

ly related to the structural nature of the economic crisis.

THE POLITICAL CONNECTION

In July, the Lebanese Communist Party issued a statement entitled «The Crisis of the Pound is the Result of the Political Crisis of the Sectarian Regime, the Free Enterprise System and Subordination to Imperialism.» The statement refers back to the events of January 1986, when Samir Geagea and Amin Gemayel staged a coup in the fascist ranks, whereby Geagea replaced Elie Hobeika as commander of the Lebanese Forces. This followed Hobeika's signing of the tripartite agreement with Walid Jumblatt and Nabih Berri, calling for abolishing political sectarianism, upholding Lebanon's unity and liberating all its territory from Israeli occupation, and maintaining special relations with Syria. Overnight, the coup scuttled the most serious attempt at national reconciliation. The pound, which had traded at 19 to the dollar, plunged along with the hopes for stability, falling to 122 to the dollar in less than a year and a half.

The assassination of Prime Minister Rashid Karami on June 1st this year was the next major blow to hopes for a political solution. In the six ensuing weeks, the value of the US dollar rose 55% as against the Lebanese pound, hitting 200 to \$1, in contrast to an increase of less than 40% in the first five months of the year. It is widely believed that fascist forces in the army had a hand in the assassination.

Amin Gemayel's regime and the fascist forces stand doubly responsible for the people's impoverishment. Their political intransigence, aimed at protecting the privileges of the Maronite bourgeoisie in particular, has blocked the functioning of the national unity government. The Lebanese Forces' proposal for a new cabinet to solve the economic crisis is really a call for replacing the nationalist ministers who are boycotting Amin Gemayel. Escalating the political crisis to the point of chaos would help the fascists pursue their partitionist plans.

In the shadow of the political deadlock and the regime's protection of



November 9th: West Beirut demonstrators carry coffin symbolizing the rulers.

the free enterprise system, the big bourgeoisie has capitalized on the pound's devaluation. General loss of confidence in the pound, and depositors' reversion to the dollar and other foreign currency, has further aggravated the situation: The Central Bank's possibility for intervening in the money market is significantly narrowed; only 15% of deposits in Lebanon's banks are now in pounds; and prices are often posted in dollars - all factors which fuel more speculation and inflation.

It seems unlikely that any sector of the Lebanese establishment, whatever their political or confessional affiliation, can or will find viable solutions to the crisis. The proposals of some politically moderate bourgeois sectors for selling part of Lebanon's gold reserves, would only be a step towards total breakdown, in the view of the Lebanese Communist Party.

The only hope seems to come from the possibility of a popular awakening that could cut through the barriers to class solidarity, that have been erected by the sectarian system. In fact, people on both sides of the political divide are suffering. Social action could add a new dimension to the struggle in Lebanon, if organized on the basis of democratic principles and clear awareness of the roots of the crisis.

MASS FIGHTBACK

Popular action to redress economic grievances has, in fact, reached an unprecedented level in the recent period. Following the mass uprising in late August, the trade unions have taken initiative to a series of actions protesting the regime's policy of starva-

tion, and threatening to begin an open-ended strike in November if no measures for improvement are forthcoming. Some have called for this strike to last until bringing down Gemayel's regime. On September 4th and 22nd, there were strikes. Labor conferences were held, focusing on basic social demands that have been on the agenda since the early seventies - the right to free medical care, housing and education, as well as frequent wage increases, indexed to match inflation.

On October 15th, there were demonstrations in all major towns throughout the country, protesting the lifting of subsidies on bread (which pushed its price up 43%). Demonstrators stressed the failure of all hegemonic and sectarian projects, and the state's failure to resolve the socioeconomic crisis. Slogans were raised for overcoming sectarian barriers and unifying ranks to stop the economic collapse. There were demands for cancelling the bank secrecy laws and limiting the price of foreign currency, in order to protect the pound.

In Beirut, the demonstration beginning in the eastern sector joined the demonstration originating in the western sector at the so-called green line, site of Mansour Palace, the parliament building. Antoine Beshara of the General Labor Confederation, who led the demonstrators from East Beirut, made a speech condemning the mafia, state policy and the latter's empty promises. He pledged that this demonstration was a final warning of the impending open strike. The other main speaker was Elias Haber of the National Union Federation, who led the demonstrators from the West, stressed that working class unity could form the basis for the struggle for consecrating Lebanon's unity and attaining social justice. He pledged that the trade unions would not retreat in their struggle.

On October 20th, public and private schools closed throughout Lebanon, as 50,000 teachers went on strike until the fulfillment of their demands for better wages, health benefits and job security. The strike continued into its second week, punctuated by demonstrations and sit-ins, after the parliament gave