

Lausanne

The Godfathers Block Secular Democratic Reforms

Official abrogation of the treaty with 'Israel', combined with Syrian efforts to induce stability in Lebanon, enabled the holding of the Lausanne conference, March 12th-20th. This, however, was not enough to insure Lebanese national reconciliation. Aside from arranging a ceasefire that temporarily reduced the level of fighting, the conference adopted no notable decisions. Rather it served to accentuate the depth of the Lebanese crisis. More than ever it was made apparent that this crisis is internal. Its causes are deep-rooted political and class contradictions that are constantly being aggravated by the fascist minority's insistence on supremacy. Still reeling under the impact of the nationalist forces' victory in February, the Lebanese Front leaders were forced to concede the abrogation of the treaty and Lebanon's Arab identity, including relations with Syria. On the other hand, they redoubled their efforts to maintain their privileged position under the false banner of «protecting the Christians».

Cantonization

The main reason for the lack of results at Lausanne was the Lebanese Front's refusal to consider reform of the Lebanese state, for altering the confessional system would cut into the Maronite bourgeoisie's power. Instead, having again failed to control all of Lebanon, Pierre Gemayel and Camille Chamoun proposed a federal system (actually cantonization). This would allow the fascists' forces to maintain autonomous political and military power, as well as their alliance with imperialism and Zionism. Fascist-controlled cantons would be the counterpart of the Israeli occupation of the South. Thus, the fascist proposal denotes complicity in Lebanon's partition, which the US now tacitly accepts, at least temporarily, after failure to impose a «strong central government».

Like the recent reorganization of the fascist military forces, promoting cantonization is the Lebanese Front's tactic for buying time until conditions permit a new offensive. Pierre Gemayel stated the Phalangists' delaying tactics quite openly prior to the Lausanne conference, when he said that reform could not

be considered until the withdrawal of all foreign forces. By this he refers primarily to the Syrian and the remaining Palestinian forces in Lebanon, not to the Israeli occupation troops. This, rather than the verbal concessions extracted by the nationalist victory, indicates the fascists' real position.

Secularization

The fascists' cantonization model was countered by the nationalists' demand for secularization of the Lebanese state. Without going into detail about the various modalities suggested, this was the thrust of the working papers presented by Nabih Berri and Walid Jumblatt, respectively. Berri in particular highlighted the progressive content of the proposed reform by adding the demand for comprehensive social justice through a reconstruction plan for deprived and war-damaged areas. He also demanded punishment for all those responsible for the massacres and destruction in Beirut's southern suburbs, the mountains and other areas, while Jumblatt called for Amin Gemayel to be prosecuted.

No middle way

The clear contradiction between the fascist and nationalist proposals left no room for compromise. Amin Gemayel's attempt to pose as the neutral head of state was rendered impotent. Actually the contents of his working paper were a clumsily concealed attempt to preserve the existing confessional system, showing that he remains the Lebanese Front's strawman in power. According to him, deconfessionalization would only be enacted in the civil administration, while the present sectarian imbalance would remain in all influential posts and bodies.

Persistent efforts on the part of the Syrian and Saudi observers to find a common denominator ran up against the Lebanese Front's ultimate refusal of even an equitable reapportionment of representation within the existing system. Gemayel and Chamoun's bottom line was 50-50 Christian-Moslem representation in the parliament as opposed to the present 54-45 division in favour of the Christians. (No official census has been taken in Lebanon for several decades, but an unofficial poll taken