

# COUNTRIES, EVENTS, ANALYSIS

## THE PLANET'S FLASHPOINTS

# MIDEAST PEACE IS IN THE HANDS OF PEOPLES

For more than 40 years now the Middle East has been a hotbed of military-political tension and the origin of several bloody wars that endangered universal peace. The failure to resolve this most protracted of all regional conflicts has poisoned the international atmosphere, retarded the move from confrontation to detente, and swallowed Arab and Israeli resources best used for socioeconomic development.

For all the importance of international factors, including the UN promotion of a Mideast settlement, peace in this region depends primarily on the people themselves. Recent events, described in the articles below, bear witness to this fact.

## A DANGEROUS CROSSROADS

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TIMES are hard for the Lebanese Republic. Since September 23, 1988, it has been without a President. Two governments are contesting power: the lawful cabinet of Selim Hoss, whom the Constitution requires to act as head of state so long as this post remains vacant, and the fascist-supported military transitional government, which proclaimed itself "lawful" ten minutes before the expiry of President Amine Gemayel's term of office.

The long civil war may have blurred the nature of the events and the aims of the opposing forces. Now they are crystal clear. The Phalangists, relying

on support within the army, tried to usurp power by a military coup. Having failed to get the newly-formed cabinet recognised across the state, they have entrenched themselves in "their" zone, and are now conducting separatist work from there. At the same time, the lawful government controls 80% of national territory.

Lebanon's political crisis has not simply deteriorated. It has reached a qualitatively new phase in which the bourgeois regime is losing its state institutions.

Apart from the Christian enclave, a project has been revived to make the country a theocratic racist state, both alien to and threatening the Arab milieu. Reaction has been seeking these aims since the civil war broke out in 1975. Should the project fall on a national scale, they would cut off a chunk of territory, create their own state, and then expand at other areas' expense. The architects of this scheme are obviously imitating Israeli expansionists who are trying to enlarge their state by annexing Arab lands.

The military Christian government in our country is intrinsically racist because of the demographic and religious pattern of Lebanese society, and due to the Phalangists' rejection of Lebanon Arab identity and

their claim to belong to a special, unique and privileged nationality. At present the separatists are engaged in consolidating absolute power over their "mini-state", destroying every distinctive trait of independent Lebanon, including any political, cultural and religious pluralism or democratic freedoms, and suppressing dissidence by force. Muslims are being deported from the enclave and a regime is being set up akin to the fascist order that once existed in Germany, Italy and Spain.

While talking about protecting Christianity in Lebanon and throughout the Arab East, the separatists have more in mind than simply imposing their project on numbers of Lebanese. They have engineered a "Christian question" in order to foment religious strife in Egypt, Syria, Jordan, Iraq, the Sudan and on the soil of the Arab people of Palestine, where millions of Christian Arabs live in harmony with Muslim Arabs as members of the same civic entity.

### Origins of Crisis

To understand the latest developments in Lebanon, it is necessary to review the period before the civil war, in particular the impact of regional and international factors.

Lebanon developed rapidly along capitalist lines in the 1960s and early 1970s. Local financial capital increased and made Lebanon a large banking centre. This led to rapid growth in various economic sectors, including industry. Capitalist production relations took root in the countryside. Traditional branches (trade, transport, including transit, services, tourism etc.) were modernised, and the financiers proceeded to amass and centralise capital in their hands.

The structure of society has fundamentally changed in the last 20 years, as the middle and petty bourgeoisie have diminished in numbers and role, population migration has intensified, and villagers have drifted en masse to the industrial centres.

But capitalism's rapid development and the major shifts in the social and class mix of society have not been accompanied by appropriate changes in the country's political system. Although some reforms were effected in the early 1960s, under President Fuad Chehab, they were limited. The establishment was still functioning on the same confessional basis as during the French mandate, which regulated the composition of Parliament and the allocation of government posts among the 17 largest religious communities. The Christians held obvious privileges under this system.

Thus, society progressed while archaic state structures remained unchanged. This created a striking contradiction between dynamic growth and the obsolete constitutional, political, and legal institutions that held it back. Moreover, the conflict intensified between big capital, fully involved as it was in the world capitalist economy and all its antagonisms,

and the rest of the population—urban and rural wage and salary earners. Precipitated by the world capitalist crisis and regional events, it not only deteriorated further, but also developed into an acute national crisis affecting every sphere—political, economic, social and cultural.

At its 2nd Congress (1968), our party had put forward the idea of *democratic reform as the only possible alternative* for pulling the country out of the crisis in the interests of the majority. It formulated a programme to establish a national democratic regime, noting that it did not call for a socialist revolution—the ultimate aim of the party—but precisely for democratic reform. This communist programme was well received among urban and rural workers and influential groups of the bourgeoisie, and adopted by many respected political forces which during the civil war became a part of the Lebanese patriotic movement.

The prewar period was marked by an unprecedented growth in the struggle for a better life. As the trade unions became involved, so they began to reunite after a long split. The people won considerable social gains, and political and civil liberties became firmly established. Lebanon was now an important information and cultural centre and an oasis for thousands of political emigres representing most liberation movements in the region.

### War, Ruination and a Putsch . . .

The financial oligarchy knew that it could not stop the movement which had united under the banner of democratic reform. It also sensed another danger as the masses streaming into the army of hired labour shed the influence of their communal leaders, who had defended the oligarchy's interests. A class awareness began to replace the one nurtured by communal and confessional ties. The masses had joined in the political struggle.

In this situation the bourgeoisie unsuccessfully attempted to repress them. They then resorted to the feudal reaction to peasant revolts—a civil war. This course was favoured by the circumstances in Lebanon, and in the region as a whole. The ruling clique deliberately used religious and communal strife to kindle a bloody internecine war and to drive out the "aliens". This added to the intensity of the war, distorted its true class nature in the eyes of the world and obscured the actual role of the financial oligarchy and fascist forces who bear responsibility for this slaughter.

The war deprived the working people of their hard-won gains. Even though the still-united trade unions organised major action in defence of labour's interests, the financial oligarchy, which controlled the state and the bureaucratic apparatus, were able to raise inflation to monstrous proportions by using the war as an excuse. The Lebanese pound's rate of

exchange fell by over 100 points,<sup>1</sup> and working people's purchasing power in 4 years shrunk to almost a tenth of what it had been; at present the minimum wage is \$30-33 per month<sup>2</sup>. The social insurance funds have been embezzled, and a marked drop in securities' value through inflation has ruined the holders of treasury bonds.

At the same time Lebanese exports have increased and, despite the ravages of war, industrial and agricultural production has reached the prewar level. The central bank has succeeded in raising hard currency reserves to \$1.5 billion, while retaining its part of the national gold reserve of 9 million ounces of gold. Runaway inflation is thus due primarily to the will of the financial oligarchy, bent on taking back all the concessions wrested from it through years of struggle by the working class, all the labouring masses and the democratic forces.

Tens of thousands of skilled workers, engineers, doctors, teachers and other specialists have left Lebanon. The outflow has been particularly strong from Phalangist-controlled areas: the trampling of civil and personal freedoms there is yet another cause of emigration. The municipal economy, infrastructure, health service, and education have been neglected and fallen into decay.

The oligarchy has employed every means at its disposal, including the demographic structure of Lebanese society, to foment inter-communal strife and religious hatred, fanaticism. It aided and abetted the Israeli invasion and the landing of US-NATO forces in 1982 in order to save its regime. The Zionist occupation, and the military presence of the USA and NATO, helped to install a President defending the oligarchy's interests and armed with its programme. However, the struggle by patriotic and democratic forces, especially the Lebanese Patriotic Resistance Front (founded and fielded by the Communists) forced the invaders to withdraw, retaining only a narrow strip of land along the border. The US-NATO forces were also made to leave.

The last two years of Amine Gemayel's presidency, which expired at midnight on September 22, 1988, were marked by resolute actions of the masses demanding an end to the civil war and the implementation of democratic reform. In the zone controlled by fascist militias, moderate liberals and democrats were increasingly vocal in supporting Lebanese unity and the primacy of law, and condemning the diktat of the reactionary paramilitaries. The influence of secular democratic parties, above all the PCL, and of the trade unions grew. Strikes and demonstrations swept the country.

An obvious change occurred in the power balance—by no means in favour of the financial oligarchy and other bourgeois sections. It became clear that, due

to popular pressure, the Chamber of Deputies, although not reflecting the real political spectrum of contemporary Lebanese society<sup>3</sup>, would have to reckon with the new situation and elect a President who could end the period marked by Israeli occupation and the military-political diktat of the USA and NATO.

Faced by these conditions, top bourgeois leaders sought Washington's help in agreeing with Syria on an acceptable candidate for the presidential post, having assumed that it would manage to impose on the Syrians—and through them on the Lebanese patriotic and democratic forces—a candidate who would guarantee a continuity of the political line. Having failed, the reactionaries paralysed the work of the Chamber of Deputies, preventing parliamentarians from meeting or leaving the Christian zone. With no hope of a president being elected who would defend their interests, they launched a coup by taking advantage of the fact that the army commander and some of his officers were keen to take power at all costs. *This amounted to an act of high treason.*

### New Situation, New Tasks

These events were not unexpected for our party. Its 5th Congress (1987), after precisely and realistically analysing the national and regional situation, had forecast that, after President Gemayel's term of office had expired, the Lebanese bourgeoisie would fail to reach agreement on a successor and a *qualitatively new phase in the civil war would follow.*

The armed coup and the establishment of a military cabinet<sup>4</sup> testify to the breakdown of the confessional system and the dismal failure of the policy of the Lebanese bourgeoisie.

The agony of the regime, we believe, eliminates a whole stage in the campaign for the aims of the national democratic revolution and a national democratic system [these tasks have been raised by our party programme and congress decisions]. The present complex situation demands precise and well-considered actions: the previous regime is falling to pieces, while a new one has not yet emerged. The downfall of the old system does not mean that it will automatically be replaced with another, progressive one—it is only an indispensable condition for this. Relying upon fascist forces and the continuing Israeli occupation of southern Lebanon, and hindering in every way a return to normalcy in the liberated areas, the bourgeoisie may interfere with the birth of an alternative system, and prolong the state of anarchy and regression. Such an outcome would mean a dual perspective: 1) a victory for the separat-

<sup>1</sup> In 1982 \$1 was equivalent to about 3.5 pounds; from the end of 1984 the exchange rate began to plummet. Now the going rate for \$1 is approximately 500 Lebanese pounds.—Ed.

<sup>2</sup> At the present time the prices for goods in Lebanon are determined in terms of their value in US dollars.—Ed.

<sup>3</sup> Sixteen years have passed since the last elections to the Chamber of Deputies. Because of the civil war and the impossibility of holding fresh elections, the parliamentarians' powers have been extended four times.—Ed.

<sup>4</sup> Three of the cabinet's six members have since resigned.—Ed.

ists and the introduction of military-fascist rule in the country; and 2) the anticipation of such events in the region or the world, which would help modify the power balance in favour of the bourgeoisie, thus enabling them to try and restore their collapsed regime.

It should be emphasised that *the Lebanese conflict is closely linked with the crisis being experienced by the region as a whole*. Since the outbreak of the civil war our country has been an arena of intense struggle between regional forces, and this struggle exerts a considerable influence on Mideast developments.

The imperialists have always allotted Lebanon the major role in their plans to impose on the Arabs a capitulationist solution to the Middle Eastern problem, and the situation in Lebanon is a clear reflection of the controversy between the advocates and opponents of a Camp David-style settlement. It is the aim of the imperialist schemes to convert our country into a second (after Egypt) element of the US-Israeli plan of regional control and to guarantee "secure frontiers" for Israel by a ring of friendly, communal-type "mini-states".

Imperialism and the Zionist circles have been labouring to split Lebanon and to extend the same disunity to other neighbouring states. They are trying to use this slaughter-house to bleed white the forces opposed to capitulationist solutions—the Lebanese patriotic forces, Syria, our republic's principal ally and window into the Arab world, and the Palestinian revolution. In parallel, they aim to strike at the heroic uprising of the Arab people of Palestine and the resistance it engenders to the Zionist occupation and an American-style solution to the crisis.

All this places extremely important tasks before the Lebanese democratic forces, especially the Communists. Above all, it is necessary to ensure that military-fascist rule is opposed *throughout the nation* and that the Lebanese factor plays the main part in this, thereby giving the patriots an opportunity to derive maximum benefit from the support of their friends and allies, rebuff any hostile intervention by Israel or Arab reaction, and prevent Lebanon from becoming an arena for various Arab states to settle their accounts. Reaching these goals is tied in with the strengthening of the Lebanese patriotic resistance, and the consolidation of its positions on each inch of our native soil.

The second task is to end the discord and conflicts between the forces which are resisting the reactionary groups and trying to restore national unity. It is also essential to do away with the confessional-communalist fragmentation in liberated areas, so that rather than their affiliation to a specific commune or religion, people's patriotic and democratic convictions become paramount. Through effective administration and the interaction of the various forces these areas will convincingly demonstrate how a united and democratic Lebanon could be.

On September 23, 1988, immediately after the military-fascist coup, the PCL called for a *front for unity and liberation* within which the popular masses and patriotic and democratic forces could fight to restore Lebanon's integrity, Arab identity and the democratic advance of the country.

The recent Extraordinary Plenum of the CC PCL has declared that the situation requires all-out opposition to the military coup, that *without any compromise or half-measures*. Nothing less than the complete defeat of the separatists—this is how the question stands. At the same time this appears impossible without abolishing the confessional system and affirming Lebanon as part of the Arab world, just as it is impossible to overcome the social and economic crisis without abandoning the "free economy" policy.

Resistance to separatism, noted the Plenum, should be comprehensive, and founded on a national democratic programme that rejects confessionalism. The state of affairs in liberated areas will be the best criterion of its viability. This programme looks to all, including those in the Christian zone. It concerns, first and foremost, the satisfaction of the working people's vital needs. To meet the requirements of the struggle itself, all the patriotic and democratic forces should be mobilised, and combat readiness declared in the face of probable attempts by the military government's supporters to "explode" the situation with weapons, backed by Israel, Iraq, and imperialist and reactionary circles.

The Plenum has stressed the great importance of forming an alliance of national progressive parties and organisations united around a programme for radical democratic reform. Simultaneously it drew attention to the political activity of those who support the lawful government of Selim Hoss and express the positions of influential groups of the national bourgeoisie, who have reasons of their own for opposing the division of Lebanon, its subjection to Zionist influence, and the military-fascist regime.

Patriotic resistance should bear a *mass character*. It is essential to set up popular committees in the villages, at industrial and agricultural enterprises, and in educational institutions, and cultural and public organisations.

The CC PCL has again appealed for a Lebanese Movement for Unity and Liberation, emphasising that a repudiation of the fascist confessional project is an inalienable part of the struggle to free Lebanon completely from the Israeli occupation, and the most important of the party's tasks.

Lebanese patriots are confident that our friends, and all those who have helped defend the country against the Israeli invasion and the conspiracies of imperialism, Zionism and reaction, and who cherish freedom, democracy and human rights, will continue to support the patriotic and democratic forces of Lebanon as they work to restore unity and guarantee its sovereignty and its progressive road of development.