

## National Democratic Front Announced in Lebanon

On October 9th, Walid Jumblatt, leader of the Progressive Socialist Party, called a press conference to announce the formation of a preparatory committee for the establishment of a national democratic front in Lebanon. He described the proposed program of action for the front, containing six main points:

1. Continuing the struggle against Israeli occupation of southern Lebanon; providing full support to the armed resistance.
2. Struggling to reestablish the unity of Lebanon, preserving its integrity and independence, and defeating all partition schemes.
3. Confirming and preserving Lebanon's Arab identity.
4. Conducting an independent and progressive foreign policy.
5. Structural democratic reforms in the overall political system, and an overhaul of the armed forces according to patriotic principles.
6. Fundamental social and economic reforms.

The preparatory committee was made up of representatives of the Progressive Socialist Party, the Lebanese Communist Party, the Syrian Social Nationalist Party, the Arab Democratic Party, the Arab Socialist Union, the Baath Party Organization in Lebanon, in addition to Najah Wakim, a progressive member of parliament.

Membership in the front was left open to all other progressive and nationalist organizations, including the Amal Movement. A transitional period would be used for further consultations on organizational aspects as well as the final draft of the front's political platform.

but not necessarily on the task of democratic reforms, or on the question of Lebanon's Arab identity in the manner that we propose.

Consequently, our party held that the alternative to the confessional character of the recent upheaval against Israeli occupation and Phalangist domination, must be a democratic secular one, based on a national democratic program which seizes on the fact that such upheaval did in essence have a democratic content despite its confessional appearance. If the confessional dimension played a positive role in the anti-Israeli and anti-Phalangist struggle so far, its potential has peaked, and it will certainly begin to play a regressive role should it remain the driving force. The thesis that the best that can be achieved at this stage is reforms based on confessional redistribution of power, is a fundamentally wrong one that risks extending and perpetuating the Phalangists' 'Maronite' dominance, and thus perpetuating Lebanon's division rather than promoting its unification. By contrast, a democratic approach, which seeks to do away with confessionalism altogether, will succeed in achieving the tasks of liberation, unification and democratic reform.

Accordingly, our party proposed to its allies, that share an interest in such an approach, a program for the National Democratic Front. This program was not simply proposed for internal consultations. Rather we invited mass participation in its development. On the 1st of May, during a large rally called by our party and with the participation of representatives from the Baath Party Organization, the Syrian Social Nationalist Party, the Progressive Socialist Party and the Amal Movement, we publicly presented the proposed program for the National Democratic Front, centered on six major points: the liberation

of the South, the unification of Lebanon, Lebanon's Arab identity, an independent foreign policy, political reforms based on the cancellation of the confessional system, and social and economic reforms.

It is worth noting that our party has expressed reservations about the manner in which the National Democratic Front was actually announced. We had believed that prior to announcing the founding of the Front, there should have been further, extensive consultations in order to broaden participation in the formulation of the political program and other aspects of the Front's work. Since then, some right-wing forces



*Southerners protest in the face of the occupiers.*

have embarked on a campaign against the National Democratic Front, instigating some nationalist forces against it by pretending that they had been purposely excluded from participation. Our party had the view that the announcement should have been preceded by broader consultations as well as more mass mobilization. Today, in fact, we are facing some difficulties as a result. There are those who try to portray the National Democratic Front as an anti-Moslem coalition, while in reality the very program and objectives of the Front are fully compatible with the objectives of the nationalist Islamic forces fighting against Israeli occupation and Phalangist domination. Others, particularly in the capital, Beirut, are against the National Democratic Front, because they have a narrow interest in maintaining the organizational disunity and decentralization of the national and progressive movement; instead they are calling for organization on the city or regional level.

To confront this, we in the Party believe that we need to broaden the base of support for the National Democratic Front, explaining to other potential participants why such a front is needed and involving them in the decision-making process. We do not see the National Democratic Front as an alternative to the broad national political work, but rather as a structure that will accommodate this work and develop it. We are hopeful that soon other parties will choose to join the Front, and that our cooperation with the Amal Movement will advance our national struggle.