distribution, granting of loans, farm machinery, fertilizers and the necessary agricultural chemicals at low prices, combating losses caused by natural phenomena, increasing the number of livestock and poultry, developing fishing, etc. In addition, it proposes a series of measures to ensure the sale and processing of agricultural products, developing cooperation, reducing the number of middlemen and products costs in order to cut down consumer prices.

These proposals are intended to alleviate the situation but do not radically solve the agrarian problem. That is why our Party simultaneously sets forth the general principles of a democratic agrarian reform, which would make it possible to solve all these problems in the interests of the agricultural workers, peasants, small and medium farmers, in the interests of an all-round advance in agriculture. As a result of such a reform, tens of thousands of small and medium

landowners would not only retain their holdings but would be in a position to make effective use of them.

### NATIONAL SIGNIFICANCE OF SOLVING THE AGRARIAN PROBLEM

In our view, solution of the agrarian question in Lebanon acquires national significance. Political feudalism, which owes its strength largely to the support of certain rural circles, continues to play a highly reactionary role in Lebanon's political life, in parliament, government and in all state institutions. The weakening of its influence would help change the relation of forces in the interests of progress and democratic development. The LCP agrarian program affords a perspective for the growing weight of the rural population's democratic movement in the political life of the country as a whole.

We are confident that the masses of agricultural workers, peasants and farmers, the masses as a whole will enthusiastically welcome and support our agrarian program because it is in principle based on the needs of the broad masses, as expressed by them on numerous occasions. We are aware that our program will arouse the displeasure and resistance of certain sections, first of all the top landowners and capitalists, who undoubtedly would be affected by the implementation of our proposals. This is to be expected and does not worry us. We are confident that the future belongs to the ideas of our agrarian program, since it is the program of peasants and agricultural workers, of the absolute majority of our people, a program of struggle, a tool in the hands of our comrades and all rural working people in their fight for their immediate aims and a better life.

On the other hand, the LCP agrarian program opens up broader possibilities for strengthening the cohesion of all progressive forces, the forces with which we cooperate in all political battles and demands for resolving immediate problems.

The solutions proposed by our program are of particular significance in the conditions of mounting prices, which make the people's life unbearable. These solutions and proposals are of immense help in fighting inflation, exposing its causes in the sphere of agricultural products, and in pointing out ways of solving this problem.

We hold that our Party has made an important contribution in dealing with this problem, which is of national significance and affects the interests and life of a large part of the Lebanese population. Our Party has proposed a solution to this problem, thereby fulfilling its duty to the masses of the people, first of all the working people of both town and country.