

Lebanon

From Elections to Partition

The Lebanese parliament's failure to elect a new president stands as the latest and most dramatic evidence that the Lebanese crisis cannot be resolved short of ending the outmoded and corrupt confessional system.

The procedure for electing the president in Lebanon is both a symptom and a cause of the present crisis. Added to the fact that the president is elected by the parliament rather than by direct popular vote is the unwritten agreement, dating from 1943, that the president must be a Maronite Christian. The inherent gap between such a system and a representative democracy is even more glaring since the presiding parliament was elected over fifteen years ago, and only 76 of the original 100 deputies remain.

Obviously, such conditions give little room for the Lebanese people to express their will. Rather, Lebanon itself is left vulnerable to the blackmail of the rightist Lebanese Front and their backers, chiefly the Zionists. Having repeatedly failed to impose a 'strong state' that would steer Lebanon in a direction favorable to imperialism and Zionism, the US and 'Israel' wanted at all costs to prevent the election of a Lebanese president who would

safeguard national interests and embark on the reform needed to resolve Lebanon's crisis. They preferred someone who would simply manage the crisis, leaving space for the interference of 'Israel' in particular, via its occupation of the southernmost border strip.

The imperialist-Zionist-rightist position was clearly articulated after former president Suleiman Franjeh announced his candidacy in mid-August, and was backed by Syria and the Lebanese nationalist forces. Since Franjeh could not be expected to cooperate with the plans of the Israelis and the Lebanese Front, Geagea's Lebanese Forces immediately announced their rejection of his candidacy. The US also rejected Franjeh's candidacy, as did the Israeli government. Uri Lubrani, coordinator of Israeli government policy on Lebanon, termed Franjeh «not a good candidate» on the basis of his close relations with Syria. At the same time, Lubrani implicitly endorsed a rival candidate, Lebanese Army Com-

mander Michel Aoun, by saying, «A strong president in the Lebanon is something that Israel would welcome... If that will happen we will be only too pleased to reconsider our present deployment in South Lebanon...» (AP, August 17th).

The Lebanese Forces' opposition was punctuated by five bombs exploding in the streets of West Beirut, and the flare-up of fighting against the nationalist forces southeast of the capital, immediately after Franjeh's announcement. Although Amin Gemayel did not overtly declare his position, it was to become clear that the outgoing president was working hand-in-glove with the Lebanese Front and Forces to avoid being succeeded by a compromise candidate acceptable to all parties in Lebanon.

In the months preceding the election, there had been a series of meetings and measures in West Beirut to stabilize the situation and create an atmosphere conducive to a measure of reform. ►

Aoun, third from left, convenes his truncated military government.

