

However, even though the reform envisioned at this stage was quite minimal, the Lebanese Forces demonstrated that they were ready to divide the country and render it the victim of a new round of war, rather than accept any compromise or slight reduction of their privileges.

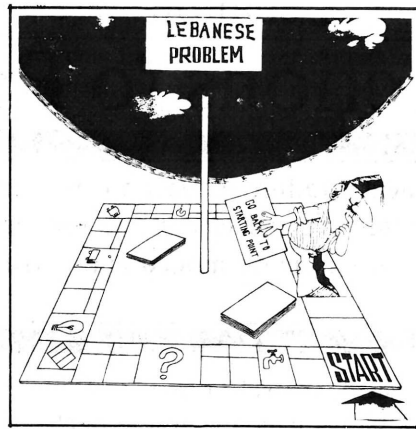
BLOCKED ELECTIONS

On August 18th, the Lebanese parliament was scheduled to convene to elect a successor to Amin Gemayel, but the Lebanese Forces in East Beirut and Lahd's Israeli-backed South Lebanon Army in the occupied zone obstructed the convening of a quorum. The militias physically prevented Christian MP's from meeting up at Mansour Palace by closing roads and in some cases temporarily kidnapping deputies who intended to fulfill their constitutional duty. Thus, they prevented the election of Suleiman Franjeh and opened the possibility of a constitutional vacuum if a new president was not elected by September 23rd, when Gemayel's term expired.

Army Commander Aoun had earlier declared that the army would intervene against any hindrance of the elections; on election day he declared a state of emergency, but the army did not move to prevent the Lebanese Forces' obstruction.

In the succeeding days, there was a mass meeting of Lebanese nationalists and a strike in West Beirut, protesting the obstruction of the elections by the Israeli and US pressure. Prominent nationalists termed this a declaration of war on the Lebanese people - a vote against national accord and for sectarian strife.

There were extensive contacts and negotiations between various Lebanese parties, and regional as well as international powers, including the visits of US envoy Murphy and of Amin Gemayel to Damascus. For the second attempted electoral session, a compromise candidate was agreed upon, Mikhael Dahar, a MP from Akkar in North Lebanon. At the same time, Gemayel kept the options open for the Lebanese Forces by considering that the government of acting Prime Minister Salim Hoss had resigned, in preparation for himself declaring a provisional



government.

MILITARY COUP BY PRESIDENTIAL DECREE

On this basis, the electoral session of the parliament was rescheduled for September 22nd. However, this session was also obstructed by the Lebanese Forces. Amin Gemayel took advantage of the vacuum by appointing a military government of six army officers, headed by Aoun. Aside from being totally unconstitutional by any measure, this junta was also stillborn. Half its members, Brigadier Mahmoud Tai Abu Dargham, General Nabil Kouraitem and Colonel Lutfi Jaber, refused to participate, deferring to the existence of the legitimate existing government headed by Hoss. Moreover, with the exception of the parties of the Lebanese Front, chiefly the Phalangists and Chamoun's National Liberals, the military government found little acceptance in Lebanon. Even among the Maronite community, prominent politicians, such as Franjeh, Dahar, Roger Edde and Raymond Edde, all potential presidential candidates, spoke out against this fait accompli.

On the regional level, only 'Israel' could be unequivocally pleased with the 'election' results. However, two Arab regimes did give tacit support to Aoun: Iraqi and Egyptian diplomats in Lebanon met with the general in East Beirut.

The US did not announce an official stand on the new military junta. However, the reception held by Aoun for diplomats was attended by the ambassadors of the permanent members of the UN Security Council, with the notable exception of the Soviet ambassador. In contrast, the Soviet am-

bassador expressed his country's support to unity and legitimacy in Lebanon by attending the meeting of Arab and foreign diplomats with Prime Minister Hoss.

DIVIDE AND RULE

Despite being stillborn, the formation of Aoun's junta is a qualitatively new step towards implementing the Zionist-imperialist-reactionary plan to divide Lebanon into two or more statelets, in order to weaken and control the country. By imposing a fait accompli, the Aoun government aims to force the Lebanese to accept a president who will sustain the system of sectarian and class injustice. Failing in controlling all of Lebanon, this military government would be the vehicle for merging the rightist-controlled areas in the North with the Israeli-occupied areas in the South into one unit for confronting the Lebanese nationalist forces and their alliance with the Palestinian revolution.

By going to the extreme of forming a military junta to enforce their policy, the Lebanese rightists are in fact revealing their own crisis and lack of legitimacy among the Lebanese people. This is a factor to be seized upon by all those struggling for a united, democratic Lebanon. Along these lines, Lebanese nationalist forces, including the Communist Party, have called for the formation of a newly constituted movement to struggle for Lebanon's unity. Such an alliance would encompass all forces committed to unity and continued struggle against sectarian domination and Israeli occupation.

On October 2nd, an assembly of Lebanese nationalist organizations and individuals convened in West Beirut to further such an alternative, in opposition to the present danger of partition and the control of the military government which they termed totally illegitimate. For over a decade, the Lebanese national movement has struggled for political reform, social justice and freedom from Israeli and imperialist interference in their country. The current impasse which heralds either partition or a new civil war, or both, shows that nothing less than their national democratic program can bring peace and unity to Lebanon. ●