

LEBANESE COMMUNIST PARTY

This October the Lebanese Communist Party celebrated its 57th anniversary. On this occasion, the PFLP's Arabic weekly Al Hadaf interviewed Comrade George Batal, member of the LCP Politbureau, about the foundation and development of the party. The interview was noteworthy due to Comrade Batal's candor in dealing with past mistakes made by the party and the process

whereby these have been corrected. Following is a synopsis of his account which we feel will contribute to our readers' understanding of the LCP's course of development, whereby today it stands among the vanguard forces, militantly confronting the plans of the enemy alliance in Lebanon and regionally.

The LCP emerged as a result of the struggles of the Arab national liberation forces. The decade of the twenties was characterized by the break-up of the Ottoman Empire and the partition of the area in accordance with the plans of the colonial powers, Britain and France, as finalized in the Sykes-Picot agreement (1916) and the Balfour Declaration (1917). In this situation, it was natural that the progressive forces in the patriotic movement searched for new and better means of confronting the colonial occupation and domination of their homeland.

At this time, socialist ideas and theory were just beginning to make headway among more advanced patriotic circles, especially after the October Revolution in Russia. This socialist revolution escalated the crystallization of awareness among the vanguard of the working class and led to the foundation of labor unions.

Under these conditions, a number of working revolutionary intellectuals decided it was necessary to found a revolutionary party able to advance the patriotic, social and revolutionary struggle. At a meeting in Hadath, in the southern area of Beirut, on October 24th, 1924, these comrades decided to form the party. The founders were Lebanese, yet they decided to name the party the Syrian Communist Party as an expression of their rejection of the French Mandate's separation of Lebanon from Syria. This was in solidarity with the overall patriotic position against the Mandate.

Initially the main task was struggling against the Mandate for the independence of Syria and Lebanon and the creation of a united nation. The party emphasized its program in practice in 1925, when comrades took part in the Syrian rebellion. The party issued a communique calling on the French soldiers to turn their guns against their generals and join their class brothers in Syria and Lebanon. In response, the French Man-

date authorities unleashed an extensive campaign of repression, imprisoning, torturing and assassinating party leaders and cadre.

However, the party maintained its general line with the main slogan of struggling against the Mandate, and taking part in all patriotic battles involving the Syrian and Lebanese people, throughout the thirties and



until Lebanon's independence in the forties. In this, the party resisted a left extremist tendency which proposed the formation of a workers and peasants government in order to overthrow the Mandate. Thus, prior to independence, the idea of a political party was introduced, and the first unions were founded by politicizing the workers in order that they struggle for their rights. The first general workers union was established along with the first labor laws in the Arab world. Mustafa al Ariss, member of the party Politbureau, headed this union. The party also played a major role in spreading socialist ideas among the masses and at the same time did not neglect the national issues facing the Arab people. From the start, the party pointed out the danger of the Balfour Declaration and the Zionist colonization of Palestine. It played an important role in condemning Zionism and supporting Arab unity, not only in Lebanon, but also in the international communist movement. In 1934, the party organized a conference in Zahle, attended by a large number of Syrians and Lebanese who declared that the Arabs are one nation which stretches from the

Mediterranean to the Gulf.

With the rise of fascism in Europe, the party was quick to expose this danger as an advanced form of imperialist and racial domination. It posited the struggle against fascism as a major element in realizing national liberation in the Arab world. It worked to form the League for the Confrontation of Fascism, including many well-known patriotic intellectuals. In this period, the party successfully combined patriotic struggle with the struggle for the rights of the working class. The party was prominent in the patriotic conference that led the battle for independence. Party leader, Farajullah Helou, was secretary of this conference.

Comrade Batal notes that when Lebanon gained independence, it was natural that the state be led by representatives of the bourgeoisie, as this class played an important role in the struggle for independence. The party, on the other hand, had been established under difficult conditions and was constantly exposed to double oppression, from the Mandate and from the bourgeoisie. In addition, the working class was still in the developing phases. It can be said that the party did not achieve the tasks it had set, yet to judge the party's action, Comrade Batal points out that one must consider the events and conditions of the times, and the balance of forces internationally and in the region.

With the elimination of the Mandate and the end of the second world war, the country entered a period of class conflict characterized by the bourgeoisie's efforts to destroy the patriotic alliance that had been established in the struggle for independence. The ruling class escalated its antagonism to the working class and its party. This occurred in the context of an international situation where colonialism was being supplanted by neo-colonialism; imperialism worked to undermine genuine independence for newly liberated colonies by forging an alliance with

the local bourgeoisie. After the victory over fascism and the establishment of the socialist bloc, imperialism evoked the cold war and established military alliances under the slogan of fighting the "communist threat". All this left its mark on the political development in Lebanon and the Arab world in this period, which witnessed the escalation of battles in and around Palestine between imperialism and Zionism on the one hand and the patriotic forces on the other.

The party, while facing the oppression of the ruling class and the new attacks of imperialism, made a dangerous mistake. In a sudden transformation, the leaders reversed the party line which had consistently rejected any Zionist presence in Palestine. They departed from rejection of any form of partition and concurred with the UN Partition Plan to create a Zionist and an Arab state in Palestine.

This reversal caused chaos in the party ranks. The ruling class took advantage of this to divert the attention of the people from its own treason; it directed blows against the

popular movement and the party, which was banned, with many cadres being imprisoned.

Instead of trying to correct their mistake, the party leaders began following an extreme left, adventurous line which widened the gap between the party and the people and weakened the party's role. Then in the fifties, the party embarked on a clear line opposing Zionism and struggling against Israel, imperialism and the reactionary regimes. Yet the party failed to criticize itself for the wrong position it took in 1948. Thus, despite fighting major social and political battles, the party was unable to evaluate its line on the national cause; this led to a delay in realizing the progressive role of the national movements opposing imperialism, as represented by the policies of Abdel Nasser.

The sixties was a period of intense internal conflict between the revolutionary and the opportunist trends in the party. The correction did not really come until after the party split from the Syrian Communist Party in 1964. From 1964-67, leading opportunist

cadres were expelled from the party ranks. In 1968, the party's second congress officially rectified the line and the party could again be recognized as a real communist party, combining patriotic and social struggle. The 20 year period had weakened not only the party but also the struggle of the masses and the working class, and delayed the revolutionary process. Thus, the second congress played a truly historical role in the life of the party and the patriotic movement.

From this point, the party regained its position as a vanguard of all forms of struggle for a united democratic Arab Lebanon. The party has since remained consistent in its defense of the historical rights of the Palestinian people to their homeland; it has worked for the unity of the organizations of the Arab national liberation movement and the development of a common struggle against imperialism, Zionism and reaction, and for Arab unity on the basis of national and social liberation and democracy. The present struggle of the party, as charted by the second, third and fourth congresses, corresponds to the demands of the period in Lebanon and the region.

The alliance policy pursued by the LCP has had important effects within the LPM, enabling a unique and advanced class alliance between the political representatives of various social sectors. In the view of the party, its own strength grows in proportion to the strength of the LPM. The revolutionary line adopted by the 2nd, 3rd and 4th congresses has enabled the party to forge militant relations with other anti-imperialist forces, and to play an important role within the communist and revolutionary movement in the world.

Al Hadaf also asked Comrade Batal how the LCP evaluates the transformation of petit bourgeois nationalist organizations to Marxist-Leninist ones:

"We hold in high esteem the phenomenon of new Arab forces transforming from a nationalist origin to a proletarian position by the adoption of Marxism-Leninism. We are anxious to strengthen our relations and take an active role with these forces... in order to shorten the difficult road of struggle for socialism, which is our common aim. In practice we have advanced relations with these forces, such as the Communist Action Organization, the PFLP and the DFLP... However, in the end we call for unity of the Marxist-Leninist forces in Lebanon and on the Palestinian level... We also aspire to strengthen the unity of all Arab national liberation movements in the battle against Zionism, Imperialism and Arab reaction."

ANNIVERSARY SPEECH

Representatives of the organizations of the Lebanese Patriotic Movement and the Palestinian Resistance, as well as other well-known progressive figures, gathered to celebrate the anniversary of the Lebanese Communist Party. At the celebration in Beirut, Comrade George Hawi, General Secretary of the Party, delivered the main speech. When speaking about the current situation in relation to the plans of the enemy, as crystallized in Camp David, Comrade Hawi spoke as follows:

"I assure you that our party will always strive for patriotic unity on the Lebanese level and especially to strengthen the alliance between the Lebanese Patriotic Movement, the Palestinian Revolution, Syria, Libya and all the countries of the Steadfastness and Confrontation Front and all the Arab national liberation forces. We will strive for Arab unity based on antagonism towards imperialism and Zionism and will fight all suspicious settlements. These words have assumed special importance after the execution of the traitor Sadat... and in the face of all the dangerous plans hatched as substitutes for Camp David. These do not differ from Camp David in substance, but only in form. They all have the same aim: surrendering all the cards to the US and Israel, dividing Arab solidarity and streng-

thening imperialist and Zionist domination over our land...

"We realize the danger building up around us, especially the dangers of initiatives coming from some Arab countries, particularly Saudi Arabia. We ask that the Arab countries be committed to the decisions of the Arab Summits, especially the Baghdad Summit, which rejected any unilateral capitulationist initiatives. We ask the Arab countries to reject these plans, and we urge the Steadfastness and Confrontation Front to be the Arab vanguard, imposing a minimum level of patriotism, which no one is allowed to violate without being considered a traitor..."

Comrade Hawi reaffirmed the LCP's commitment to the three aims of the LPM: to confront Israel and the Israeli occupation of South Lebanon and Saad Haddad's border strip; to struggle to stop the extension of the Zionist-fascist plans and to prevent the regime from dividing the country and subsequently reuniting it on the basis of subordination to the Zionist entity; to prevent those plans similar to those of the isolationists in which the regime plays a dangerous part... by building the army on a sectarian basis, an army which does not defend security in the country nor defend its unity and borders...