THE LEFT: CAN IT BE RIGHT FOR LEBANON?
THE PATH AND PROSPECTS OF THE LEFTIST MOVEMENT IN LEBANON

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The Left: Can it Be Right for Lebanon?

The Path and Prospects of the Leftist Movement in Lebanon

Karma Khayat

ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the path and prospects of Leftist movements in Lebanon. It points out their main successes and flaws, and examines their future possibilities. The research attempts to go beyond historical personal narratives by critically highlighting the general traits and major stages of the Lebanese Left since its inception while providing a critical account of what has been done and what could be achieved in the future. The aim is to answer the question asked in the title of the thesis: has a Leftist approach been, or will it ever be, a realistic option for Lebanon? The thesis examines two major Left-wing parties in Lebanon: the Lebanese Communist Party (LCP) and the Progressive Socialist Party (PSP). It also looks at the main alliances organized by Leftist parties in Lebanon: the Lebanese National Movement (LNM) and Lebanese National Resistance Front (LNRF). Leftist experiences in other countries are compared with Lebanon’s own to investigate the possibility of making the Left right for Lebanon in the future.

Keywords: Sectarianism, Left, Secularism, Political Parties, Civil War
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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CAO : Communist Action Organization
CPSL : Communist Party of Syria and Lebanon
LCP : Lebanese Communist Party
LNM : Lebanese National Movement
LNRF : Lebanese National Resistance Front
LPP : Lebanese People Party
NSF : National Salvation Front
PLO : Palestinian Liberation Organization
PSP : Progressive Socialist Party
SCP : Syrian Communist Party
CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

1.1 – Situating the Thesis

Belonging to a specific sect is rooted in Lebanese society since the formation of Greater Lebanon (Qbanji, 2009: 27). In fact, the Lebanese constitution, which confirms political, judiciary and civil equality for all citizens, establishes, at the same time, for the conditions of their inequality describing them as followers (ra’aya) of religious groups with varying shares of the political power and public office (Traboulsi, 2008: 186). Chaoul rightfully notes that the role of sects in Lebanon goes beyond the religious framework (Qbanji, 2009: 75); they actually share state power in what is believed to be a ‘consociational’ democracy making Lebanese politics and political parties unthinkable outside a religious/sectarian box.

This distinctive kind of democracy is based on a consensus between the components of society –sects in this case– on general policy orientations and the distribution of public positions. It is no secret that this consociational democracy has several drawbacks on many levels not least of which are “the limitation of the efficacy of political parties and the constraints on the development of a concept of citizenship” (Ayubi, 1996: 397). Political representation is limited to representatives of the different sects (Qbanji, 2009: 82). Thus, in most cases, Lebanese parties largely overlap with Lebanese sects.

Leftist parties in Lebanon have so far failed to radically change this “fragile political/sectarian system” (Matar and Dakhlallah, 2006: 23) designed under the pretext of safeguarding Lebanon’s social complexity. This is not to say that they have not been trying. Rather, there are flaws in the effort of Leftist parties, one that goes
back to 1907 according to Mohamad Dakroub (2007:100) and continues till the present day. These flaws, that will be revealed through the thesis’ case studies, prevented the Lebanese Left from fulfilling their aims, namely overcoming political mobilization according to sectarian identity, a Lebanese constant considered by former Prime Minister Salim El-Hoss the main obstacle facing radical change (Sadek, 2001: 31).

Can the Left be right for Lebanon? The proposed research critically highlights the path that Leftist parties have taken in Lebanon while assessing their accomplishments and mishaps regarding the Lebanese system. The thesis aims to evaluate whether a leftist approach has been or will ever be a viable option for a country like Lebanon. This is the contribution this research hopes to add to the existing literature on the Left in Lebanon.

1.2 – Research Questions

The main research question problematized in this thesis is the following: Is the Leftist approach a realistic option for Lebanon? It contains a number of layers, however: What are the major achievements and failures of Leftist parties? What are the major achievements and failures of the main alliances that have existed between the parties of the Lebanese Left? And, finally, what should the Lebanese Left do to succeed? Answering these three questions brings us closer to answering whether the Left can present a reasonable alternative to the existing sectarian system.

1.3 – Methodology and Case Selection

As mentioned earlier, this research investigates the key stages of the Leftist movement in Lebanon. Particular attention will be paid to the efforts made to infuse
change into the country’s sectarian system, and whether they were rewarding or not. This examination will be conducted individually for each party, then on alliances among Leftist parties to review what has happened and to reflect on future prospects.

The main objective of this thesis is to assess the efficiency of the Left and evaluate whether this approach can be suitable to Lebanon’s plural society. It builds on the existing literature but is largely based on original material and documented analysis.

In addition to the examination of the literature, this study builds on specific case studies particularly significant for the Lebanese Left to answer the research question. First, this thesis will investigate two major leftist parties. Looking at these cases will allow us to understand the major achievements and failures of Leftist parties.

There are many parties in Lebanon that are labeled leftist. Among these parties are: the Lebanese Communist Party, the Communist Action Organization (currently not active), the People’s Movement, the Popular Nasserite Organization, the Movement of Independent Nasserites- Al-Mourabitoun, the Progressive Socialist Party, the Baath Party and the Democratic Left.  

The parties that were selected as case studies for this thesis are the Lebanese Communist Party (LCP) and the Progressive Socialist Party (PSP). Two main reasons are behind this choice: first, thoroughly studying more parties goes beyond the scope of this thesis. On another note, attempting to fit more parties within the limits of this thesis means that more importance would be given to breadth over depth, while for

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1 Worthy of note is that three out of the eight mentioned parties (the PSP, the Baath Party and the Democratic Left) are currently represented in parliament. However, it is naïve to imply that the Lebanese Left is well represented given the activities of these parties and the political coalitions they have joined to attain parliamentary seats.
this particular study, depth should be given more weight. Another reason for this choice is the lack of relevant literature given that what is written about the LCP and the PSP significantly exceeds what is written about other parties like the Baath Party and the CAO. However, this choice does not make this research less relevant seeing as the chosen parties are two of the main and most influential Leftist parties in Lebanon thus studying their failures can significantly contribute to the thesis question. Additionally, unlike some other leftist parties, both parties still exist today and continue to draw the path of the so-called Lebanese Left.

Nevertheless, this does not deny the importance of smaller Left-wing parties and their influence in the course of events related to the path the Lebanese Left has taken. In fact, it is essential to examine such parties as indispensable pieces of the mosaic.

This thesis also examines the major achievements and failures of the main alliances that have existed between the parties of the Lebanese Left? It looks at the coalitions formed among leftist parties, reviewing the LNM and the LNRF will give an answer to the above question. It is evident that in recent times alliances among Leftist parties in Lebanon have been rare. Although hypothetically they fall under the same umbrella, these parties seem to fail to be in agreement, even with regards to fundamental issues. In fact, political parties in Lebanon are in crisis, as Ziad Majed asserts (Sadek, 1999: 342). Shawkat Ashti agrees and adds that this crisis is affecting the parties’ basic foundations, their future prospects and their intellectual identity, in addition to their organizational frameworks and internal relations (2004: 9). It should be added that this crisis, which impacted parties’ performances and contributed to their decline, has also affected the inter-party relations and left parties unable to find common grounds. In fact, this crisis affects Leftist parties in particular since, unlike
most of the other parties, they are not founded on sectarian identities that they can fall back on whenever needed.

However, in the course of Lebanese history, several alliances among the Leftist parties have occurred, major and minor ones, successful and failed ones. This thesis will look at the Lebanese National Movement (LNM) formed in 1969 and presided by Kamal Junblat (Traboulsi, 2008: 256). The LNM was undoubtedly the most remarkable alliance of the Lebanese Left: on the one hand, its affiliations were essentially leftist parties, and on the other hand, it represents the instance when the Left in Lebanon was almost successful in infusing major change to the Lebanese sectarian system.

Very much related to the LNM is the Lebanese National Resistance Front (LNRF), better-known by its acronym, Jamoul, initiated by the LCP, the CAO and the Arab Socialist Labor Party in September 1982 (Ibid: 387). The LNRF will be looked at but less extensively though it is an important instance in that it reflects the effort the Lebanese Left has invested to fight an exterior enemy, Israel in this case.

Interestingly, most central alliances among Leftist parties have occurred during the years of the Lebanese Civil War. This fact raises an intriguing question: given that the civil war had presented good grounds for parties to attract members (Ashti, 2004: 59), could it be that armed conflict presents the strongest common ground for the parties of the Left? This point will be examined in this thesis.

Third, what should the Lebanese Left do to succeed? Here examples of the Left in other countries will be referred to. It is obvious that the decline of the Left is not exclusive to Lebanon (Olsen, Koband Hough, 2010). While Giddens (1994) advances that the Left in the present day has turned defensive rather than radical, Bell argues that the Left has disappeared in some European countries (Ibid: 33).
Accordingly, and since it is clear that this decline is not exclusive to Lebanon, this study will also highlight some lessons that should be drawn from the experience of Leftist movements in other countries. The cases that will be referred to are those of parties in Britain and France.

This section will attempt to put down a series of suggestions that possibly will help improve the status of the Leftist parties in Lebanon based on the previously mentioned case studies in addition to this section which will serve as comparison to the Left in other countries. It will bring to light the internal and external factors that led to the decline of the Left, in order to propose relevant recommendations for the future. This, hopefully, will answer the main question of this thesis: What should the Lebanese Left do to succeed?

1.4 – Map of the Thesis

This thesis is divided into six chapters. It opens with an introductory chapter explaining the topic and the methodology. The second chapter presents a brief literature review and an overview of Leftist parties in Lebanon. The third and the fourth chapters include overviews of the chosen parties, followed by their main achievements and failures over time. The fifth chapter highlights the main alliances the Leftist parties have managed to create among themselves and describes the path these alliances have taken. The conclusion underscores the Lebanese Left’s prospects and what it should do in the future while drawing from its own experience as well as Leftist experiences in other countries.
CHAPTER TWO
THE RISE OF SECTARIAN PARTIES

2.1 – Introduction

This chapter examines leftist parties in Lebanon. It opens with an overview of Lebanese political parties in relation to the sectarian system, focusing on the leftist parties’ integration into the Lebanese sectarian system. It then sheds light on the emergence and evolution of a number of leftist parties in the country.

Sectarian parties in postwar Lebanon have marginalized the role of leftist parties. Whether due to the general collapse of the Left in the Arab world after the 1967 defeat, or their robust ability to distribute social welfare (Cammett and Issar, 2009), sectarian parties dominate the postwar Lebanese political scene. This chapter examines the array of leftist parties in Lebanon. It surveys their emergence, evolution and transformation within the context of Lebanon’s sectarian system.

2.2 – The Lebanese Left: A Review of the Literature

The Left and Arab revolutionaries in Lebanon were not homogenous but were largely gathered around the Palestinian cause (Nemr, 2004:14). According to Gordon, “the importance of the Lebanese Left was extra-parliamentary, in the street, on the campus, in the refugee camp” an importance it gained through tactics: “newspaper propaganda, demonstrations, strikes, and ultimately resort to the barricade, the Klashnikov, the bomb” (1980: 170).

In particular, the Communist Party (LCP) was close to people’s everyday life and presented an alternative to sectarian parties (Ashti, 2004: 49-50). However, Hawi asserted in the mid-1990s that the revolutionary process is no longer possible within
the frameworks of the LCP, even though the party has distinguished itself from other communist parties with certain stands or positions that prevented it from collapsing (Charbel, 2005: 176).

Another main party affiliated with the Left is the Progressive Socialist Party (PSP). The PSP, which falls under “the actions of what could be called feudal socialism” (Timoviv 2000: 206), had been very influential namely as leader of the Lebanese National Movement. However, after the assassination of Kamal Junblat and other circumstances accompanying it, the PSP took a defensive approach. Later on it allied with its “previous enemies” under the slogan of “dialogue” and sectarian and political “reconciliation” (Ashti, 2004: 281).

As Richani suggests, few are the studies that examine Lebanon’s political parties (1998: 3). Some of these studies tackle the rise and history of Leftist parties in Lebanon (Dakroub, 2007; Ashti, 2004; Ismael Ismael 1998and Traboulsi 1997) Others put forward criticism of these parties individually (Dalloul, 2010; Edde, 2005; Timoviv, 2000; Traboulsi, 1997) and propose possible reforms (Edde, 2005; Nemr, 2004). Others study the political sectarian system in Lebanon, its consequences, and its potential remedies (Haddad, 2008; Qbanji, 2005; Gordon, 1980). In fact, most of the references consulted and mentioned in this study fall within the above-mentioned frameworks.

However, these studies do not bring to light the Lebanese Left’s main strengths and weaknesses, or examine future possibilities for reform of the Lebanese sectarian system. The proposed research goes beyond surveying the facts and surpasses the specificities of individual parties: it highlights the general traits and major stages of the Lebanese Left while providing a critical account of what has been
done and what should be done, while drawing from experiences of the Left in Lebanon and elsewhere.

This study argues that attempts by the Lebanese Left to change the political sectarian system have been flawed throughout Lebanon’s history. This thesis considers that this failure has not only been caused by the established and deeply rooted sectarian system—though it is one of the causes—but also by the choices made by Leftist parties themselves, at different levels, and the priorities they have set themselves, namely political reforms at the expense of social and economic reforms.

2.3 — *Ta’ifa as a Nation*

Ussama Makdisi underscores the paradox of having national unity in a multi-religious society wherein religion stands as the citizens’ most important public attribute (Makdisi, 1996). Constant failures to lead the Lebanese away from pre-modern loyalties based on religion that inhibit the growth of a democratic, civil, and secular society arguably produced a dichotomy between *Ta’ifiyya* (sectarianism) and *Wataniyya* (patriotism) in which sectarianism prevailed. The sect became the quasi-nation defined against other sects as elites sought to bring about an exclusively religious definition of community. The deployment of religious-based politics by sectarian elites opened the possibility of popular mobilization along communal lines and reduced the influence of secular parties.

In Lebanon, political organizations with sectarian orientations play a crucial role in distributing social welfare (Cammett and Issar, 2009). The degree to which sectarian parties cater to members of out-groups depends not only on electoral incentives but also on non-electoral aims such as mobilizing communities for several purposes (Ibid). Hence, one could make the case that the extensive social welfare
power of sectarian parties lured large popular masses toward them, condensing the share of leftist parties and constraining their political influence.

Ersun Kurtulus also suggests that four elements of continuity exist and create an Independence-Integration cleavage causing the problem of collective self-determination in Lebanon (Kurtulus, 2009). The Independence-Integration cleavage in Lebanon is rooted in sectarian lines, which makes it difficult to see the Lebanese as collective actors exercising collective self-determination. Kurtulus contends that these four elements of continuity raise doubts about the strength of a community that remains deeply fragmented and fragile: first, the confessional nature of Lebanese politics marked by sectarian loyalties and the predominant role of confessional leaderships; second, the omnipresence of transnational alliances and mobilization of external support for promoting domestic goals; third, the confessional nature of political rhetoric, especially in relation to foreign affair; and, fourth, the various forms of foreign intervention in Lebanon.

These elements of continuity suggest that Lebanon remains a “precarious republic” in which Lebanese remain unsufficiently integrated and unable to act as a collective actor with the aim of collective self-determination (Kurtulus, 2009). Lebanon thus remains a quasi-federal state as it still fails to serve all Lebanese equally, leaving it to parties to provide communal support that often comes on a sectarian basis and consequently reinforces sectarianism. A case in point is Hezbollah’s welfare system that is often considered the most developped in the country (Harik, 2004). Beyond providing schools, clinics, day-care centers, jobs, and financial support to its community, Hezbollah offers the historically disadvantaged and marginalized Shi’a in Lebanon a sense of identity and pride (Gerges, 2006).
2.4– The Sectarianization of Leftist Principles

Left-wing parties constitute the bulk of multi-sectarian political groups in Lebanon. Some of these parties have opposed the established clientalist system in the country, while others embraced Marxist principles. Even though these movements are multi-sectarian, many of them have come to coexist with confessional system, even though they call for the abolishment of political sectarianism. The Taif Accord includes a special segment on the abolition of political sectarianism under the “Political Reforms” section. It regards this as “a fundamental national objective” that should be attained gradually. However, Taif provides no timetable for deconfessionalization.²

As’ad Abu-Khalil contends that the failure and “perceived bankruptcy” of the Lebanese and the Palestinian Left gave rise to Islamic fundamentalist groups in Lebanon. Abu-Khalil adds that “slogans of change and revolution were monopolized by the Left at a time when religious movements in Lebanon were generally conservative, [while] Shiites were until the late seventies drawn into leftist political organizations because they were alienated from the political system in the country” (Abu-Khalil, 1991).

In addition to Makdisi’s dichotomy between sectarianism and patriotism, Elie A. Salem talks about another dichotomy between rich and poor that existed in

² See <http://www.al-bab.com/arab/docs/lebanon/taif.htm>
“Abolishing political sectarianism is a fundamental national objective. To achieve it, it is required that efforts be made in accordance with a phased plan. The Chamber of Deputies elected on the basis of equal sharing by Christians and Muslims shall adopt the proper measures to achieve this objective and to form a national council which is headed by the president of the republic and which includes, in addition to the prime minister and the Chamber of Deputies speaker, political, intellectual, and social notables. The council's task will be to examine and propose the means capable of abolishing sectarianism, to present them to the Chamber of Deputies and the cabinet, and to observe implementation of the phased plan.”
Lebanon and had a direct impact on leftist principles. A direct consequence of this dichotomy, the urbanization of Lebanon and Beirut provided for the emergence of slum settlements of rural populations and Palestinian refugee camps around the capital. These constituted a fertile ground for the development of ideological leftist and revolutionary movements. As Imam Musa al-Sadr mobilized Shi’a communities, “the Palestinians, and the Muslim Nasirist movements in Beirut and Sidon, also tapped the slum belt and mobilized its youth under their ideological slogans. Passionate ideological politics exploited poverty and used it as a ramming rod against the tottering institutions of the state” (Salem, 1979). Salem argues that this was the beginning of what he terms “the sectarianization of leftist principles” (1979: 449).

Political parties in Lebanon, especially leftist ones, face many limitations and problems. The postwar era reinforced the communal nature of society and few parties are able to surmount the confessional barrier (El Khazen, 2003). Moreover, secular-oriented parties shared a “rigid political platform” and were highly influenced by political and ideological principles originating from other Arab states. Consequently, parties constantly failed to foster national unity and collaborate beyond the formation of temporary electoral alliances (Ibid.).

Leftist and nationalist parties, particularly the Syrian Social Nationalist Party (SSNP) and the Lebanese Communist Party (LCP), “were not associated with any particular community and/ or region”, but they were often unable to relate to the working classes the way other sectarian parties like Hezbollah did. As Khazen asserts, the Progressive Socialist Party has become a Druze-oriented party, while the SSNP maintained a discourse revolving around Syrian nationalism, and the Ba’ath party adhered to its principles of Arab unity and the common aspirations of the Arab people (Khazen, 2003).
2.5– Leftist Parties in Lebanon

This section examines four leftist parties: the Communist Action Organization (CAO), the Arab Socialist Action Party (ASAP), the Independent Nasserite Movement (INM), and the Nasserite Populist Movement (NPM). Although these parties will not be considered as detailed case studies in this research, discussing them allows a better overview of the Left since they played important roles on different levels at different times.

2.5.1 – Communist Action Organization (CAO)

The establishment and evolution of the CAO in Lebanon can be highlighted through several historical incidences. The origins of the CAO trace back to the Arab Nationalist Movement (ANM) (harakat al-Qawmiyin al-Arab), even though it later deviated from the latter’s orientation (Zebian, 1977: 205). The CAO mutated from the Arab Nationalist Movement, to the Lebanese Socialist Organization (Munazzamat al-Ishtirakiyin al-Arab) and then to the declaration of the Communist Action Organization in May 1971 (Zebian, 1977: 206) where the communist identity was adopted, signaling the rupture with the past pan-nationalist thinking and its bourgeois reality (Traboulsi, 1997: 119). Although the CAO does not exist today, it is important to outline three main historical contexts that portray the experience of the CAO as a major leftist organization in the modern Lebanese history.

The Arab Context

Muhsen Ibrahim, the Secretary General of the CAO, underscores the Arab context in which the CAO emerged: namely the crisis of the Arab national liberation movement upon the defeat of June 1967, in both its wings, the nationalist and the
Ibrahim states that the CAO emerged from a Marxist Leninist split within the nationalist movement itself. Therefore, the crisis of the Arab nationalist liberation movement, inspired by the leadership of Jamal Abdel Nasser and his promising nationalist and patriotic visions at that time, paved the road to the formation of the CAO in Lebanon.

The crisis within the Arab nationalist liberation movement was due to the class struggle within the popular bases, especially in the 1960s. This struggle took many forms: an ideological clash, a political split, and a social difference among the components of the movement. The main and essential slogans and principles of the movement were, according to Ibrahim, supplied by the petite bourgeoisie. Hence, there was a political, social, and economic crisis led by an alliance of the bourgeoisies and the landlords, which caused discontent among the proletariat class across the Arab World. Moreover, this ruling alliance did not try to contain the spread of imperialism, Zionism, and foreign intervention in the region (Ibrahim, 1983: 230-231).

Along those lines, the CAO outlined several major themes in its political mandate that it wanted to spread throughout the Arab World the political struggle against imperialism to achieve national political and economic liberation; the struggle for the pan-nationalist cause of liberating the Occupied Arab Territories of 1967, and to safeguard the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination and an independent state; the struggle against ending Arab-Soviet relations and to restore and strengthen the alliance with the Soviet Union and other Socialist countries; the struggle against exploiting the working classes and burdening it with the economic crises that the Arab bourgeois regimes suffer from, while ensuring the social rights of
the Arab popular masses; and the struggle against repression to ensure democratic freedoms for the popular movement (Ibrahim, 1983: 260).

The Lebanese Context

The Lebanese context of the CAO’s emergence can be summarized by the crisis of the Lebanese Patriotic Democratic Work (Al-’amal al-watani al-dimuqrati) that culminated in the 1960s, with its three main wings: the Lebanese democratic corrective wing (al-janah al-watani al-dimuqrati al-isla?i al-lubnani) represented by the PSP; the communist wing represented by the LCP; and the Arab pan-nationalistic wing represented by the Movement of Arab Nationalists.

These three wings together formed the Front of the Patriotic Progressive Parties, Bodies and Personnel in Lebanon (Jabhat al-Ahzab wa-lhay’at wal-shakhsiyyat al-wataniya wal-taqadumiya fi Lubnan) under the leadership of Kamal Junblat. This front included additional parties for intermittent periods, and a number of independent political figures. This experience was one of the first stages of the establishment of the Left in Lebanon, regardless of the ideological differences among its constituent units (Ibrahim, 1983: 275 – 277). The opposing views that emerged within the front led to the eruption of its main crisis: the position vis-à-vis the sectarian system.

The CAO represented an Arab communist faction that succeeded in applying the “Creative Marxist Leninist” approach to the Arab situation (Ibrahim, 1983: 282). This gave the CAO strength on the Lebanese level, especially in its social, economic, and political approaches to the Lebanese system. The main formative stages of the CAO in the Lebanese context were between the years 1968 and 1973: first, the emergence of the Marxist Leninist factions within the Lebanese branch of Arab
Nationalist Movement in 1968; second, the establishment of the Lebanese Socialist Organization (*Munazzamat al-Ishtirakiyin al-Arab*) in 1969; third, the declaration of the establishment of a joint organization under the name of Lebanese Socialist Organization – Socialist Lebanon (*munazzamat al-Ishtirakiyin al-Arab- Lubnan al-Ishtiraki*), in 1970; and fourth, the establishment of the CAO and its first conference in the spring of 1973.

**The CAO and the Lebanese Civil War**

The CAO was thus a result of a merger between Socialist Lebanon and the Lebanese Socialist Organization. The events that took place in Lebanon and the region after June 1967 strengthened the relationship between these organizations, most importantly the Israeli raid on Beirut airport. On the intellectual level, interaction also grew between the parties with Lebanese Socialist Organization being self-critical (Traboulsi, 1997: 101). The agreement over the Palestinian guerilla action (*al-amal al-fida'i*) was another major fact that brought them together. According to Traboulsi, the CAO was the most spontaneous manifestation of the changes of Lebanese society and the implications of the Arab context after 1967 (Ibid: 102).

Zebian argues that the CAO represented a detachment from the core Ba’athist beliefs, and also from the overall nationalist Arab thinking. According to him, what happened to Arab nationalist thinking during the 1960s has caused the diversion to Marxism, in the form of the CAO and this was the reason behind the merger that happened between the two organizations (1977: 220).

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3Socialist Lebanon was established in the middle 1960s, and included former Ba’athist intellectuals who adopted Marxism as their ideology.
The CAO believed that change in Lebanon can be achieved democratically, as many other leftist organizations. Moreover, the CAO was an active member at all fronts established in Lebanon since the early 1970s in support of Palestine in guerilla action. The CAO was a member of the Arab Front Participating in the Palestinian Revolution (\textit{al-Jabha al-Arabiya al-Musharika fi al-Thawra al-Falastiniya}), which gave it an important role in the support of the Palestinian Resistance (Zebian, 1977: 220-221).

The CAO found itself fighting as a faction of the National Movement, against the Right. Its embrace of armed struggle was not a drawback against its main path of work rather than a development of it. This can be identified from the main ideology (Marxist-Leninist) of the CAO, where armed struggle represents the most elite form of social and patriotic struggle. The reactionary violence of the Right was faced with a revolutionary violence (Zebian, 1977: 222). Fawaz Traboulsi, a member of the political bureau and a key leader of the CAO, noted in September 1976 that “the changes that shaped the conflict in Lebanon and in the Arab region, resulted in the Lebanese regime’s tendency towards dealing with armed oppression against popular movements, and towards alliance with Fascist armed forces who aim to strike the Palestinian Resistance, and seize the political and social change with armed violence. For that reason, the CAO fought to defeat this reactionary attack for the independence of Lebanon, its unity, and sovereignty, throughout building a democratic secular system” (Zebian, 223).

Although the parties forming the CAO seemed to be in harmony at first, Traboulsi asserts that soon enough disagreements emerged between the organizations that turned out to be heterogeneous. They disagreed on the form of the organization, the stand from the occurrences and the distribution roles and internal work (1997:
116-117). Splits occurred for several reasons: some who considered that the Lebanese context does not justify the existence of a new communist party joined with the Palestinian resistance; others argued that the Lebanese Communist Party is more popular and effective within the Labor community, while others considered that armed struggle should be adopted but not through Palestinians resistance (Traboulsi, 1997: 128-129). Although Traboulsi argues that the CAO was able to overcome difficulties (Ibid: 132), the CAO is no longer active today and the points above are main reasons why this party ceased to exist.

2.5.2 – The Arab Socialist Action Party (ASAP)

The Arab Socialist Action Party (Hizb al-Amal al-Ishtiraki al-Arabî) is a result of the Ideological transformation of the Arab Nationalist Movement (ANM) that allowed for the creation of the Palestinian Popular Liberation Front (al-Jabha al-Sha’biya li-tahrir Falastin), the Palestinian Democratic Liberation Front (al-Jabha al-Dimuqratiya li-tahrir Falastin), the Communist Action Organization, and the Arab Socialist Action Party (Zebian, 1977: 224). The party emerged as a Marxist-Leninist variation from the ANM. Generally speaking, the emerging parties from ANM were categorized as Leftist organizations.

The ASAP considered each Arab country part of the whole Arab nation, thus taking into consideration the different objective circumstances in each country. Consequently, branches of ASAP were established in most of the Arab countries in recognition of every country (it existed in Syria, Iraq, Jordan and Palestine). However, the ASAP had difficult beginnings in Saudi Arabia and Egypt.

Georges Habash, the secretary general of the party argues that “the defeat of June 1967 was seen as a pan-nationalist defeat and created new circumstances. As a
result, it is normal that this incidence creates a clearer political view for the cause of revolution and its path”. After the 1967 defeat, the ASM reshaped itself into a new political organization, called the Arab Socialist Action Party. The name expressed the radical change that occurred to the theoretical, practical, and social structure of the Arab Socialist Movement. In fact the new structure of the party dates back to the conference of the Arab Provisional Central Leadership (APCL) (al-Qiyada al-Markaziya al-Arabiya al-Mu’aqata) in May 1969, and later the founding of the ASAP in 1970.

The founding of the ASAP was instrumental to the establishment of the Unified Arab Communist Party (UACP) (al-Hizb al-Shouyou’i al-Arabi al-Muwahad). The UACP would later unify the Arab working classes since it represented the common grounds for all Marxist-Leninist organizations across the Arab world.

The ASAP in Lebanon: Revolution for Change

In Lebanon the ASAP maintained a strong relation with the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), which had an important role in its formation (Zebian, 1977: 226). On 12 August 1972, the national conference of the ASAP was held and continued until the 14th. A political report was issued declaring the political mandate of ASAP. The report embodied important political and ideological messages with a clearer vision of the party’s mandate: “the conference is considered to be a new starting point in the process of the continuity of the party, where the ASAP is an

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4 See p.38, political report in the party’s publications. 
5 See The Road of the Revolution(tarik al-thawra), a publication of the party, issue 1, June 1970.
6 Political report in the party’s publications.
7 A study from the June 1971 meeting of the Temporary Central Command Arab Meeting (Al-kiyada Al-Arabiya Al-Markaziya Al-Moa’kata), a political party report.
At the same time, the party mandate endorsed the resort to revolutionary violence based on armed struggle, and considered this alternative as the only way for achieving the “Lebanese revolution”, while other alternatives such as political demands and protests were considered incapable of achieving change. Thus, the ASAP represented the belief that revolutionary violence is the only way to stop feudalism and bourgeois rule.

The ASAP and the Lebanese Civil War:

The ASAP re-established itself with new revolutionary zeal. Although a drop in membership levels occurred in 1972 as a result of the party’s defection of the Revolutionary Front from the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PLFP), especially in the South of Lebanon, the party retained a strong presence in Tripoli, Sidon, and Tyr (Zebian, 1977: 228). In 1974 the party built a strong political and military structure. The ASAP worked according to the rule that “every activist is a fighter” (kul munadel muqatel). The PFLP supplied arms and training to the ASAP militants. The party completed its preparations and spread its fighters in Beirut and throughout Lebanon on the eve of the civil war (Zebian, 1977: 229).

The ASAP entered the civil war at its early stages and participated in many of its rounds. Based on its belief in revolutionary violence, the party engaged in warfare against what it considered to be the fascist Right wing movements, allying with the Palestinian resistance and the leftist National Movement (Zebian, 1977: 229). During

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8 Political report, the party’s publications, pp. 1, 2 and 3.
9 Political report, the party’s publications, p. 110.
10 Political report, the party’s publications, p. 2
the war the ASAP collided on a number of occasions with the National Movement; the latter insisted on maintaining a defensive strategy. Instead, the ASAP believed in a more offensive strategy vis-à-vis the right wing groups.

Aside from its theoretical propositions on the importance of armed struggle, the party could not achieve what it aimed for, and remained constrained by the small number of militants it had to engage in both defensive and offensive battles (Zebian, 1977: 230). Moreover, the party was also constrained by insufficient levels of military training. The ASAP had a strong position against the Syrian intervention in Lebanon and was sympathetic to Iraq. According to the leadership of the party, the revolutionary violence should continue, but via different and secret forms in the postwar period (Zebian, 1977: 231).

2.5.3– The Independent Nasserite Movement (INM)

The Independent Nasserite Movement (INM) (Harakat al-Nasiriyin al-Mustaqlin) was one of the first parties to adopt Egyptian President Jamal Abdel-Nasser’s principles, reflected in its “Liberty, Socialism, and Unity” slogan, under the presidency of Ibrahim Koleilat. The INM became a key player in politics since the 1958 civil war when its military wing, the Mourabitoun (sentinels) clashed with Lebanese President Camille Cham’oun. The movement retained a strong presence until the 1970s while maintaining pan-Arab ideals and strong support to the Palestinians in Lebanon. In the 1980s the INM engaged in battles alongside the Palestinians and the Progressive Socialist Party (PSP) against Israelis and the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF). However, the alliance with the PSP crushed as the PSP joined the Amal Movement and Syria in a campaign that culminated in the exile of INM leader Ibrahim Koleilat and the sidelining of the Mourabitoun in 1985.
During the civil war, the INM was considered the main branch of the National Movement capable of operating in most of the conflict areas around Beirut. Albeit some have suggested that the PLO used the Mourabitoun as cover in Beirut since they enjoyed popularity in the Sunni Street, this does not seem to be the case (Zebian, 1977: 232). Al-Mourabitoun’s popularity allowed it to be a leading party during the years of war.

2.5.4 – The Popular Nasserite Organization (PNO)

The Popular Nasserite Organization was a Nasserite organization established in Lebanon by Maarouf Saad in 1973, along with many other movements like the Free Nasserite Movement and the Union of the Popular Working Forces. The movement was mainly attributed to Maarouf Saad, who was the charismatic figure attracting the people of Sidon, especially as the representative of the city in the Parliament. Saad was considered the shadow of Nasser. He believed in pan-Arabism as a way to defend the Arab nation against Zionism and Imperialism. Moreover, the movement was considered the main populist group in Sidon (Zebian, 1977: 277).

The PNO joined the National Movement and fought alongside it mainly in the Sidon area. Like other leftist parties, the PNO fought with the resistance movements against the Israeli Invasion in 1982. The PNO was founded and based on “Nasserism” as a path of struggle for unionist Lebanese parties that raised the issues of Arab Unity and Arabism, and adopted the Palestinian cause as a core interest (Ibid).
2.6– Conclusion

Although they played an important role in Lebanese politics, the parties examined in this chapter are not heavy weight ones. In fact, some of them, like the CAO are no longer active, while others have lost their influence. In part this is due to the fact that they were formed under the pressure of armed struggle and thus had to accommodate themselves and their principles to a war-like situation. This diverted the parties’ priorities from social-economic struggles to revolutionary political struggles, and thus made it difficult for them to retool themselves into civil organization. The eclipse of leftist parties in Lebanon is also part and parcel of the general collapse of the Left in the Arab world after the 1967 defeat.

The next two chapters examine the Progressive Socialist Party and the Lebanese communist Party’s experiences in Lebanon. Studying these parties allows for an understanding of the failures and successes of the Left in Lebanon and its future prospects.
CHAPTER THREE
THE LEBANESE COMMUNIST PARTY

3.1 – Introduction

This chapter examines one of the main leftist parties in Lebanon, the Lebanese Communist Party (LCP), a party commonly thought of as the first leftist party and “one of the oldest multi-sectarian parties in Lebanon” (Collelo, 1987). The first part of this chapter will present an overview of the party’s origins, evolution and decline. The second and third sections will highlight its main accomplishments and failures.

3.2 – Early Origins and Evolution

Leftist movements in Lebanon date back to the early 1900s. On May 1907 a demonstration was held in the area of Raouche. In 1925 the Comintern Journal reported that “It is believed that the earliest May 1st celebration on Arab land took place in Lebanon in 1907. In that year, a group of intellectuals and students who had studied in Europe came back to Lebanon with socialist thoughts and held the celebration” (Dakroub, 2007: 100-101). They called for freedom, equality and a constitution among other things (Ibid: 106). According to the same journal, the second May 1st celebration did not take place until 1921 when some workers and intellectuals held a celebration that ended in a bloodbath (Ibid: 164).

A few years later, in 1924, the “Lebanese People Party” (LPP) – which would later become the Communist Party of Syria and Lebanon (CPSL) – was created. Nassib Nemr (2004) presents two accounts regarding the birth of the CPSL. The first suggests that Fouad Chemali met with Youssef Yazbek among other intellectuals and
workers\textsuperscript{11} and called for the creation of the party; the second one advances that it was Joseph Burger, a Jewish journalist from Palestine who visited Yazbek claiming he was representing the Palestinian Communist Party and was in charge of creating a division of the party in Lebanon. Together, they met with Chemali and other intellectuals and workers and launched the party (Ismael and Ismael, 1998: 7). Nemr claims that while some historians were under the illusion that the party was under Jewish control, seeing as it was founded by Jews, others only treat it as a historical fact (Nemr, 2004: 130).\textsuperscript{12} Be that as it may, founders of the party decided to call it the Lebanese People Party in an attempt to avoid the then French ban on Bolshevik activities (Collelo: 1987).

Alongside other demands, the LPP called for activating of the Lebanese industrial, agricultural and trade sectors; spreading a spirit of brotherhood, eliminating religious, sectarian and regional intolerance and banning the clergy from interfering with political issues; strengthening national school and making primary school mandatory for boys and girls; organizing workers and peasants in trade unions in order to defend their common interests and gain their full rights; imposing tax on inheritance and fortune and decreasing tax imposed on people; making public endowments property of the people under the government’s administration; and liberating women and giving them their full rights (Isamel and Ismael, 1998: 11).

On 30 April 1925, the LPP put in an application for a license to operate as a political party. Once legal and public it was able to celebrate May 1\textsuperscript{st} 1925 at Crystal

\textsuperscript{11}Elias Qashami, Artin Madoyan, Nicolas Mchantaf, Elias Mchantaf, Dr. Adib Mezher, lawyers Nemr Heba and Elias Jahshan, Ibrahim Estefanos, Bechara Kamel and Elias Al Hajj Nassar.

\textsuperscript{12}It is important to note that among the bibliography consulted for this study, the reference to Jewish founders is only emphasized by Nemr (2004) and Ismael and Ismael (1998). Dakroub (2004: 181) briefly mentions Burger, not as a founder but as a facilitator, without pointing out that he was Jewish. This raises the issue of whether the fact has been intentionally avoided or ruled out as unimportant.
Cinema (Ismael and Ismael, 1998: 10). This celebration was the party’s greatest achievement where Youssef Yazbek, writer, reporter and founder of the LPP, articulated the labor demands to ban night work and impose a limit of eight hours on the working day and introduce legislation to establish a minimum wage and to establish social security insurance. He concluded his speech with Marx’s known phrase “Workers of the world, workers of the world, unite!” (Ibid). Among other things, it was one of the manifestations of the LPP’s ties to the Comintern.

Later in 1925, members of the LPP and Spartacus, a party of Armenian Bolsheviks, decided to merge their parties into the Communist Party of Syria and Lebanon (CPSL). Even though the authorities of the French mandate had arrested tens of communist leaders accused of inciting the people against the system and supporting the Syrian revolution, detainees managed to lead the party from within their cells. 1926 was labeled the year of labor strikes, strikes that lead to the realization of most of the workers’ demands (Ibid: 397 to 399).

In 1928 communist detainees were released as a result of a general amnesty for political prisoners. The party was restructured under Fouad Chemali, who became its Secretary General. As a result, the CPSL was linked officially to the Comintern (Ibid: 405 to 408). In 1929, the communists took advantage of the upcoming elections to disseminate their program, which was largely similar to those of the LPP in 1924. In July 1930 the CPSL, still a secret party at that time, decided to go public and openly attack the mandate, surprising the Comintern that had assumed the arrests had eradicated the party.

The early 1930s witnessed prominent partisan activity whether in daily struggle or intellectual output all under the oppression of French authorities and a ban on labor or political movements (Ibid: 427 to 431 and 448). Party activities
concentrated on political education among the Arab intelligentsia (Ismael and Ismael, 1998: 21). In July 1931, the party published its first detailed program asking for the total independence and unity of Syria, the withdrawal of the occupying French armies, the end of the mandate, the cancellation of debts imposed by the Ottomans, the withdrawal of the privileges of foreign companies and confiscation of their possessions, and, finally, the abolishment of the constitution imposed by the mandate on the Syrian people (Ibid: 449). Unlike the previously mentioned demands focusing on popular needs and rights, these ones concentrated on abolishing the French mandate.

In 1932, it was decided that a Palestinian Communist Party would be created, independent from the Syrian one. The effect of that on Lebanon was the emergence of a new leadership of the party by Khaled Bekdash. Consequently, more intellectuals were drawn to the CPSL and many its members were dedicated to political work, focusing on how to present to party to appeal to the public (Nemr, 2004: 63).

The late 1930s witnessed the establishment of a multi-sectarian democratic pro-reform force reflecting that decade’s social struggles against monopolization of wealth and resources. It culminated in the Democratic National Convention held in November 1938 under the auspices of the CPSL. The convention condemned the interference of the mandate officers in ministerial work and denounced administrative corruption. It proposed a series of reforms including the popular election of the president of the republic, a ban on combining ministerial and parliamentary tasks, and the adoption of a direct and progressive income tax (Traboulsi, 2008: 172-173).

The CPSL had been enjoying its public status after the victory of the National Front in France in 1936. Ismael and Ismael note that there was “some relaxation of repressive measures in Syria and Lebanon and more tolerance of the mandate
authorities towards communist activities” (1998: 29). But in 1939, after the start of the Second World War, and the surprising Nazi-Soviet agreement insuring the Soviet’s non-intervention, the party was declared illegal by the French mandate authorities and had to go back to the secretive life (Nemr, 2004: 78; and Collelo: 1987).

1943 was an eventful year for both the CPSL and for Lebanon. In May the Comintern founded by Lenin was dissolved as the Soviet Union joined the Allies. The CPSL regarded this as a positive step in the evolution of world communism (Ismael and Ismael, 1998: 34). Nevertheless, this meant that, on the eve of the parliamentary elections in August 1943, the CPSL had to contest the elections independent of the Comintern. In fact, the CPSL candidates contested the elections ran as independents, outside the usual electoral lists. Their electoral plan was flexible and appealed on reform and the demands were democratic and moderate, but it was a plan that marginalized several fundamental communist concerns such as acquiring independence (Nemr: 2004, 124-125). According to Nemr, it also sidelined the main communist goal, namely revolution. In his speech, Bekdash claimed that “all we ask is the improvement of the conditions of the national worker” to reassure employers. The candidates thus entered their electoral campaign with “traditional bourgeois slogans” (Ismael and Ismael, 1998: 32) and failed to win any seats in the Chamber of Deputies (Callelo, 1987).

In this “volatile climate, both nationally and internationally”, the CPSL held its first party congress from 31 December 1943 until 2 January 1944. The

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13 While the Soviets claimed the decision was taken because of the widened communist movement that no longer can be controlled in one center, it is believed that it was the Soviet’s guarantee of no interference in other countries’ affairs (Nemr, 2004: 147).

14 As discussed earlier, some consider it the second congress.
conference was attended by 200 delegates (Ismael and Ismael, 1998: 34). Orchestrated by Bekdash, the congress concluded with three main decisions: the division of the CPSL into the Syrian Communist Party (SCP) and the Lebanese Communist Party (LCP); that there should be one common Central Committee for both parties; and the ratification of the national program for each of the Syrian and Lebanese parties (Ibid: 35).

After the end of the Second World War, the LCP launched a series of strikes against the mandate and established the General Union of Workers. In spite of their internal problems, by 1947 both the LCP and the SCP were playing “prominent roles in national politics and had about 18,000 members”. In addition, “union organizing activity expanded and about seventy trade unions had been established including nearly 30,000 workers in the most important sects of the economy” (Ibid: 38). Nevertheless, LCP candidates were defeated again in the 1947 parliamentary elections (Collelo, 1987).

According to Ismael and Ismael, the party reached the peak of its influence in Lebanese politics in 1948. Quoting Walter Laqueur, they suggest that the LCP had become “one of the strongest parties in the country” (1998: 38). However, this high point soon collapsed in the light of the party’s position on the partition of Palestine. Khaled Bekdash shifted drastically the party’s position to accommodate the Soviet policy, even though the LCP had been strictly against the partition. This resulted in internal conflicts leading to a dramatic decrease in the party’s membership due to the expulsion of dissidents and the mass withdrawals, in addition to a significant loss of public support. Consequently, the Central Committee decided to reunify the Syrian and Lebanese parties in August 1950 (Ibid: 39-40).

From then on, ties to the SCP became stronger to the point where, in 1954, the
party leadership was moved to Damascus. In Artin Madoyan’s view, this decision damaged the already fragile party (Ibid: 45). The unification ended in November 1958 and the LCP and SCP were separated again. Thus, during the 1950s, the party's inconsistent policies on different levels cost it support and eventually isolated it and pushed it back to underground work (Collelo: 1987).

It was not until 1965 that the LCP moved towards ending its isolation. Early that year, as Nicolas Chawi was elected Secretary General replacing Khaled Bekdash, the LCP became officially independent of the SCP. According to George Batal, the LCP took some drastic regulatory measures, carried out a deep and comprehensive correction of the party’s policies and also reconsidered its alliances with democratic and national forces (Edde, 2005: 51-52). As a result, the LCP started reaching out to Arab nationalists, which was the first step towards the long-term alliance with the Arab Nationalist Movements (Ibid: 53). In addition, communication with the PSP resumed and the LCP became a member of the Front of National and Progressive Parties and Forces, which later became the Lebanese National Movement (Collelo, 1987). In August that year, the LCP, along with the PSP and the Arab Nationalist Movement, called for a popular gathering in support of the farmers’ struggle against trade monopoly (Traboulsi, 2008: 254).

Despite this seeming success, the party was preoccupied conflicts within its ranks, which were aggravated by the humiliating Arab defeat in 1967 (Ismael and Ismael, 1998: 81). The severe internal crisis visibly manifested itself during second congress held in 1968. There were then two distinct visions and approaches: one that longed for more independence from the Soviet Union and another that called for maintaining party ties with Moscow. Accordingly, for some members, the congress was considered historic as it was able to draw goals, formulate policies and make
political alliances, independent from the wishes of the “infallible authority”, the Soviet Union (Batal in Edde, 2005: 57). For others, the congress was taken over by some opportunists who had appropriated some ideas as their own, and whose aim was the total distortion of communism (Nemr, 2004: 11-12). The former camp was able to attain its objective as the party was restructured radically (Murad in Edde, 2005: 30), and according to Ismael and Ismael, “the party showed great vigor in recruiting new members, particularly among youth” (1998: 81).

Shortly after that, in 1970, and while communist parties in other Arab countries were still banned by their respective governments, the LCP regained legal status from then Minister of Interior Kamal Junblat (Ismael and Ismael, 1998: 81), and the call to join the party turned public (Ashti, 2004: 58). Meanwhile, efforts were spent on two levels: preparations for the third congress, and the establishment of the Popular Guard (al-Haras al-Sha’by), the party’s military wing.

Held on schedule for the first time, the third congress convened in January 1972, four years after the second one. It was largely considered as continuation and development of the earlier congress (Batal in Edde, 2005: 66), and presented a serious attempt by the party to become a meaningful political force in the region as it struggled to overcome the traditional communist ghetto of isolation and sectarianism and to make a strong, convincing appeal to the Arab public (Ismael and Ismael, 1998: 82). That year several LCP leaders, including its Secretary General, publically ran for the elections. But even though they polled several thousands of votes, none of them succeeded in claiming a seat (Collelo, 1987).
3.3 – The LCP’s Military Engagement and Decline

The LCP started preparing military cadres in order to protect itself and the Palestinians from two looming dangers: that of the Phalange Party and its allies in the Lebanese Front (LF) and that of Israeli attacks. Nonetheless, along with its allies, the party launched political initiatives in order to find a political solution under the slogan of democratic change (Batal in Edde, 2005: 62). However, on the eve of the civil war, the Popular Guard was actively fighting alongside its allies in the LNM (Collelo, 1987) against the LF in what has come to be known as “the Two Years War” (Harb al-Sanatayn) (Traboulsi, 2008: 329-330), which ended with the assassination of Kamal Junblat in April 1977 (Ibid: 255).

The LCP’s fourth congress was held in 1979, three years late because of the war. During that congress, George Hawi was elected Secretary General and some major changes were introduced to the structure of the party. Ten comrades were assigned as members of the Politburo leaving the LCP under a collective leadership. Moreover, a secretariat office was assigned to overlook the execution of decisions. However, according to Batal, this led to the marginalization of the Politburo and, contrary to what was intended, turned the secretariat – under the leadership of the Secretary General – into the leading force of the party (Edde: 2005, 86-87).

Despite the LCP’s internal conflicts, the decision to resist the 1982 Israeli invasion was largely a collective decision (Charbel, 2005: 69-70). In September 1982, the LCP created the Lebanese National Resistance Front (Jabhat al-Muqawama al-Wataniya al-Lubnaniya) (Traboulsi, 2008: 387), a topic examined in details in chapter 5, proving itself a major player at a historical turning point (Murad in Edde, 2005: 30). In addition to fighting the Israeli army, the LCP also initiated a fight against Multi-National Forces as soon as those started supporting Israeli troops (Batal in
Once more, the war had delayed the party’s congress. Its fifth congress was held in February 1987, eight years after the fourth one. It confirmed, yet again, the conflicts within that party, and aggravated its incessant crisis (Ibid: 102-103). Also in that year, along with the PSP, the LCP fought a weeklong battle with Amal militants, a conflict that was stopped by Syrian troops. Worthy of note is that, during the mid-1980s, many party leaders and members were assassinated, reportedly by Islamic fundamentalists (Collelo, 1987).

For the LCP, the fact that it was the foreign interference that ended the civil war meant the defeat of the project of democratic forces. That, in addition to the fall of the Soviet Union, deepened the party’s crisis (Batal in Edde, 2005: 102-103). Under these circumstances, the sixth congress was held in May 1992 and deep differences came to light. According to Batal, the political document that came out (al-wathiga) presented advancement and regeneration in thought, politics, methods of work and internal democracy. But when it comes to the party itself it did not meet the ambitions of Hawi (Edde: 104). Few months later, in September 1992, Hawi submitted his resignation and was replaced by Farouq Dahrouj (Edde, 2005: 182).

Thus, since the early 1990s, the crisis kept intensifying and persisted during the following congresses. The ninth congress, held in December 2003, and where Khaled Hadadi was elected Secretary General marked the rupture of communists according to Batal. In fact, Hadadi asserted that the rupture not only was within the party, but also with the people: “we are alienated from our people” (Edde, 2005: 111). This was confirmed in the elections of the year 2000 where the LCP failed on both levels: they failed internally to agree on the elections and failed to gain votes. Internally, there was a strong disagreement regarding how the elections were handled.
and how the candidates were chosen (Ashti, 2004: 298). This disagreement even produced counter-nominations: some communists nominated themselves against the candidates officially nominated by the party (Ibid: 300). Moreover, the LCP remained outside the major electoral lists and was thus unable to win any seats (Ibid: 281).

The situation has not changed in recent years, and the LCP seems to have become stagnant. The party’s activities are limited to May Day celebrations, attended by a few hundreds of people, in addition to more failed election results in 2005 and 2009.

3.4– The LCP’s Accomplishments

Although the LCP’s influence has been declining over the years, the party achieved several feats that have had lasting impact on Lebanese politics. In this section, four of the LCP’s major achievements will be highlighted. These are promoting the concept of secularism, developing the trade union movement, establishing the concept of resistance to Israelis, and strengthening media, cultural and artistic work.

3.4.1 – The Concept of Secularism

The LCP has always been a secular party, and one of the few parties that have affiliations throughout different sects and regions in Lebanon (Batal in Edde: 2005, 93; Collelo, 1987). In fact, secularism was one of the party’s key struggles –if not the main one– that started with the LPP and continues today. The LPP’s principles called for eliminating all forms of religious and sectarian fanaticism and banning the clergy from interfering with political issues (Dakroub, 2007: 342).

These are recurrent demands in the LCP’s statements and activities. The
current rules of procedure (*al-nizam al-dakhili*) of the party, like previous ones, highlight that the LCP aims at abolishing the sectarian system and replacing it with a democratic, secular and civil one.\(^{15}\) Along the same lines, the LCP’s leader Khaled Hadadi recently called for political reform based on the abolition of political sectarianism.\(^{16}\) The LCP also was a major contributor to the Campaign for Abolishing the Sectarian System (*Hamlat Isqat al-Nizam al-Ta’ifi*) in 2011.

This is not to say that it was a concept unknown to the Lebanese, but to point out that it was the LCP that brought it to light, implemented it within the party and attempted to apply it to Lebanon. One of these attempts appears in the statement of former PM Rashid El Solh on the eve of the civil war. The statement, to which LCP leader George Hawi had contributed largely, revolved around the idea that the sectarian dominance cannot continue and that political sectarianism should be abolished and replaced by a secular democratic system (Charbel, 2005: 83-84).

Throughout the years and up until today, anti-sectarian slogans have been raised by the LCP and it is important to note that it was the LCP that has rooted the concept of secularism in the Lebanese society. Nowadays sectarianism is an offense that none would want to be guilty of and it is the LCP that first carried the banner of secularism, and continues to do so today. Leaders of sects call for abolishing sectarianism, an obvious shift from their past speeches, regardless of whether it is a genuine call.

Another important point to note is that, while abolishing sectarianism was not mentioned in the Lebanese constitution, it was later on noted in the Ta’ef Agreement.


\(^{16}\) Speech made by Hadadi in 2009, retrieved from \(<http://www.jammoul.net/forum/showthread.php?t=12012>.\)
as an objective, although it is still not implemented today.

3.4.2– The Trade Union Movement

Establishing trade unions has also been a fundamental aspect of the LCP’s work. In fact, the LPP had called for organizing trade unions for workers and peasants in an attempt to defend their interests and insure their full rights (Dakroub, 2007: 342). Dakroub refers to several successful experiences among which that of the communist printing workers who were able to re-establish their union in 1926, which then became very influential and was able to fulfill many of the workers’ demands (2007: 335).

The LCP allocated a significant amount of its activities in order to form trade unions and regulate the relations between them with the aim of uniting the trade union movement in a General Union (Ibid: 301). The General Union of Workers (GUW) and Employees in Lebanon (the Labor Union) was indeed founded in the mid-1940s after the Second World War, by Mustafa Al-Ariss, and became influential in the country’s political life (Ismael and Ismael, 1998: 38). “The GUW was responsible for enacting the first progressive labour legislation in the Arab World, the Lebanese Labour Act of 1946. It was affiliated with the World Federation of Trade Unions and attended the federation’s Paris conference in 1945”, and, by 1947, seventy trade unions had been established (Ibid).

Thus, even though the political trait remains the party’s central feature, for the LCP, trade union work is a key and central issue that had its positive returns for the party and for the country. On the one hand, it helped the labor wing of the party and helped underscore the main difference between the LCP, the party of the working class, and other national parties (Dakroub, 2007: 302). On the other hand, it helped
improve the work conditions of labor: eight working hours a day, a ban on night work, and fixing the minimum wage, were all demands of the LPP on May Day 1925 (Ibid: 303-304).

The LCP not only played a major role in establishing and developing Trade Unions in Lebanon, it also attempted to educate the people about the importance of these Trade Unions. The LPP allocated a part of its publications “Humanity”, to publish articles under the title of “the Life of Unions” (Hayat al-Naqabat) that would discuss the establishment and organization of unions, as well as the rights and obligations of workers towards their unions, among other things (Ibid: 332).

The LCP’s work in Trade Unions translated into different successful accomplishments. In 1965, the law for social security was put in place and one year later, the National Union of Workers and Employees’ Union (al-Ittihad al-Watanili-naqabat al-‘ummalwal-mustakhdamin) was licensed, followed by the establishment of the General Union of Workers in Lebanon in 1970. Between 1972 and 1974 the Union was immersed in supporting the struggles of farmers and peasants. The Union was able to lead a march of more than 30000 farmers in May 1974 (Ghazal, 2005).

This prominent Trade Unions’ work was however ceased on the eve of the civil war, although in 1988 protests were organized in all regions and demarcation lines were crossed. After the end of the civil war, the union movement declined even more and was taken over by sectarian forces. The role of unions has since become weak, unable to overcome sectarian quotas (Ibid). Thus, when the LCP had the command over trade unions, they managed to achieve several important accomplishments, however, when the LCP’s power declined and sectarian parties took over, unions are struggling to survive. This shows the significant role the LCP had been playing in the union movement.
3.4.3–Resistance

The LCP is also the founder of the ideology of resistance in Lebanon. At the present time, the concept of resistance is wrongly attributed to Hezbollah. Charbel rightfully notes that what we are witnessing with Hezbollah is a continuation of the resistance mode (*Halat al-Muqawama*) initiated by the LCP (2005: 27). In fact, the LCP’s resistance state is not limited to armed confrontation with the enemy, but also includes intellectual and political resistance. In this respect, intellectuals and artists affiliated with the LCP have produced books, songs, plays promoting the concept of resistance among the people and calling for freedom and independence.

During the mandate years, the LCP fought constantly the French authorities in pursuit of the country’s independence. Even when the LCP’s leaders were detained between 1926 and 1928, they were able to lead the party from their prison cells, managed to mobilize prisoners, and were capable of producing journals and books (Dakroub, 2007: 397). Thus, the LCP’s resistance against the ‘enemy’ started manifesting itself as early as the party’s inception.

As soon as the Israeli troops invaded Lebanon in 1982, the LCP turned all of its efforts into fighting Israel, this time physically however. Once there was a threat of occupation, armed resistance was given priority, and, in 16 September 1982, the party, along with other parties, initiated the Lebanese National Resistance Front (Traboulsi, 2008: 378). Batal describes the LCP’s military operations as “clean”, meaning that they targeted the enemy without exposing the interest of the people and managed to inure major losses to the Israelis (Edde, 2005: 93). The LCP did not only fight Israeli troops, but also the South Lebanon Army and Multi-National Forces when they started supporting Israelis (Batal in Edde, 2005: 93-94).

Throughout the years, resistance was a recurrent theme that the party stressed.
The LCP’s leaders’ speeches on the commemoration of the Lebanese National Resistance Front for example reflect the great emphasis the party puts on resisting the enemy and liberating the land. In one of his speeches, Hawi asserts that Sheb’a Farms should be liberated and stresses the need for liberation while referring to the LCP as the “Liberation Party”. More recently, on the same occasion, Hadadi wrote an article that he concluded by advancing that protecting the bread loaf and protecting the resistance and the nation are one battle.

Hence, even though the LCP has fallen behind when it comes to resistance, at both the intellectual-political and military levels, for different reasons, this does not change the fact that it had established the cornerstone for the concept of resistance and it remain an essential part of it (Charbel, 2005: 27).

3.4.4 – Strengthening Media and Cultural Work

Since its inception, the LCP has initiated, encouraged and nurtured media and cultural activity. A lot of nationalist democratic revolutionary intellectuals accompanied the party’s journey whether as party members or supporters. According to Dakroub, the journals and books published under the LCP’s supervision are probably the most important part of modern progressive socialist Arab thought, and an important part of Arab culture in general (2007: 216).

Al-Sahafi al-Ta’ih (the Wandering Journalist newspaper), first published in September 1922, “is considered to have laid the intellectual foundation for leftist thought, which in turn produced the organizational basis for Lebanon's early socialist

17 Video of the speech posted on youtube, at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h8zBokpoJQ4>.
movement, including Marxism and communism” (Ismael and Ismael, 1998: 5).

*Al-Insaniya* (Humanity) represents the first official Arab communist weekly newspaper. It was closed down only after five weeks of its founding (Dakroub, 2007: 217). However, this did not affect the party’s determination. Fouad Chemali then started *Sawt al-’ummal* (the Voice of Workers), a weekly newspaper that was published for four weeks. The LCP managed to keep publishing *Al-Fajr al-Ahmar* (the Red Dawn), a clandestine newsletter initiated in 1931, despite security efforts to stop it. It became an important medium for the coordination of labor activism. Then in 1934 the party acquired *Al-Douhour* newspaper (the Ages) that was closed down a year later and replaced by *Al-Tali’ah* (the Vanguard). Later, in 1937, *Sawt al-Sha’b* (Voice of People) was issued for ten years before it was closed down. In the 1950s, the LCP acquired *Al-Sarkha* (the Shout) and *Al-Akhbar* (the News) newspapers. A clandestine party circular, *Nida’ al-Sha’b* (Call of the People), was also published (Ismael and Ismael, 1998: 16-17-21-29-31-44; and Dakroub, 2007: 218-219).

Even during civil war years, and while undertaking resistance operations, the LCP kept working on this cultural level and created *Sawt al-Sha’b* (Voice of the People)radio station and *Al-Jadeed* TV station (Batal in Edde, 2005: 102-103).

This brief overview of the cultural productions and activity of the LCP, in addition to the hundreds of books published by its own publishing house, *Al-Farabi*, clearly highlights the emphasis the party puts on media and intellectual work, which are great contributions to the Arab progressive thought. Worthy of note is that, the Soviet Union’s material aid, such as paper for example, helped the LCP produce more newspapers, magazine and books than other parties (Ashti, 2004: 348-349).

Thus, there was a clear mutual influence between the LCP and some of the most prominent intellectuals. Many of the Lebanese writers, poets and artists working
during the 1960s and 1970s were strongly tied to the LCP, some of them as comrades, other as friends (Dakroub, 2007: 221). Amin El Rihani, Maroun Abboud, Ra’if Khoury, Mikhael N’aimeh, Salim Khayata, Tawfiq Youssuf Awwad, George Hanna and Omar Fakhoury are acknowledged intellectuals and writers who contributed to the publications of the LCP (Ibid: 219 to 221). Ziad Rahbani, Marcel Khalife, Khaled El Habr, Sami Hawat and Ahmad Qa’bour are renowned communist or ex-communist musicians and composers who still enjoy wide popularity. Also among the intellectuals and artists that influenced and were influenced by the LCP Karim Dakroub (theatre), Asaad Said (zajal), Issam Abdallah (poet), Shawqi Bzay’ (poet), Mehdi Amel (writer) and Karim Mrouwe (writer).

3.5–The LCP’s Mistakes

In addition to the achievements of the LCP there were also failures on different levels. These have largely weakened its internal structure and affected its relation with the people. This section will outline four of the party’s major failures: its involvement in the Lebanese civil war and its sectarian dimensions, the marginalization of socio-economic issues, its inability to avoid ideological paralysis, and the lack of internal democracy in the party.

3.5.1 – Subordination to the Comintern

In June 1928 the CPSL was officially incorporated into the Comintern (Dakroub, 2007: 408). The latter had an active – and sometimes decisive – impact on communist parties in the world, and Lebanon was no exception. This did not apply only to critical decisions, but to such acts as a self-censorship by intellectuals who relied on theories of the international communist movement for fear of committing “intellectual and practical” errors (Ibid: 53).
One early manifestation of the LCP’s subordination to the Comintern took place in 1947 regarding the partition of Palestine. The party had always supported the Palestinian peoples in their struggle against Zionism, and had rejected partition. In fact, ten days prior to the Soviet vote in support of partition in October 1947, Sawt al-Shaab, the LCP’s newspaper declared that “the solution to the Palestine question is withdrawal [of British forces], independence, abolishment of the mandate, and unequivocal rejection of partition”. However, after the Soviet vote, Bekdash shifted radically the party’s position to accommodate Soviet policy. This resulted in severe internal party conflicts (Isamel and Ismael, 1998: 38-39).

After the Comintern was abolished during the Second World War, the LCP claimed its independence. However, when the Soviet-Chinese conflict erupted, the LCP sided with the Soviet Union and its Marxist-Leninist approach against China and its Maoist approach. Thus subordination to an international body, the Comintern, was replaced with subordination to a country, an even more dangerous choice (Nemr, 2004: 148). Some members of the LCP were even “accused” of being “Maoists deviationists” and were expelled from the party.

Hawi was elected Secretary General of the LCP in 1977. He was critical of the party’s ideological stalemate and argued that Marxism should only be considered as a method or a guide for action (Edde, 2005: 11). However even when Hawi was leading the party, the LCP still adopted a Leninist approach (Ashti, 2004: 48). For example, albeit party members opposed the LCP’s participation in the civil war, Hawi’s decisions were nevertheless implemented.

It was only after the fall of the Soviet Union that some changes took effect: there was more flexibility with membership, discipline, members’ rights and the organizational principles (Ibid). For instance, at the organizational level, the sixth
congress held in 1992 amended the rules of procedure allowing more internal democracy, diversity and respect of different opinions, as well as more debate before taking any decisions. It also allowed those with opposing opinions the chance to voice them and try to convince others, however only after abiding by the party’s decisions.

The binding relations between the LCP and the Comintern were the reason for the ideological stalemate that the party suffered from. This affected practical decisions as well as the party’s intellectual productivity, thus causing a gap within the party and a gap between the party and the people. The LCP was not able to take its own decisions based on the circumstances in Lebanon. As a result, people were not able to relate to it.

3.5.2 – The LCP’s Involvement in the Civil War

The LCP’s involvement in the civil war is without doubt one of its chief failures. Although the party reportedly tried to avoid the conflict, it soon found itself immersed in the war and drawn into its sectarian dimensions.

In an interview conducted with him, George Hawi claimed that the LCP’s participation, and that of the Syrian Social Nationalist Party helped give the war a national dimension rather than a purely sectarian one (Charbel, 2005: 35). Yet the LCP’s participation could not stop the war from taking sectarian detours. Hawi himself speaks of the uncontrollable sectarian reactions during the war. In the Mountain war for example, Israel fomented sectarian massacres. The horrible killings and displacement of Druze by the Lebanese Forces and the chaos resulting from the lack of discipline in the ranks of the forces fighting with the LNM are reasons why it was impossible to avoid sectarian conflicts (Ibid). This not only proves that the LCP’s participation did not ease sectarian hatreds; it also suggests that the party, at some
point, justified sectarian massacres. Even if, at the beginning of the war, the LCP considered itself participating in a national struggle, soon this did not stop the war from sliding into a sectarian conflict.

At some points during the years of the civil war, the LCP engaged in sectarian alliances. For instance, in the early 1980s, the LCP and other leftist parties allied with Amal movement, and sectarian figures like Rashid Karami and Suleiman Franjyeh under the National Salvation Front (Jabhatal-Inqaz al-Watani) (Traboulsi, 2008: 391). The front however did not last long because it was sponsored by Syria that was trying to find sectarian solutions according to Batal (in Edde, 2005: 95-96). Similar sectarian alliances have given the party a sectarian aspect. Hawi advances that having a lot of Muslim figures allied with the leftist parties, made it look as if those parties were allied with Muslims against Christians (Edde, 2005: 157).

The LCP frequently found itself immersed in conflicts that it did not want to participate in. The clash with Syria is one example. The Syrian regime was favorable position to the Lebanese Front and against the Lebanese National Movement during the war, it wanted to end armed conflict and implement sectarian policy. On the other hand, Junblat was asking for the Syrian help to eradicate extreme right to implement reform and decided to clash with Syria because of its position. The LCP was against this clash with Syria, but had to abide by the decisions of its strongest ally, the PSP (Charbel, 2005: 98 to 102).

Another example is the eradication of al-Mourabitoun party: Hawi confessed that the LCP was against this decision but had to go through with it along with Walid Junblat (Ibid: 53). This demonstrates that decisions taken during the civil war were not always –if at all– aligned with the LCP’s views. The LCP participated in a sectarian war, but could not even take its own decisions.
It is essential to note that the LCP had several reasons for getting involved in the war, most importantly to avoid a victory of those political parties supported by Israel. Preserving Lebanon’s Arab identity is actually one of the LCP’s principles. However, a lot of mistakes were made and many times the party relied on its aspirations instead of the facts as its leaders thought they could master the “game” (Hawi in Charbel, 2005: 88).

3.5.3 – The Marginalization of Socio-Economic Issues

The fact that the LCP was involved in the war for so many years undoubtedly led to the marginalization of its social and economic agenda. Although a consequence of the LCP’s participation in the civil war, it was one of the party’s weaknesses.

As previously highlighted in this chapter, when it was first initiated, the party’s main focus was on the socio-economic rights of workers mainly through trade unions. However, this ceased to be the main concern later on. As already stated, during the 1940s, the LCP focused less on its main principles, but especially socio-economic reforms, and was accused of having shifted from being a revolutionary to a barely reformist party (Nemr, 2004: 125).

Later, during the civil war years, there was no room left for social and economic demands, even though Batal claims that, despite the fighting, social and economic issues were still of concern to the LCP (Edde, 2005: 93-94). Nonetheless, this concern is not evident. Batal himself admits that, while the communists wanted reform through politics and feared that the military wing of the party would be the central focus once at war, militarization took over, marginalizing other aspects of the LCP, namely its social and economic agenda.
In fact, an overview of some of the main turning points of the party clearly shows the marginalization of socio-economic demands. In the 1920s, the LPP had for several demands, on the top of which the activation of the Lebanese industrial, agricultural and trade sectors, as well as strengthening national schools, among other things. In the 1930s the demands published in the party’s program concentrated on abolishing the French mandate. In the 1940s, after the division the CPSL, both the LCP and the SCP were concentrating on socio-economic work through focusing on trade unions. This work continued and culminated in the establishment of the General Union of Workers in Lebanon in 1970, but started declining at the eve of the civil war where socio-economic demands were marginalized in favor of military engagement.

The inescapable correlation between the political, the social and the economic has been pointed out by many (Nahas in Sadek, 2001: 299). Even though this correlation is not unknown to the LCP’s leaders, who founded the party hoping that social and economic reforms would lead to political reform, it seems that the party has disregarded this correlation at many instances, whether deliberately or for reasons outside of its control. Thus, after the civil war where military work was given priority, it was difficult for the LCP to re-engage itself with socio-economic work. It lost influence on the level of trade unions, and has been failing to take back the lead on socio-economic reform (Dakroub, 2007: 100-101-106- and Ismael and Ismael, 1998: 11-21-34-35-38-81).

3.5.4 – Lack of Internal Party Democracy
Very much related to the previous point is the fact that the party has mainly been led by a dictator-leader and has always suffered from internal conflicts reflecting its ideological deadlock. Nemr suggests that the Soviet system of government turned the leader of the party into an infallible dictator (2004: 172). Similarly, Edde argues that in the Soviet experience, the party replaced the people, the party leadership replaced the party, and the Secretary General replaced the party leadership (2005: 11). Although critical of this aspect of the Soviet model, the Lebanese model is actually not very different: Khaled Bekdash remained Secretary General until his death for a total of 58 years. But this dictatorial title is not only the result of the long years as Secretary General but also of the practices of Bekdash who expelled members, not only dissidents but also those he claimed have connections with the Security forces, like Fouad Chemali, one of the party’s founders (Ismael and Ismael, 1998: 20). Bekdash’s style is described as an “authoritarian and semi-Stalinist style of control over the part” (Ibid: 64).

Bekdash is not the only Secretary General who remained in this position for a long period, however. Even those who followed remained in their position for long years: George Hawi and Farouq Dahrouj were Secretary Generals for 15 and 11 years respectively, and Khaled Hadadi has been Secretary General for 9 years so far.

As aforementioned, internal conflicts were unremitting within the LCP. Throughout the years many members have chosen to leave the party and start other parties that would fit their visions. The internal differences appear very explicitly in the literature, where accounts of similar events are given different interpretations. For example, while Batal praises Hawi’s input in the second congress and points to those who did not support Hawi as fundamentalists blindly aligned with the Soviet Union
(Edde, 2005: 57), Nemr refers to Hawi and his followers as opportunists who are distorting communism and longing for tribal rule (2004: 12).

Several issues were at the core of growing alienation within the LCP, namely the relationship with the Soviet Union, the relationship between the Arab national liberation movement, the role of the petty bourgeoisie in the national liberation movement, and the authoritarian versus democratic practice (Ismael and Ismael, 1998: 64). Consequently, several communists had left the LCP throughout the years, expelled or by choice. In 1964, a number of party members, led by Edmund Aoun, Nakhlah Mutran, Suhail Yamot and others, formally asked the leadership to hold a congress, as they wanted to question the party leadership on its policies and its failings. Their request was denied; they were accused of being Maoist deviationists, suspended from the party, and a year later, expelled (Ibid: 64-65). Other groups followed. Between 1965 and 1967 some of those who left the LCP have initiated the Communist Action Organization (Charbel, 2005: 143).

Nemr, who is actually a member of a group that walked out of the party in protest of the authoritarian leadership and stagnation, argues that the LCP suffered from a wrong understanding of democratic centralism (al-Markaziya al-Dimuqratiya) making the leadership always right and the base always wrong even when right which resulted in dictatorship and internal conflicts (2004: 36). This group of “reformists” referred to “traditional communists” as “the communist[s] who adopted communist, literally, and not in concept”, an expression they borrowed from Lenin.

3.6 – Conclusion

This chapter attempted to highlight the LCP’s origins and evolution, as well as its main strengths and weaknesses. It is important to note that the weaknesses referred
to seem to match some of the reasons that have led to the failure of the Soviet Union model. According to the LCP’s sixth congress the reasons of the Soviet Union’s failures are: first, a wrong economic vision; second, the lack of democracy; third, the neglect of the national factor in determining the future of individuals and the community; fourth, the arbitrary denial of the role of spiritual factors in the life of individuals and community; and finally, the closed nature of the undemocratic bureaucratic party (Batal in Edde, 2004: 106). The points addressed in fact apply to the Lebanese model. The LCP succeeded to point out weaknesses but was unable to avoid them.

The next chapter looks at another influential party in Lebanon labeled as leftist, the Progressive Socialist Party founded by Kamal Junblat. Similarly, the chapter first looks at the party’s founding and evolution then emphasizes its main achievements and failures.
CHAPTER FOUR

THE PROGRESSIVE SOCIALIST PARTY

4.1 – Introduction

The principles of the PSP derive from socialist ideas and reform experiences from around the world (Timoviv, 2000: 172-175). Even though the party is called “socialist”, its principles, according to its founder, do not blindly adopt all Socialism’s philosophical ideas. According to Kamal Junblat, the PSP’s socialism is not a rigid copy of Marx and Engels’ dogma applied by International Communism. Instead, the party embraces some of Socialism’s economic and social approaches but rejects many of its assertions (Junblat, 2004: 12 and13).

The PSP is an exceptional “leftist movement” founded by a leader whom was a descendant of a feudal family, Kamal Junblat. This blend has put the party under the actions of what could be called feudal socialism (Timoviv, 2000: 206). It is important to note that the history and ideology of the PSP is largely based on its founder, Kamal Junblat, and later on his son Walid. Thus the overview of the party undertaken in this chapter will be conveyed through their lives.

The chapter opens with a discussion of the origins of the PSP and its evolution. It then examines the party’s main strengths and weaknesses within the frame of the Lebanese Left.

4.2 – Origins and Evolution

Kamal Junblat, the only successor to the Junblat family had a spiritual and intellectual nature that his closest family members could rarely understand (Timoviv,
He began his undergraduate studies in France specializing in Law at the Sorbonne University. The year (1937-1938) he spent in France affected his leftist tendencies given that during his stay, the French Popular Front was still in power and the labor and leftist movements were at their peaks and socialist notions were very popular amongst the masses (Rihana, 2007[volume 2]: 19-20).

After his return from France a clash between his socialist ideas and feudalist uprising surfaced. A conflict of interest between Junblat and his powerful mother Nazira emerged (Timoviv, 2000:120-121). In 1942, the corruption of state officials and the deterioration of the economic situation in Lebanon affected the lower class. Given his socialist principles, Junblat could not accept the unjust measures taken by the authorities (Timoviv, 2000: 86). He established a consumer association that bought wheat from Syria and Palestine and established, in Mokhtara, a chemical laboratory to extract the caustic soda electrolysis to secure soap making supplies (Rihana, 2007 [volume 1]: 39).

On 5 June 1943, Junblat was declared successor to his family’s feudal leadership and one of the political leaders of the Druze sect in Lebanon (Rihana, 2007[volume 1]: 40). Historically, the Junblat family allied with the powers of the day, whether the French when Lebanon was under its colonial control or the President and the ruling Lebanese bourgeoisie after independence (Timoviv, 2000:92). Junblat won in the 1943 parliamentary elections running on the same electoral list with the traditional Maronite allies of the Junblat family. After Bechara El-Khoury was voted as president, Junblat’s political stances started to deviate from that of his mother. He soon opposed

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20 Mokhtara is the ancestral Palace of the Junblat family.
21 Emile Edde was a Maronite leaders allied to the France.
his blocs’ policies, and allied with their rivals, who were calling for more concessions from the French, demanding the complete independence of Lebanon from France (Timoviv, 2000:101-103).

Between 1944 and 1949 Kamal Junblat allied with traditional political leaders but did not participate in their political targets of position building for personal benefits. His socialist beliefs and actions were highlighted in almost all of his actions as minister and as Member of Parliament. In 1944 Junblat voiced his belief that the government should start emphasizing reforming economy, and proposed his vision in this regard. His reform vision was based on three main principles derived from that of Marxist economic principles. First, prioritizing the economy in the course of building a strong state. Second, the country’s income should return to the state as an institution rather than the political authorities’ personal interests. Third, organizing a planned economy that enables the government to mobilize state resources and spend according to the economic goals of the country. This also involved reducing the income gaps between the rich and the poor. Junblat believed that the only solution for this lies in the redistribution of social wealth, which would give workers and farmers the right to own properties (Timoviv, 2000:107-108-113). He also believed that for the country to be completely independent the hegemony of sectarian interests should be ended and the public interest should be given procedure over sectarian ones.

At the end of 1946 Kamal Junblat formed with other members of the parliament a “reform bloc” to oppose the current government system and presidential policies. He was soon appointed minister of economy from where he tried to

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22 President Bechara El-Khoury, Minister Camile Chamoun, and MP Saeb Salam.
23 Notably, Abdel Hamid Karami a powerful Sunni politician from Tripoli, Alfred Naccache, Henry Faroun, Camile Chamoun.
24 President Bechara El-Khoury.
implement his reforms (Safi 2006: 58 and 59). His biographer, Eigor Timoviv, asserts that Junblat was particularly strict with the Druzes working with him in the ministry (2000:133).

On 17 March 1949, the Progressive Socialist Party was established after Junblat had concluded that individual work in public policy and parliamentary work is useless no matter how great a leadership the politician carries (Safi 2006:54). The founding administrative board was formed of six figures, Kamal Junblat, Albert Adib, Farid Jubran, Sheikh Abdallah Alayli, Fouad Rizk, and Dr. Goerge Hana (Rihana, 2007[volume 2]:49). The party’s ideology and agenda were largely based on the vision of its founder. According to Junblat, the creation of the party “is the result of long months and years of collective exploration and research, scientific enlightenment, and meditation” (Junblat, 2004:23). He also asserts that most of the charter was written in the summer of 1946, and that it was re-written and re-printed several times (Junblat, 2004:23). The charter was actually never published, and in fact it was later changed (Ibid).

On 3 May 1949, two days after the parties first celebration, al-Hayat newspaper wrote “the PSP calls for decentralization, expanding authorities and limiting responsibilities, a secular state that respects individuals’ beliefs, the abolishment of the sectarian political system, and fighting against systems of collective dictatorships” (Al-Hayat newspaper, 1949: 22).

From 1949 leading until the elections of 1951, the Palestinian-Israeli conflict escalated while the Lebanese system was overflowing with corruption. Kamal Junblat’s parliamentary opposition was at its peak, calling for the abolishment of parliament (Safi, 2006: 72). Preparation for elections had started and Junblat’s popularity had spread. Although the majority of PSP members were Druze, the party’s popularity had
spread to other sects. The state tried to stop the spread of socialism and the increase in Junblat’s popularity by suppressing the PSP’s work by legal and illegal means. PSP members were fired from their jobs in government institutions; they were also refused to serve in the army and gendarmerie. The conflict escalated even more during a meeting in Barouk where gunshots broke out between the security forces and a PSP group. The security members claimed that the party’s members had been hiding weapons. Three members of the PSP were killed, and almost 58 arrested (Timoviv, 2000:179-182). The elections of 1951 were perceived as a victory for Junblat. He then formed a parliamentary bloc with nine other MP’s under the name of “the Nationalist Socialist Front” (Safi, 2006:111).

Opposition against the president increased with more loyalists switching positions, such as Hamid Karami, a feudal leader from the North, Anwar Al Khatib, Abdallah Al-Haj, and a coalition of Islamic Parties named “The Popular Front” (Rihana, 2007[volume 4]: 56). They called for the resignation of President Beshara El-Khoury and organized a general strike calling for reform along with two-days of demonstrations in Beirut and other regions of the country (Timoviv, 2000:213).

President El-Khoury resigned under pressure from the opposition. Now, socialist ideology dominated Junblat’s thoughts especially when Camile Chamoun, member of “the Nationalist Socialist Front” was elected to Presidency (Timoviv, 2000: 227). Junblat’s requests for reforms would fall on deaf ears. The president renewed his promises to reform the system. MP’s who were part of Junblat’s alliance refused to give the “the Nationalist Socialist Front” a majority in the government. In 1953 the President abolished parliament and called for new elections. The results were devastating. Junblat

\[25\text{ Pierre Eddeh representing the “national bloc”, Ghasan Tweini representing the Syrian Social National Party (SSNP), while Camil Chamoun and Emile Bustany were considered independents.}\]
lost a significant number of seats in different areas of Lebanon. Only he and another PSP member running in the Chouf\textsuperscript{26} were elected to the Parliament. Rihana rightfully notes: “the exaggeration in the role of the revolutionary masses and that of the socialist front backfired against Junblat” (2007, [volume 6]:137-150).

The first protest organized by Kamal Junblat and other leftist parties took place in 1954. The PSP leader participated in preparing for a student protest that took place on 27 March. The slogans of the demonstration were against the United States’ attempts to include the Middle East in an alliance opposed what Washington called the “communist threat”. The authorities used force against demonstrators and one PSP member was shot dead (Safi 2006: 202-203). It is important to note here that the alliance between the PSP and other leftist movements, in particular the LCP, was not based on internal social ground during this period (Timoviv 2000:337).

The period between 1956 and 1958 witnessed the rise of Jamal Abdel Nasser and the emergence of two poles in the Middle East: the revolutionary and conservative states. Lebanese politicians were also divided along these lines (Safi 2006:216). In 1957 President Camile Chamoun endorsed the Eisenhower Doctrine.\textsuperscript{27} This lead to tensions between Abdel Naser and Chamoun as well as a fierce parliamentary opposition against the treaty (Rihana, 2007[volume 7]: 39-40). Junblat’s opposition to Chamoun during this period was not as strong as that of the rest of his parliamentary allies and soon the president suspended parliament and called for new parliamentary elections (Safi, 2006:247-248). Not only did the opposition candidates lose in all constituencies, but

\textsuperscript{26} An area in the mountains of Lebanon largely populated with the Druze sect.

\textsuperscript{27} Use of the US army to defend the countries of the Middle East without aggression by any state subject of world communism and the adoption of $200 million to assist these countries in the development of its economy and strengthen armed forces.
their main leading figures such as Kamal Junblat, Saeb Salam, Abdallah Al Yafi, and Ahmad Al Asad were also defeated in the elections (Timoviv, 2000:260).

During this period Junblat grew fond of Abdel Nasser and the Arab revolutionary alliance and he soon started to receive weapons from Abdel Nasser through Syria (Timoviv, 2000:261). Tensions in Lebanon soon escalated: clashes in the Chouf during the summer of 1957, strong opposition against the nomination of President Chamoun for another term, and the division of the country between two opposite camps (Rihana, 2007[volume 7]:90). This escalation reached a breaking point when the leftist journalist Nassib El Matni was assassinated. The opposition held the authorities responsible for the waves of provocation and assassinations that had swept the country. Bloody conflict spread from Tripoli passing through Beirut and reaching the Chouf. The opposition started organizing uprisings in its spheres of influence (Safi, 2006:277-291).

Towards the end of the first week of the 1958 revolution, the opposition had taken control of a major part of Lebanese territories. Chamoun and allies held Syria and Egypt responsible for the escalation in Lebanon. The opposition was not internally coherent, as each party worked as a separate entity without coordination. This was one of the reasons that left the opposition unable to over throw Chamoun from the presidency (Timoviv, 2000:267-271). It was during this period that Junblat formed the so-called “popular forces”, which included members from different sects and areas of Lebanon (Timoviv, 2000: 270).

Gradually Junblat created in the Chouf an administration that consisted of agencies able to meet the needs of the people and maintain public order. The only criterion that was taken to appoint administrators was their competency and political beliefs, disregarding sectarian considerations. Thus, for the first time in Lebanon, and in
particular in the Chouf area, a non-sectarian representation was established based on secular considerations. Junblat believed that this criterion should be followed in the entire country in the efforts to build a strong Lebanon (Timoviv, 2000:268).

Few days after the 1958 revolt, a military coup took place in Baghdad and overthrew the monarchy. The US feared that Iraq may join the UAR. Invoking the Eisenhower doctrine, the U.S. Sixth Fleet warship appeared on the Lebanese coast; Washington announced that the warship’s task was to protect its nationals in Lebanon and to help stability in the Middle East. In addition to the warship, the US, through Robert Murphy, President Eisenhower’s personal delegate, nominated Foad Chehab for the presidency in agreement with Abdel Nasser, and France. Murphy conducted some negotiations with the different Lebanese factions to secure Chehab’s nomination, including Kamal Junblat and Patriarch Mouchy. Foad Chehab was later supported unanimously by opposition leaders on a condition that the U.S. warships leave Lebanese water (Safi, 2006: 300-303).

Christian parties were not pleased with the election of Chehab, and after Rashid Karami was appointed prime minister, the Phalanges Party declared a counter-revolution. Over 28 peoples were killed and 53 injured in clashes that spread to areas outside Beirut. While Junblat called for the punishment of those causing clashes, Chehab and the rest of Junblat’s allies preferred a compromise solution (Timoviv, 2000:276-277). Soon a new government was formed that included Rashid Karami, Hussein Al-Oweini, the Phalanges Leader Pierre Jumayil and the National Bloc leader Reymond Edde under the slogan of “no victor, no vanquished”. This approach worried Junblat who believed it would only result in strengthening the sectarian system in Lebanon. According to him, the only solution was by forming a new government of
national and secular parties that would gradually implement non-sectarian administrative reforms (Rihana, 2007[volume 7]: 14-20).

Although Junblat was against sectarian government rule, the period between 1958 and 1964 was the only period when the PSP leader tried to reform the system from within government rather than from the opposition. During this phase, Junblat was appointed minister of education, minister of justice, minister of transportation and design, and of the interior (Rihana, 2007 [volume 8]: 73, 75, 97, 101, and 109). His reform efforts were clear in the positions he held. He suggested a number of reforms, including: municipalities in the villages and cities, the establishment of cooperative societies, the protection of Lebanese agriculture and industry from foreign competition, the application and modification of labor laws, the prevention of arbitrary dismissal of workers, a national health care system, the enactment of a new rental law that suits the needs of the poor, the protection of national banks and prohibiting drugs, smuggling as well as the elimination of corruption in the public morals (Rihana, 2007 [volume 8]:110 to 113).

4.3 – The Transformation of Kamal Junblat’s Stance

In the 1960s Junblat felt a bitter disappointment towards his former allies in the opposition. He came to a conclusion that what they considered a “struggle” was merely selfish concerns whenever circumstances resulted in the denial of the privileges granted to them by the National Charter, whether a ministerial position or a parliamentary seat. This reflection of the causes of failures led Junblat to conclude that the struggle towards a democratic secular socialist Lebanon requires different techniques and methods (Timoviv, 2000:292).
Until the early 1960s Junblat was cautious towards his the Soviet Union. In many of his writings he condemned the totalitarian Soviet system’s approach on the division of social classes. He did not differentiate between the United States and the Soviet Union during the beginning of the Cold War, and believed their competition reflected a threat to the peoples of the world. It was until grounds of an alliance were built between Moscow, Syria, and Egypt in the 1960’s that Jounblat now believed that the USSR was an ally to the progressive Arab regimes (Timoviv, 2000:337). A long-term alliance between the LCP and the PSP was thus concluded in 1965. Communications between the two parties was re-established after a long hiatus (Batal: 51, 53).

The years 1969 through 1975 were the period that made the Palestinian issue the core conflict between the right and left wings in Lebanon. It is also the period in which the Lebanese National Front was formed, made up of several parties of nationalist and leftist figures. It was founded in 1969 but was only activated in 1973 under the leadership of Kamal Junblat. It called for political and economic reforms as well as a clear declaration of the Arab identity of Lebanon. Junblat was also able to gather the leftist parties in Lebanon under the slogan of supporting the Palestinian resistance movement and its right to launch commando operations from Lebanese territories (Timoviv, 2000:332).

In November 1969, the Cairo agreement was signed. It established principles under which the presence and activities of Palestinian guerrillas in southeast Lebanon would be tolerated and regulated by the Lebanese authorities (Rihana, 2007[Volume 10]:111). During the 1970’s the Phalanges party stopped attacking the Palestinians in their speeches, instead Pierre Jumayil attacked the Lebanese Left and international
Communism, claiming that they were taking advantage of the Palestinian cause (Timoviv, 2000: 347).

In 1973 both camps starting arming themselves. Right wing Christians parties on the one hand and the Palestinians with their Muslim and leftist allies on the other, started training and arming themselves (Rihana, 2007 [volume 10]: 84, 85). Tension rose until the eruption of the civil war in 1975, and the beginning of the 2-year war (Harb Al-Sanatayn) between the Phalanges and their allies in the “Lebanese Front” (Al-Jabha Al-Lobnaniya) and Kamal Junblat and the parties of the “Lebanese National Movement” (Al-Jabha Al-Wataniya Al-Lobnaniya). Junblat called for the isolation of the phalange, outlawing its activities and expelling its ministers from the government (Traboulsi, 2008: 329-330).

The LNM declared the “transitional agenda for democratic reform of the Lebanese system” (Al-Bornamij Al-Intikali lil-islah Al-Dimokrati Lil-Nizam Al-Lobnany). This called for: the abolishment of the sectarian quotas (Mohasasa) on political and administrative levels; an optional civil law for personal status (Kanoun Madani Ikhtiyari Lil-Ahwal Al-Shakhsiya); a new electoral law based on proportional representation with Lebanon as one electoral district; administrative decentralization; and the creation of an assembly with no sectarian restriction. This agenda was positively received, but Jumayel refused the reforms. The fighting consequently resumed. The “National Dialogue Committee” was formed and the agenda of the National Movement its main topic, but again no reforms were adopted (Traboulsi 2008: 331).

The alliance between the LNM and the Palestinian resistance was founded on common interests that intersected but did not overlap. The former wanted to use military pressure to impose political reforms that were not necessarily supported by
Palestinians while the Palestinians wanted the right to fight Israeli military forces from Lebanese territories (Traboulsi, 2008:351). The LNM managed to achieve military success at the beginning of the war and controlled almost 80 percent of Lebanese territory. However it soon splintered into factions as a result of the dispute with Syria. The LNM received several blows from the Syrian regime during its military intervention in Lebanon in June 1976, followed by the assassination of Junblat on March 16th 1977 (Harb Lubnan).

After the assassination of Junblat, the LNM’s leadership fell to his son Walid. The demand for a new civil law was dropped to reassure the Muslims. As for its discourse, it turned into an Arab national discourse with sectarian behavior. It divided Lebanese sects into “national” and “anti-national” ones (Traboulsi, 2008:373). A clear deviation from secular to sectarian considerations took place during the War of the Mountains (Harb Al-Jabal) in 1983 when Walid Junblat and his party engaged in sectarian massacres against Christian villages (Traboulsi 2008:391).

The turn that the PSP took after the assassination of Kamal Junblat is best shown in an interview conducted with Walid Junblat in 2011. He asserted that “the Lebanese civil war was a Syrian-Iraqi war on Lebanese land; a Syrian-Israeli war on Lebanese land, an American-Soviet war on Lebanese land. The right wing received weapons and money from Saddam Hussein and Israel; we were in the Syrian-Soviet alliance and received weapons from the Soviets through Syria”. He then presented the reasons why he abandoned his father’s reform platform claiming that “the Lebanese civil war was pure absurdity of no benefit and if we were in agreement to reform and abolish the Lebanese sectarian system we would not have gone into the war in the first place”. Junblat clearly sets his priorities for fighting Israel rather than reforming the system during this era stating that “after the assassination of Kamal Junblat, and even
though someone from the Syrian regime had killed him, I said I will forgive but not forget. Because of Lebanon’s geographic standing, I am forced to ally with Syria against Israel” (interview with Walid Junblat, 2011, Dream TV)

Before the Taif Accord, an agreement was signed in Damascus, between Junblat, Nabih Berri, and Elie Hobeika the leader of the Lebanese Forces. The “Tripartite Agreement” created committed to end the war and dismantle militias within a year. Politically, they agreed on an equal representation of Muslims and Christians, the abolition of political sectarianism after a brief transitional period, and the creation of a new balance between the authorities of the President of the Republic and those of the Prime Minister and the Speaker of the House (Traboulsi, 2008: 394).

The abolition of political sectarianism was never implemented, however Kamal Junblat’s efforts towards socialism, reform, and secularism were replaced by Walid Junblat’s sectarian conclusions rather than the principles of social reform, and thus to feudal ways. The elections of 2000 made clear the choices of the PSP. It allied with the “former enemies” under the slogan of “dialogue” and sectarian and political “reconciliation” (Ashti 2004: 281).

4.4 – Evaluating the Experience of the PSP: The Accomplishments

This section will evaluate the strength and weaknesses of the PSP concluded from the overview presented in the section above. We will begin by elaborating on four strengths the PSP led by Kamal Junblat has contributed in improving Lebanese system, and the circumstances of the left in general. The PSP was able to convey change from within the system, a dynamic that no other leftist party in Lebanon enjoyed. It has also contributed a great deal in strengthening the leftist alliance and through its international presence it took Lebanon’s leftist reputation to a broader
level, and finally its lenient ideology helped the party adapt according to Lebanon’s needs.

4.4.1 – Change from within the System

Having come from a feudal family and from it to a system based on feudal leaders, Kamal Junblat was perceived as a strange man. His high intellectual and socialist beliefs were awkward to his fellow feudal leaders, and his constant demands for social reform were simply conceived as strange (Timoviv000: 150,151). Junblat did not melt into the system and was always repeating his demands and trying to implement his socialist beliefs. Moreover, most of the alliances he formed were catalyst to his reform or political demands. Indeed, the PSP leader was able to change the nature of the Lebanese political game, though within limits (Timoviv, 2000: 150-151; Rihana, 2007[volume 6]:27).

Junblat’s concrete reforms can be found in his work in the ministries he headed and through some bills he was able to pass in parliament. For example, as minister of national economy, agriculture and social affairs, Junblat put a stop to bribery in the ministry. He used to disguise himself and go around the departments to apprehend all actions of bribery. As Minister of Education, Junblat was able to establish public schools in underdeveloped areas in the North, South, and Bekaa. As Minister of Interior, his goals were the separation of the security forces from the army, the freedom of organized demonstrations, the organization of relations with the Palestinian resistance, the release of political detainees and banning their prosecution, and the freedom to form political parties. Junblat even licensed left-wing and national parties that had been outlawed for a long period (Timoviv, 2000: 212-214; Ashti and Ashti: 44; and Rihana [volume 6]:40-44).
The PSP leader was also able to pass a bill in parliament which aimed to monitor the illicit enrichment of politicians (Timoviv, 2000:242). The PSP also submitted many draft laws including laws pertaining to compensation for unemployed workers, collaborative agricultural projects, medical security system, the amendment to the law of elections, and abolition of class titles (Timoviv, 2000: 242;Rihana, 2007[volume 6]:47; and PSP booklet).

The PSP leader also took part and at times even led demonstrations and strikes calling for reform even though he was part of the system. In August 1965, the PSP, the LCP, and the Arab Nationalist Movement called for a popular gathering in support of the farmers’ struggle. Kamal Junblat highlighted the list of the farmers’ demands related to trade monopoly. In April 1968, the instructors and students at the Lebanese University started a 50 days strike. They asked respectively for: a wage raise, tenure, a unified campus, and an increase in scholarships. The university’s administration did not respond to any of their demands. However, the students managed to win recognition of “the national union of the Lebanese University students that was won over by a Leftist coalition, the CLP, PSP, and CAO.” This highlighted the radical nature of the student movement at the time (Traboulsi 2008: 254, 301).

4.4.2 – Strengthening the Lebanese Left

The Druze sect in Lebanon is considered to be a minority compared to the larger Muslim and Christian sects. However Kamal Junblat was always the leading figure amongst the many influential leaders he aligned with. He headed the “Reform Bloc” and the “National Liberation Bloc” that included Sunni and Christian feudal sectarian leaders. Junblat was the major figure in the coalition influencing and
imposing his socialist demands. He also led the 1958 drive to oust President Chamoun.

Consequently, the PSP spread to different sects rather than restricting itself solely to the Druze; its leadership included many Christians. Even though the majority of the PSP’s organizational base remained Druze, the ideas of the party and its secular spirit attracted to its ranks youths with radical tendencies from the Maronites, Roman Orthodox, Sunni, and Shi’a sects. Towards the end of the 1950’s the party gathered 18 thousand members (Timoviv, 2000: 179 and 294).

The PSP’s popularity, as well as its President’s strong political influence, were powerful factors of the left’s rise in Lebanon. The strength Junblat gave the Left in Lebanon can be seen through the 1970 Presidential elections between Elias Serkis and Suleiman Frangieh. Junblat forced both candidates to a meeting with him and the leftist parties in Lebanon. The meetings they conducted with the candidates separately were closer to an exam where the candidates were asked questions about their agendas. The next day the newspapers wrote that Elias Serkis failed the exam and soon Suleiman Frangieh would become President (Timoviv, 2000: 348 - 350)

Junblat’s contribution to the Left was recognized by his allies when he was elected president of the LNM. Goerge Hawi, an LNM and Communist leader suggested that “the Lebanese National Movement, led by Kamal Junblat, was one of the fundamental powers qualified to play an important role in reform. It is a popular movement, democratic, national, and progressive, presents the right formula for class political coalition and its leader has a personality that reflects all this” (Batal: 120). Some have suggested that his adherence to socialist principles and demands, in addition to his refusal to surrender militarily before achieving his reform agenda, were the reason behind his assassinated (Hazran 2007:169).
4.4.3 – The International Dimension

Rarely does a Lebanese Member of Parliament, minister, or party leader become internationally a well-known as Junblat was. He was one of those few who rose to the international level, yet it was not on the basis of his Druze leadership but on the foundation of his socialist ideology. He was internationally recognized and visited country leaders as one of the men of thought and liberation movement leaders. More importantly, and although he has strong regional and international relations he was not subservient to any foreign country or leader or camp.

Junblat visited India inspired by Ghandi’s socialism and met with his socialist counterpart, as well as Indian PM Jawaher Lal Nahro. In France, he met George Marche, secretary general of the communist party, and had distinctive ties with the French Socialist Party and its President Francois Mitterrand. He had close ties with former President of Yugoslavia Josip Broz Tito and former President of Chile Salvador Allende. He visited the USSR and built a relationship with the Soviet Communist Party. He accepted an invitation to the United States and met with high officials where he spoke frankly against their policy in the Middle East. Junblat visited many leaders and presidents in the Arab world, but held a strong bond and great admiration to President Nasser and his socialist policies (Timoviv, 2000:189-197, 236-241; Safi, 2006: 217-222).

The PSP leader also conducted a number of activities in the international politics. He called for the first Arab Socialist parties’ conference held in Beirut in 1951, headed the conference of the Asian-African peoples in 1960, represented Lebanon in the Asian-African solidarity conference, headed a parliamentary and public delegation to Popular China in 1966, and headed the Arab delegation to commemorate Nasser. He was elected President in 1973 to the “Democratic Front for
Arab participation in the Palestinian Revolution” from representatives of 47 organizations of socialist, national, and democratic orientation. Finally, an essential event which proves that Junblat’s reputation goes beyond local and regional borders was in 1971 when he received the Lenin Prize for “peace and friendship between the peoples” (Rihana, 2007[volume 12]: 34,37,113; Timoviv, 2000:360-361).

4.4.4 – The Lenient Ideology

Since the PSP was not subservient to any international or regional country, it enjoyed the privilege of having a lenient ideology that could be structured and developed according to Lebanon’s needs. The party is mainly based on its leader’s concepts and beliefs. Junblat constantly emphasized the independence of his party asserting that “we are not communist socialists, national Russian Marxists, bourgeois socialist democrats, national Nazi socialists, nor fascist capitalists. We have taken what is right of all these movements and built the ideal progressive socialist theory (Junblat 2004:23, 126)

According to Junblat, the PSP is “a point of view of life on political, social and spiritual levels. It was not created as a tool to be in power or as a tool for exploitation” (Junblat 2004:12). The fact that socialism begins with the human’s behavior in his daily life does not contradict Junblat’s living. Although a descendent of a feudal family, Junblat’s way of life mirrors his socialist principles. In order to prove he was able to apply his socialist principles in practice, he gave a hundred hectares of land to the farmers in Siblin in the Chouf Mountains (Chink 1999: 78). He spent much of his time with the “commoners” and insisted that he be called “comrade” rather than “Kamal Beik”. His feudal family and fellow traditional leaders were astonished and disturbed by the simplicity of his clothing, his loose tie, and
inexpensive shoes. Lebanon’s political elite saw this as a brazen challenge to proper social wares (Timoviv, 2000: 149 and 150).

The PSP leader strongly believed that Progressive Socialism is the only road to salvation for Lebanon since Lebanon has all the social, economic and political elements to become a socialist country one day. However, he believed that to do so requires total openness and faith in ones capabilities self and in the human being (Junblat 2004:149,230).

Junblat’s belief that socialism needs to be catered to Lebanese society underscores his expresses a farsightedness. After all, an important factor in the LCP’s decline was its later subordination to the USSR. The mixture between the PSP’s moderate ideology and the means it managed in hope of implementing its principles led to the PSP’s deviation from socialism whether moderate or subservient. This setback opens to the next section that looks at some of the pitfalls of Junblat’s project in Lebanon.

4.5 – Evaluating the Experience of the PSP: the weaknesses

The PSP’s weaknesses are also divided into four different yet interrelated topics. Through them we will be able to understand more thoroughly the misfortunes that led to the fall of the left. Also throughout the overview it becomes evident the internal conflicts Kamal Junblat was going through. These conflicts were essential elements in forming leftist parties, whether the feudal-socialist or the sectarian secular conflict. Such a divergence affected Junblat’s alliances on different levels. Another crucial factor of a socialists beliefs would be democracy, yet the party’s’ internal democracy was not a model to follow.
4.5.1 – The Feudal-Socialist Conflict

As a child Kamal Junblat refused to be addressed by his hereditary title “Kamal Beik”. During his youth, he clashed with his mother over his ideological socialist beliefs (Timoviv 2000:53, 80). Junblat would carry this clear feudal socialist conflict with him until the rest of his political life. However, he never clearly chose between one over the other. This was evident through many of his actions and practices.

Kamal Junblat hesitated before accepting to assume the “Mokhtara Leadership.” He visited Najib Beik Abu Sawan, a highly respected man and an old friend of the Mokhtara, to discuss with him this matter. Towards the end of their discussion, Junblat claimed: “I am convinced that I have to face my destiny yet I am not satisfied”. Thus the journey of conflict between his feudal roots and socialist beliefs had started (Timoviv 2000:90, 91).

Junblat’s alliances from the beginning of his political life until the 1960s did not always match his progressive socialist thoughts. He entered parliament in 1943 for the first time allying with his family’s traditional allies. His political stand soon differed than the bloc he was a member of. The main reason behind this is Junblat’s belief that Lebanon should gain its complete independence from France and not because of differences of domestic reforms (Rihana, 2007 [volume 4]: 16-18).

Junblat’s alliances give a better understanding of this socialist-feudal conflict. In 1947, and under “the national liberation bloc, Kamal Junblat aligned himself with, Abdel Hamid Karami, former prime minister a scion of Tripoli’s traditional Sunni family elite, Omar Al-Daouk a politician from the Beiruti Sunni Family Figures, Alfred Naccache, former president and prime minister from the traditional Maronite elite of Beirut, Henry Faroun, one of the traditional Maronite business and political
families in Achrafieh, and “the national bloc”, a Christian Lebanese party established by Emile Edde in 1943 and later headed by his son Reymond (Ashti and Ashti, 2007:13).

Kamal Junblat formed the PSP in 1949. He invited politicians, journalists, social and educational figures for tea to celebrate the establishment of the party. Some journalists wrote the next day that “the first socialist party in Lebanon was established in a bourgeois tea party” (Timoviv 2000:164)! Even after the establishment of the PSP, the Druze leader continued to ally himself with traditional Lebanese leaders and not the LCP, though the latter had been active in Lebanon since 1924.

Between 1949 and 1950 a “Party Committee Alliance” was formed under only one slogan “abolishing parliament and conducting fair and free elections”. The coalition was formed of the PSP, the Union Republican Party that emerged from the SSNP (Syrian Social Nationalist Party), “the national bloc” led by Emile Edde, and “the Liberation Bloc” led by Abdel Hamid Karami. The “National Socialist Front” was formed between 1951 and 1952 with similar alliances. In 1953 a conference was held in support of the Arab people in Marrakesh. This conference was later transformed to include reform demands such as the abolition of political sectarianism, economic unity with Syria, preservation of Lebanon as an Arab state, and resistance against colonial movements. These demands seemed similar to leftist demands, however the coalition appeared to have a Muslim tilts with most of the parties having Muslim backgrounds. The main parties included were the PSP, “the National Call Party” and “the National Commission” the latter two were Muslim parties allied to British policy in the region, “the Islamic Youth”, the SSNP, “The Popular Front”, “the group of Abdel Rahman, and Tripoli’s organizations”(Ashti and Ashti 2007:14-17).
The socialist-feudal conflict can also be noticed in the compromises Junblat made after entering the Lebanese political system. During the beginning of the 1950s Junblat constantly spoke about corruption in the Lebanese system and asserted that an error in the system occurred when the regime did not transcend the National Charter, which according to him was supposed to be only a temporary arrangement, towards the establishment of a secular state (Timoviv, 2000:203). Yet in 1957 Junblat aligned with some Lebanese traditional Muslim figures after losing the elections, such as Saeb Slam, Abdallah El-Yafi, Ahmad El-Asaad, Kamel El-Asaad and Sabri Hamadi. Their alliance called for a number of demands, one of which was the adherence to the National Charter (Ashti and Ashti, 2007:15-16)! Junblat would later return to his primary stance criticizing the National Charter.

According to Junblat the 1958 revolt was a historic opportunity to abolish confessionalism and establish a non-sectarian political system. It was not only a revolt to overthrow Chamoun. However, the traditional Sunni allies allied with him opposed his demand to eradicate the entire system of political sectarianism since they were the main beneficiaries of that system (Hazran 2010:162-163). The end-point of the 1958 revolt was the resignation of Chamoun and not the abolishment of the sectarian system. However Junblat proceeded to work from within the system and with his traditional political allies although there would always be a clear difference in principles between the two.

Between 1958 and 1964, during the presidency of Fouad Chehab, the political opposition of those parties with sectarian roots and represented in the government such as the Phalanges Party, the PSP, and the National Bloc decreased compared to the previous years. Their opposition during this period was mainly based on the difference in perspectives on the distribution of power in the government (Ashti and
Ashti 2007:16-17). Junblat’s integration into the establishment, as Hazran notes, “proved to be based on utilitarian and functional considerations, rather than driven by any ideological dimension. He saw the government apparatus as an instrument to expand his spheres of influence” (2010:164).

Junblat was well aware of his traditional allies’ agenda, yet chose to ignore the lack of common principles. For example Junblat formed with Chamoun, Salam and other traditional figures, the “Socialist Bloc” in the early 1950s. Camile Chamoun became president and implemented none of the “Socialist Bloc” reform requests, Saeb Salam became prime minister and refused not only to reform according to the “Socialist Bloc’s” agenda but also deprived the bloc from a reasonable representation in the government (Timoviv, 2000:225-228).

Furthermore, when Junblat stood by Chehab throughout his presidency he was well aware of the latter’s indifference to eliminating the sectarian system, and his aim in preserving the balance between Muslims and Christians. Nevertheless, Junblat supported Chehab through most of the his mandate, integrating fully into the government, as did his supporters enjoy unlimited access to governmental positions (Hazran, 2010:163). Thus the PSP leader based his alliances on fragile grounds and short term ends. His allies rarely shared his goals but their presence was always a powerful tool in attaining influence in matters of political controversy.

4.5.2 – The Sectarian Secular Conflict

The PSP leader always emphasized throughout his political career the necessity of establishing a secular system in Lebanon. However, was this because he was from a minority sect? The answer to this question may be found in Junblat’s position as a Druze leader, his perception of the Maronites in Lebanon and their role
in the historical rivalry between the Maronites and the Druze, as well as his relationship with the Sunnis in Lebanon and Muslims in general.

Historically, the Druze sect in Lebanon possessed great influence in the Chouf district. This was the area Kamal Junblat chose throughout his political life to run for elections. In 1953, the PSP leader’s electoral lists lost in several areas of Lebanon when he was in conflict before the elections with many of his allies who had representation in areas other than the Chouf. Only Junblat and another PSP member made it to parliament during that election year. As Timoviv argues, the exaggeration in the role of the PSP led Junblat to run single party electoral lists in different areas of Lebanon (Timoviv 2000:230). However Junblat knew the Druze would always back him up.

Moreover, the secular PSP leader felt he had the right to take part in the Druze sect’s religious affairs and was a strong advocate of the Druze religious establishment. Consequently Junblat stood unopposed by the spiritual Druze establishment that did not attempt to change Junblat’s political status (Shink, 1999:79, 82, 83). Hazran claims that the PSP had two primary platforms: abolishing the confessional system and creating a secular one, “both of which were aimed at revitalizing the role of the Druze in Lebanon, under the guise of progressivism and revolutionarism” (Hazran, 2010:161).

There are also several signs highlighting a strong link between Junblat’s political projection and the Druze’s historical rivalry with the Maronites. In 1975 Junblat refused to attend President Franjieh’s ceremony to unveil a statue of Amir Fakhr El Dine in Beit El Dine and reacted by saying “the Lebanon of today does not represent the historical heritage or national unity which Fakhr El Dine embodied and we, the authentic Lebanese, feel alienated within confessional Lebanon” (Al-Nahhar
newspaper, 1975). Moreover, some historians argue that the leftist-Palestinian forces aimed to crush the Maronite military forces in the mountains during the Lebanese civil war. This was later emphasized in a speech of the late Syrian President Hafez Al Assad. Assad spoke about the last meeting that he had with Kamal Junblat. Junblat’s aim of the meeting was to convince the Syrian president that military action against the right wing was the only route in implementing the LNM’s reform agenda. According to Assad, Junblat was adamant about defeating the Maronites: “let us discipline them [Maronites], we must have decisive military actions. They have been governing us for 140 years”. Later in an interview the PSP leader was asked to comment on Hafez Al Assad’s accusations, instead he answered: “yes I am working for the elimination of the separatist Maronite regime in Lebanon… I want to eliminate the crusade character which is associated with our country” (Hazran, 2010:169). This suggests that Junblat’s objectives were shaped by his sectarian background.

The Druze leader’s affiliations and political stand during much of his parliamentary career leaned towards Muslims. This alliance contributed to the transformation of the Lebanese civil war from a Left-Right wing conflict to that of a Muslim-Christian nature. Those sectarian signs did not appear suddenly during the civil war, they date back to the beginning of Lebanon’s modern history. For instance, in the 1950s it was easy for the right-wing Christians to pinpoint accusations against Junblat and his allies that the opposition against the president and their strike activities is that of a Muslims struggle towards overthrowing the Maronite presidency (Timoviv, 2000:212-214).

Chink suggests that Junblat pinned his hopes on the Sunnis in Lebanon to implement his political objectives. He notes a comment by the PSP leader in 1958 saying that the Sunni axis is essential given the location of the Sunni community in
the cities as well as their national path (1999: 85). Junblat’s Sunni alliances enabled him to increase the PSP’s presence in Sunni communities, which worried Junblat’s Sunni allies. This dispute between Junblat and the Sunni establishment developed into a real confrontation during the civil war (Hazran, 2010:167)

4.5.3 – Building Alliances on Loose Grounds

Although Kamal Junblat opposed totalitarian regimes such as the USSR, and disagreed with the communists on their notion of class struggle, the PSP leader was strongly influenced by Marxist ideology and believed it to be one of the greatest achievements of human thought (Timoviv, 2000:160). Thus Junblat could have easily found common ideological grounds to ally with leftist communist parties in Lebanon but instead formed coalitions with sectarian traditional figures.

Since Junblat was well aware of the common ideological grounds with leftist thought before an alliance was established, it would be safe to argue that two main reasons behind the coalition that began to take shape with the leftist parties in 1964 are: his sectarian identity and the geographical balance of power outside Lebanon. It was only after close ties were established between the USSR and Egypt under Nasser that Kamal Junblat felt comfortable to establish grounds with the leftist parties in Lebanon. He had reached this decision after playing the Lebanese political traditional game whether as an opposition or in the government. He had concluded that he would never be more than a local leader whose authority will never exceed the position set for a Druze in the sectarian system, which is a minister and a member of parliament (Timoviv, 2000:319).

Furthermore, the alliance between the parties of the Left was not based on the common reform agendas they shared, but rather on support to the Palestinian issue in
particular. In 1969 when the leftist parties allied together in demonstrations that turned into bloody confrontations with the state authorities, they were demonstrating against the actions that the Lebanese army was taking against the Palestinian resistance. The Lebanese Left saw this as a revolutionary event that marked the beginning of a battle with the Lebanese establishment (Hazran, 2010: 164). Yet, even after they united together due to an external issue, a common internal platform was only established after the start of the Lebanese civil war (Ashti and Ashti 2007: 20). Nevertheless, this internal platform neglected the social and economic dimensions of the crisis and only emphasized political issues. The problematical issue that brought them together was neither the confessional system nor the lack of a governmental social policy, which later on became their reform agenda (Hazran, 2010:168).

The struggle of power between the two superpowers in the region, and the regional geopolitical battles created the alliances of the leftist parties under the banner of the Palestinian cause. Junblat sought to make use of this equation in establishing a new secular system in Lebanon. Unfortunately this theory worked the other way around. This point could be emphasized through one of its main protagonists, George Hawi, when he summed up this period by saying: “we made mistakes, in many cases we replaced the realistic facts with our desires and we thought we could be masters of the game” (Hawi, 2005:88). The leftist parties in Lebanon led by Junblat thought they could use the geopolitical regional game to implement their political reforms. Instead, their game destroyed Lebanon.

As we have noted Junblat became aware that without the political, military and logistic assistance, his efforts to change the existing sectarian system would come to naught. Thus the PSP leader and his leftist allies were aided with weapons from Egypt and Syria, and trained by the Palestinian forces and the USSR (Hazran
This aid was not free of charge however, especially since the alliance between the LNM and the Palestinian resistance was founded on common interests that intersected but did not overlap (Traboulsi, 2008:351). Moreover, Hawi a leading member of the LNM, did not delay in confessing that it was wrong to make use of Palestinian and Syrian support to implement an internal national agenda especially since the external powers have contributed in transforming the conflict into a sectarian one (Hawi 1996:4, 10). This clear clash of interest and penetration of foreign powers in the national movement caused the anti-establishment front to fall apart and the assassination of Kamal Junblat by a regime he relied on greatly, the Syrian regime (Hazran, 2010: 169).

4.5.4 – PSP: A leader or a Party?

The PSP’s primary principle is building a society based on true democratic principles. This principle is very appealing and highly relevant, yet the PSP’s structure is irrelevant to such a principle. Kamal Junblat was president of the PSP from the year it was established in 1949 till the day he was assassinated in 1977, and was succeeded by his son Walid in a ‘hereditary election’ rather than a democratic one. Thirty-five years later, Junblat the son is still the president of the PSP. This evidently contradicts another PSP principle noted in the party’s booklet “the combat of feudalism and the prelude towards correct leaderships” (PSP booklet).

The two highly contradictory principles have highlighted the path of the PSP after the death of Kamal Junblat until today. After the death of his father, and in his first speech during the celebration of the party’s foundation, Walid Junblat addressed the exact socialist principles Kamal had worked for. He claimed that “we will
continue to work towards the abolishment of all artificial class and sectarian barriers between the people of Lebanon” and that the “program of the LNM is the correct vision for a united Lebanon” (Rihana, 2007 [volume 15]: 53-54). Only twenty days after he gave this speech Junblat the son visited Assad in Syria. The meeting resulted in the Syrians acquired from the son what they could not from his father. Consequently, the LNM and the PSP dropped their civil reform demands to reassure the Muslims. As for its discourse, it turned into an Arab national discourse with sectarian overtones (Traboulsi, 2008: 373).

In practice, social reform became to a certain extent extinct in the PSP’s political platform under Walid Junblat’s leadership, although never abandoned in principle. Thus the PSP of today vaguely resembles the name it holds and principles it calls for. It has taken the form of a traditional sectarian Lebanese party playing the game of quotas in the political system. This can be observed by a few comparisons with the PSP of Kamal Junblat. The latter established the PSP mainly based on the belief in the need to abolish the Lebanese sectarian system. His son Walid, on the other hand, has only one constant principle in his political career: the protection of the Druze sect. First, during the civil war and Mountain War, Walid Junblat and his party engaged in sectarian massacres against Christians: 1500 killed, 62 villages destroyed, and the displacement of the Christians in “mixed areas” (Traboulsi, 2008: 391). Although Kamal Junblats objectives were shaped by his sectarian position, his socialist principles were well-built to prevent him from falling into the hostile reaction his son chose.

After the end of the civil war, Walid Junblat engaged in the Lebanese confessional system as a Druze leader without working towards abolishing the sectarian system, even though the Taif Accord called for this after a brief transitional
period. Throughout the 1990s and until today the PSP had no effective social reform activities with the leftist parties in Lebanon and when there is a call for any kind of social reform, unlike previously, the PSP contributes with shy statements only. In 2011, inspired by the Arab spring in the region, an effective movement to abolish the sectarian system in Lebanon was organized by independent and leftist movements; the PSP stood aside inspecting and approving without mobilizing its supporters.

Another example of the difference between Kamal and Walid Junblat’s PSP is their stance on the electoral law. The LNM headed by Kamal Junblat called in its transitional agenda for democratic reform and a new electoral law based on proportional representation with Lebanon as one electoral district without sectarian restrictions (Traboulsi, 2008: 331). Walid Junblat did not only do nothing in the path of implementing such a law, but when the idea of proportional representation was suggested in 2011 in the government, He declared in a speech against proportional representation that “I prefer a thousand times to win or lose in the Chouf between my people than to be dissolved in large areas” (Junblat speech in August 1, 2011). He further emphasized his refusal in an interview with Al-Manar TV saying: “if by implementing the law they were intending to strike my sphere of influence, the message has been received” (Al-Manar TV, November 2011).

During his political career, Kamal Junblat was able to promulgate some social reforms. Yet it is well known that Kamal Junblat’s reforms were not in line with the interests of liberal capitalism, which serves the interest of the sectarian elite (Rihana, 2007 [volume 6] : 40). In contrast to his father, Walid Junblat has opted to ally with leaders with capitalist agendas, such as former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri.
4.6 – Conclusion

Kamal Junblat once noted that “when the wheels of the revolution are launched it will be difficult to controlling its prospects if it lacks a systematic party base that holds the keys of guidance and the reins of leadership from within the system” (Timoviv, 2000:206-207). Although Kamal Junblat had intentions his practices were not always successful. His use of feudalism, sectarianism, wrong choices, and a party based leadership backfired after his death. His son and his followers later downsized the PSP from that of a leader of the left in Lebanon to a mere sectarian traditional party with a very appealing cover. After studying the two most influential leftist parties of Lebanon separately, the next chapter examines the alliances of the left through two coalitions that have changed Lebanon’s modern history, the Lebanese National Movement and the Lebanese National Resistance Front.
CHAPTER FIVE

THE LEFT IN PRACTICE: THE CASE OF THE LNM

5.1 – Introduction

This chapter examines two major alliances formed among leftist parties in Lebanon: the Lebanese National Movement and the Lebanese National Resistance Front. The chapter opens with a brief overview of the two parties’ origins and evolutions. It then looks at their accomplishments and failures.

5.2 – Origins and Evolution

In the mid-1960s, the Front of National and Progressive Parties and Forces (Jabhat al-Ahzab wal-Qiwa al-Taqadumiya wal-Wataniya), also known as the Revisionist Front, was formed. Shortly after that, it came to be known as the Lebanese National Movement (LNM) and assumed a prominent role at the start of the Lebanese Civil War and until the early 1980s (Collelo, 1987).

The LNM was headed by the PSP under Kamal Junblat’s leadership. Inaam Raad, of the Syrian Socialist National Party (SSNP) served as vice-president, while Mohsen Ibrahim, of the CAO, was its General Secretary. The LNM consisted of a number of Leftist parties: the LCP, the CAO, the SSNP, the Independent Nasserite Movement-Al-Mourabitoun, the Popular Nasserite Organization, the Arab Socialist Union, in addition to several independent figures including Albert Mansour, Ousama Fakhouri and Samir Franjiyeh (Traboulsi, 2008: 256).

The LNM was strongly opposed by the Lebanese Front (LF), a largely Maronite coalition, gathering Suleiman Franjiye, Charbel Qasis (President of the
Maronite Order), Pierre Jumayel, Charles Malek, Edward Hanin (Vice president and Secretary General), and Fouad Boustani (Ibid).

Generally speaking, the parties that participated in the Lebanese civil war can be grouped into two main bodies or camps: on the one hand, the LNM and its allies, mainly parties from leftist backgrounds in addition to some nationalist figures; and, on the other hand, the ‘Freedom and Human Front’ (Jabhat al-Horiya wal-Insan), which later came to be known as the Lebanese Front (Al-Jabha al-Lubnaniya).

The “Joint Forces” (Al-Quwwat al-Mushtaraka) was the name of the armed wing of the LNM. It included militants from all the parties represented in the front. These parties were usually known as the ‘leftist forces’ or the ‘progressive forces’, although some were not strictly leftist (Zebian, 1977: 121). On the other hand, the armed wing of the LF was known as the Lebanese Forces (Al-Quwwat al-Lubnaniya), and sometimes as the Right or isolationist forces, because this group wanted to isolate Lebanon from its geographical context by creating an entity detached from its historical the Arab identity geographically (Zebian, 1977: 122).

On the eve of the civil war, the forces composing the LNM were not homogenous nor in harmony. On 13 April 1975 the political work of the LNM metamorphosed into an armed struggle. Nevertheless, each party and group retained its own identity and vision of Lebanon (Zebian, 1977: 127). These disparities among the components of the LNM are due to the political and sociological fragmentation of Lebanese society. Moreover, this fragmentation itself is due to the sectarian, political, and economic formulas constraining political life in Lebanon, provoked mainly by the hierarchical and political practice of the established sectarian political parties and movements (Zebian, 1977: 128).
Starting in 1975, the LNM engaged in what is known as the ‘Two Years War’ (Harb al-Sanatayn), an armed conflict against the LF. In addition to fighting, the LNM called for the isolation of the Phalange Party, a main member of the LF, the outlaw of its activities and the expulsion of its ministers from the government. Soon this led to the resignation of the Christian ministers in solidarity with the Phalange Party while PM Rashid Karami resigned on solidarity with the LNM. As a result, then President Suleiman Franjieh, who was not able to contain the crisis, formed a military government to impose security and stability, a government that lasted three days and collapsed due to a strike organized by the LNM. Consequently, Franjieh assigned Karami to form a new government that would leave out both leaders of the conflicting camps. Thus the government, excluding the PSP and the Phalange Party, was formed and was able to reach a cease-fire with the help of Syrian officials as mediators (Traboulsi, 2008: 329-330).

This war was seen as a conflict between security and reforms, where Lebanese internal variables played the most important role especially when it came to the process of the fighting and its outcomes, and mainly through the social crisis it created on the eve of the war and the popular movements it caused (Traboulsi, 1997: 151). One of the main variables was the role of the Lebanese Army at that time: protecting the country from external enemies or maintaining internal security? The LF used force to impose “security and order”, while the LNM used force to impose political reforms (Traboulsi, 1997: 151).

According to Traboulsi, Mohsen Ibrahim, Georges Hawi, and Kamal Junblat were working to end the Lebanese conflict at the time. The project adopted by the communist Left and their view of Lebanese society produced the democratic political reform agenda of the LNM (Ibid: 152). The latter was criticized for being biased to
political reform. Consequently a social and economic reform plan was produced but it was not published officially because the LNM lost the battle on the Arab front (Traboulsi, 1997: 153).

Thus, in 1975, the LNM declared the “transitional agenda for democratic reform of the Lebanese system” (al-Barnamaj al-Intiqali lil-Islah al-Dimuqrati lil-Nizam al-Lubnani). It called for: the abolishment of sectarian quotas (al-muhasasa) on both political and administrative levels; the implementation of an optional civil law for personal status (qanoun madani lil-a7wal al-shakhsiya); the creation of a new electoral law based on proportional representation with Lebanon as one electoral district; and finally, administrative decentralization and the formation of a constituent assembly free from sectarian restriction (jam’iya ta’isya kharej al-qayd al-ta’ifi). In general, this agenda was positively received but Jumayel rejected the proposed reforms. The National Dialogue Committee (lajnat al-hiwar al-watani), which largely took on the LNM’s agenda, also failed to adopt any reforms (Ibid: 331). As a result, fighting resumed and massacres were carried out on both sides until, in January 1976, Syria imposed a cease-fire to salvage the Phalange Party (Ibid: 337-338).

The relation between the LNM and Syria was deteriorating particularly after it became evident that the latter was planning for a military intervention in Lebanon in favor of the Phalanges.28 Even though the leader of the LNM had secretly met with Bashir Jumayel in June 1976 and the latter had agreed on the LNM’s suggested reforms due to the military pressure imposed by the LNM, Jumayel could not keep his promises as other members of the Phalange Party opted for the Syrian option. The Joint Forces, comprising of fighters from the LNM and Palestinian factions, fought

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28 Assad had explicitly articulated his intentions in his meeting with Junblat on March 1976 (Traboulsi, 2008: 339).
against Syrian troops but they had to give ground when Arab Deterrent Forces (Quwwat al-Rad’ al-Arabiya), namely Syrian troops, entered Lebanese territory in November 1976 with an Arab consensus (Ibid: 347-348).

The Syrian intervention tipped the balance of power in favor of the LF after the LNM had the upper hand both militarily and politically. Then, in March 1977 Kamal Junblat was assassinated. Walid Junblat succeeded his father for the leadership of the LNM, while Mohsen Ibrahim of the CAO remained as Secretary General. The secretary-generals of the other parties’ of the LNM were appointed as deputies to the president (Traboulsi, 2008: 373).

However, the radical reforms suggested in the LNM’s 1975 transitional agenda soon fell apart. A rather “defensive” agenda was put in place, an agenda that brought back sectarian features to the fore. Accordingly, the personal status reform was dropped to reassure Muslims who opposed it. Thus, even though the LNM’s discourse remained an Arab national one, sectarian traits had surfaced (Ibid).

The assassination of Kamal Junblat debilitated the LNM. He had played an important role in burying sectarian tensions. Hence, it was a normal phenomenon, after the leading role Junblat had played in unifying the national movement and empowering its reform agenda, for the LNM to fall into stagnation (Ibrahim, 1983: 85). After 1977, the LNM’s component fell from the pursuit of general national democratic objectives to sectarian specific interest (Ibrahim 1983: 86).

In March 1978, Israel launched the Operation Litani against the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO), and LNM fought alongside the PLO. The one-week incursion caused major Lebanese and Palestinian human losses, estimated at around 2000 killed and 250000 refugees (Chomsky, 1983: 192). It also increased the ongoing tension between the warring parties: LNM and the LF.
Meanwhile, the LF’s relation with Syria deteriorated as the LF soon rejected Syria’s presence in the Christian areas. Consequently, the LF engaged in a fight against Syrian troops. And as the LF-Syria relationship started deteriorating, the LNM-Syria relationship began recovering, although according to Batal, it was never a trusted relationship as Syria’s relationship with the LF did not end (Edde, 2005: 84).

In March 1980, the LNM organized a military parade commemorating Junblat’s assassination during which the “peace of the brave” (salam al-shuj’an) project was put forward: it called for the restoration of national unity based on the new political balance between the warring camps. The LNM’s attempt failed as the LF rejected the proposal their opposition to the Palestinian presence in the country and their fear of converting Lebanon into an Islamic state (Traboulsi, 2008: 369).

By the early 1980s, the LNM looked like it had lost its momentum. It had been losing ground on military and political levels, especially after the Syrian military intervention shortly followed by Junblat’s assassination. June 1982, which saw the Israeli invasion of Lebanon, marked the practical termination of the LNM and the beginning of the resistance against the invading Israeli troops under the umbrella of the Lebanese National Resistance Front (LNRF) (Jabhat al-Muqawama al-Wataniya al-Lubnaniya).

The LNRF was officially launched in September 1982, initiated by the LCP, the CAO and the Arab Socialist Action Party as an umbrella for the military work of the LNM and the remaining Palestinian factions. On the 16th of September 1982, Georges Hawi and Muhsen Ibrahim announced a joint communiqué inviting the Lebanese to join the LNRF and defend their city Beirut. The communiqué stated that the duty of defending the country is the noblest cause a person can fight for, and the
honor of fighting the occupier is the greatest honor for every nationalist. The LNRF fiercely fought Israeli troops and resiliently challenged Sharon’s promise of a “two weeks promenade” in Lebanon, turning it into bloody fighting that cost Israel dearly (Traboulsi, 2008: 387-388). The next section evaluates the experiences of the LNM and LNRF.

5.3 – The Accomplishments of the LNM and the LNRF

The following sections of this chapter will outline the main strengths and weaknesses of the LNM and the LNRF combined highlighting the strong interrelation between them. Four main strengths are identified: the secular aspect, the reform agenda, the strong alliance, and fighting the Israelis.

5.3.1 – The Secular Aspect

The LNM endorsed a secular reformist movement that wanted to change the Lebanese sectarian system. According to the LNM’s view of the regional context of the struggle, a major defeat in the modern Arab history was the loss of Palestine in 1948, leading up to the main defeat of Arabs in 1967. To these two events, the assassination of Jamal Abdel Nasser leading to the weakness of pan-nationalism, as well as the successive blows to the Palestinian resistance, are to be added to the list of events that had repercussions on the nationalist movement in Lebanon (Zebian, 1977: 9). However, the LNM was seen at that time as the materialization of the dream of the

30 Ariel Sharon had promised Israelis that taking over Lebanon would require no more than two weeks.
left in Lebanon, as a path towards secularism, which was viewed as an optimal solution for the Lebanese system.

In fact, the founding parties of the LNM identified in the previous section were mainly secular leftist parties, and their alliance under the LNM’s umbrella was based on their common views of secularizing the Lebanese confessional system. George Hawi perceived the LNM as a popular, democratic, national and progressive movement that presents the right formula for class political coalition (al-tahalof al-tabaqi al-siyasi) thus enabling the creation of a National Liberation Movement (harakat al-taharor al-watani) (Edde, 2005: 120).

5.3.2 – The Reform Agenda

The reform agenda of the LNM was one of its strengths. It endorsed a political reform of the Lebanese system that starts at the base of the system, represented by the abolishment of sectarianism. Among other demands it called for the adoption of a new civil personal status law, as well as the implementation of a new electoral law in order to ensure a proportional representation that can develop the system and reform it efficiently.

Thus, this agenda was not constrained to political reform. It also called for socio-economic reform. However, as Traboulsi asserts, the Marxist Left played a major role in the formulation of the LNM’s agenda, which means that political reform was considered necessary for socio-economic reforms (2008: 253-254)

In fact, the leftist movement was able before the war to advance many of its demands and managed to acquire wide support. The Left was strongly integrated into the syndicates, which made it powerful and influential. The growth of such a movement in power and number threatened the pillars of the Maronite political
coalition representing the political feudalism of that time. According to George Hawi, the LNM was one of the fundamental powers qualified to play an important role in the reform process (Edde, 2005: 120).

5.3.3 – The Strong Alliance

Since its inception, and until the 1982 Israeli invasion, when most parties gathered to fight the Israelis under the umbrella of the LNRF, parties forming the LNM have managed to maintain a strong alliance. Since the 1960s, the LNM faced an attack from the sectarian Lebanese authority, and fought for change and reform. The LNM gradually found itself developing from political struggle into an armed struggle at the eve of the civil war, and then most of its constituent parties turned towards fighting the Israeli enemy in the early 1980s. The LNM maintained its unity despite internal conflicts between its different forces, from different ideological backgrounds, and stood as a main focal point in confronting the successive attacks, despite its poor experience in military confrontation (Zebian 1977: 15).

5.3.4 – Fighting the Enemy

The LNRF was formed as a reaction to the 1982 Israeli invasion. After the communiqué, 16 September 1982, the LNRF fought its first military operation on the 20th of September 1982 at al-Mathaf area in the suburb of Beirut. The LNRF undertook in its first year alone a total of 1113 resistance operations, nine hundred and seven of them were conducted against Israeli troops, while two hundred and six operations targeted Israeli agents in Lebanon. From 1982 until 1986, the Israeli army admitted the death of 386 soldiers. On the other hand, the LNRF lost 184 fighters. Seven thousand fighters participated in all the military operations from 1982 until
1990. Three thousand members of the LNRF were put in detention in Ansar and al-Khiyam prisons. Consequently, Israel was forced to withdraw from Beirut and establish a security belt in south Lebanon. This was due mainly to the LNRF’s attacks against the Israeli army.

This brief summary is intended to highlight one of the main strengths of the LNRF: the establishment of the armed resistance against Israeli forces. The LNRF managed to start a strong culture of resistance, later on appropriated by other parties, namely Hezbollah. However, it is important to note that it was first introduced by this group of leftist secular parties fighting for their country.

5.4 – The Weaknesses of the LNM and the LNRF

Despite the strengths discussed above, the LNM and the LNRF had several limitations. Some of them are derived from the aforementioned strengths themselves, while others from various miscalculations. This section goes through four of the main weaknesses of the LNM and the LNRF: first in relation to the above-mentioned strengths, and as a consequence of the alliances with the Palestinian factions and the Syrian regime.

5.4.1 – The Strengths as Weaknesses

Although it started as a strong secular alliance with a solid reform agenda, the LNM later took a sectarian turn and its ambitious reform demands were lost in the war. There were also tactical miscalculations that led to a gap between the LNM and its supporters: abandoning the democratic program made the LNM’s agenda look like

31 The numbers are extracted from LNRF website: <http://www.jammoul.net/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=293&Itemid=72>. 
a clause in a program promoting Muslim rights. Consequently, the LNM lost its democratic secular character. Hawi has argued that the LNM failed to place enough emphasis on the need for national reconciliation to ameliorate the conflict. Thus the LCP ignored the practices of its allies whom undermined the LNM’s reputation and decreased its public support through its wrongful actions during the civil war (in Edde, 2005: 155-157).

As suggested above, the first stage of the war was about political reforms. The political struggle however escalated into an armed one after the Left found itself clashing with the pro-status quo mainly Christian parties. Both parties used armed force to impose their agenda and both resorted to external support. The LNM, however, miscalculated by allaying with the Palestinian factions, which undermined the Left more generally.

Junblat’s assassination led to the LNM’s decline, proving that the strong alliance of the LNM was in fact only a result of the imposing character of Junblat and the submission of the parties forming the LNM to the desires of its leader. Thus, although it seemed like the alliance was not easily broken, what was holding it together was Junblat, and parties or members of the LNM who disagreed with any of his decisions preferred to protect the alliance even at the expense of their own beliefs.

The loss of Junblat and his son’s succession to led the LNM further into sectarian fighting. Walid’s participation in the mountain war, where the PSP engaged in sectarian massacres against Christians gave the conflict a very sectarian overtone. According to Traboulsi, the war left 1500 killed; 62 villages destroyed, and caused the displacement of many Christians (2008: 391). This was a clear deviation from the secular foundation of the PSP and the LNM.
Finally, and although resistance against Israeli troops was a major strength of the LNRF, however, the preoccupation with fighting Israel distracted it from its own reform agenda. Consequently, the LNM’s social, economic and political reforms were marginalized. By the time the Israeli troops had started withdrawing from Lebanon in 1985, the LNM’s reform agenda had become overshadowed with new sectarian dynamics.

5.4.2 – Alliances with the Palestinian Factions and the Syrian Regime

Since parties at war may not have too many choices the LNM and LNRF made use of whatever options were then available. They benefited greatly from the alliance with the Palestinian factions and from their experience in guerilla warfare. However, this turned to be one of the main weaknesses of the LNM because its short-term allies did not share the movement’s long-term goals for Lebanon.

Zebian suggests that even though he championed the cause of Palestine always Kamal Junblat was constantly worried about the alliance with the PLO. The main problem was that the Lebanese progressive forces did not possess their own arsenal for revolutionary action, which made the alliance with the PLO a necessity (Zebian, 1977: 24). This in the long run undermined the LNM’s autonomy, and subjugated it to the interests of the PLO. This weakness of the Lebanese progressive forces led to imbalances in the relation with the Palestinian resistance. Additionally, there were some mistakes that occurred in the chaos of war under the slogan of resistance, an excuse that permitted the Lebanese authorities and Right wing parties to consider the Palestinian resistance an external threat to Lebanon, and therefore undermining the LNM’s credibility.
(Zebian, 1977: 26-27). Thus, the alliance with Palestinian factions gave the LNM military capabilities, but deprived it from national public support. While some accepted its reform agenda, others viewed it as a volume of the PLO (Traboulsi, 2008: 352).

Another view states that the alliance between the LNM and the Palestinian resistance was found on common interests that intersected but did not match (Traboulsi 2008:351). The former wanted to use military pressure to impose political reforms that were not necessarily supported by Palestinians, while, on the other hand, Palestinians wanted to use Lebanon as a staging ground from which to launch military operations against Israel (Traboulsi, 2008: 341). Another example that can illustrate the fact that interests of the LNM and the Palestinians did not match is the choice of the LNM to ally with Yasser Arafat despite the fact that Arafat had clearly stated his intention to make peace with Israel, something that the LNM and later the LNRF strongly rejected.

George Hawi was candid when he confessed that his party, along with the LNM, placed on Lebanon, in the service of the Palestinian cause, a burden that it could not bear (Edde, 2005: 10). He also confessed that it was wrong that his party and LNM imagined that they could make use of Palestinian support in some instances, and Syrian support in others, to implement its national reform agenda (Ibid). After all, it was not the LNM’s reform agenda that ignited the civil war. If there had been no Palestinian conflict there would not have been a war in the first place.

The Syrian intervention of 1976 ended the reformist dream of the Left in Lebanon. To be sure, the Syrian military intervention of 1976 neutralized the LNM’s attempts to impose reform by force (Traboulsi 2008: 253-254). The LF’s
willingness to cooperate with Syria against the LNM and its Palestinian allies suggests how far Maronite leaders were willing to go to protect their political prerogatives. Nevertheless, soon the LNM ignored the fact the Syrian regime was the main cause behind its defeat and decided to ally with it in exchange of military assistance against the LF. This may well be one of the LNM’s main miscalculations. The LNM was now forced to take stances contradicting its own beliefs. Before Kamal Junblat’s assassination, the LCP was against cutting all relations with Syria, and Hawi tried talking Junblat out of his firm opposition to Hafez el Asad, Nevertheless, the LCP supported Jumblat’s position. After the Syrian defeat of the LNM’s dream, ties with Syrians were re-established. Once the heart and soul of the LNM’s own existence, now political reform was no longer a priority for the left.

5.5 – Conclusion

This chapter examined two main alliances among Lebanese leftist parties. It looked at origins, influence, decline, as well as accomplishments and setbacks of the LNM and LNRF. The chapter highlighted the experience of the Lebanese Left as a coalition of different parties that lured difficult choices. The importance of tackling such alliances is of fundamental importance to trace the path of the Left in Lebanon and weigh its possible future prospects. Since leftist parties are failing to introduce any change into the system individually, it is probably a coalition that may have to revive the Left in the future. The next chapter presents the general findings and conclusions of this study, and also compares the leftist experience in Lebanon with leftist experiences in Britain and France.
CHAPTER SIX
CONCLUSION

6.1 – Summing Up the Argument

Sectarian parties in Lebanon have fought furiously to maintain the Lebanese confessional system, a matter that has clearly staggered the leftist path in Lebanon. Yet this alone does not help pinpoint the failures of leftist parties in achieving their goals. The Left in Lebanon has used wrong strategies in its attempt to achieve important objectives.

Lebanese leftist parties are an added value to the Lebanese society as a whole, but have yet to become a major player in it. Chapter two provided an insight into how leftist parties were able to bring Lebanon’s political conflict to an ideological level rather than a mere superficial conflict driven by sectarianism and personal interests. The victory of sectarianism over secularism was a major reason behind the eclipse of leftist parties in Lebanon. The LCP, as shown in chapter three, was unable to change Lebanon into a secular state but was capable of transforming sectarianism into a shameful notion. The emphasis on resistance discussed in the case studies of chapters three and five was a major reason behind the party’s downfall in the post-war phase. Yet resistance was inevitable otherwise the country would have remained under Israeli occupation.

Aside from the establishment of the resistance against the Israeli occupation, a major accomplishment of the left was their contribution to cultural and intellectual work, especially by the LCP and CAO. Thus, even though their political power has significantly decreased, their cultural output has kept the leftist spirit alive in the minds of the new generations. As for the PSP, Kamal Junblat was able to change the
methods applied in the sectarian system from a policy of distributing personal gains to decoding real reform. If Junblat’s influence and power along with the strength he brought to the Left and the PSP’s lenient ideology would have been managed differently, the course of reform in Lebanon may have taken a different path.

The setbacks of the LCP, PSP, and other leftist parties are the reasons why Lebanon has surrendered to the confessional system. These setbacks have led to the marginalization of demands for social and economic reform in the post-war period. The mistakes of the LCP are interrelated. The involvement in the civil war and its sectarian traits led to the marginalization of social welfare demands and the lack of internal democracy undermined the credibility of the party. The subordination to the Comintern left the LCP immersed in regional politics, incapable of anchoring its choices on the demands of the Lebanese. Consequently, citizens were unable to relate to the LCP on a national scale.

Suffering from different setbacks, the PSP has landed on similar grounds: the marginalization of social-economic demands. While participating in the civil war under the banner of secularism and reform, the party was immersed into the existing confessional system. Therefore the PSP’s internal structure of sectarian-secular and feudal-socialist conflicts backfired, giving in to the confessional system. This conflict might have weighed differently if Kamal Junblat had built firm social reform alliances with the LCP in the late 1940s. Instead he only chose to ally with leftist parties when regional politics changed the Lebanese balance of power. If those reforms were built decades before the right-left wing/Palestinian clash, social economic reform may have been acknowledged as a national priority.
6.2 – Politics Triumphs Over Reform

The leftist parties’ strategies in Lebanon were dominated by political and ideological agendas rather than economic and social reforms. This thesis has underscored how leftist parties in Lebanon lacked consistency in labor demands, especially during wartime, although such demands could have paved the way for real reforms and may have allowed the left stronger national appeal. After all, individuals participating in worldwide movements against capitalist globalization are not consciously opposed to capitalism, but initially revolt against the effects of capitalism on their own living standard (Taaffe 2004: 10).

To better understand the mistakes of the Lebanese Left in implementing its social reform, the next section briefly compares with actions of the Labor Party of Britain, a Centre Left democratic social party, and the Popular Front of France, a coalition of France’s Left-wing movements. It is important to note that both the British and the French experiences have been through numerous setbacks. The following discussion addresses some of their achievements that are relevant to the experiences of leftist parties in Lebanon.

6.3 – Trade Unions in Wartime

One of the greatest achievements of the LCP is the establishment of trade unions. Through them the LCP was able to establish itself as well as struggle for labor rights. It is this approach in particular that brought to Lebanon some major social reforms. The amendment of the labor law, the social security legislation, and the health insurance policy are some of those reforms. The British Labour Party (BLP) was founded on similar grounds. It can be described as a coalition of trade unions and
socialists covering different political perceptions but mainly committed to the representation of labor interests (Worley, 2005: 218).

It is only during the later stages of the LCP, and in particular when war was approaching, that the party's actions became excessively immersed in politics. This affected the unions’ role in protecting labor interests. The BLP, on the other hand, and after it secured party development, its emphasis was geared towards Britain’s social and economic well-being. The party’s relationship with trade union movements was integral to its constitution and identity (Worley, 2005:219). The unions’ role increased during World War II. Their participation during wartime, combined with the political efforts of the Labour Party, war reproduced in the form of pro-labor legislations (Melvor, 2001: 219).

The LCP and other leftist parties prioritized the political situation over labor reforms during the civil war. They continued to do so while at war with the Israelis. Resistance was a priority despite the fact that wartime inflicts burdens on the people. This is not to reduce the value of the LCP’s role in the resistance, but rather to draw attention to how this affected its reform agenda. The LCP could have concentrated on resistance while the CAO, for example, could have worked on maintaining social services through their influence in the trade unions, or the other way around. A similar distribution of roles was practiced in Britain during WWII. The basis of the coalition was divided into two functions. Winston Churchill ran the military side of the war while the Labor ministers looked after the home front by maintaining social services and mobilizing human power (Cole, 1948: 386-388). Thus, social services increased through the care of trade unions at many levels: health and welfare, transfer of labor, machine staffing, technology, price rate fixing and welfare payment fixing (Cole 1948: 392).
Labour ministers insured that trade unions received political recognition and directly advised the unions on collective bargaining, wartime demands and planning (Mclvor, 2001: 226-227). Through the unions’ efforts, the state added steps to the process of compulsory arbitration. Other wartime restrictions were imposed, such as the Essential Work Order and the development of occupational medicine and state sponsored research. Through creating joint industrial councils and collective bargaining, unions were able to expand wages while keeping working hours stable (Mclvor, 2001: 105 and 134 and 210). Labour policies during wartime led to the narrowing of wealth inequalities while the real value of wage incomes increased by 18 percent from 1938 – 1947 (Mclvor, 2001:224).

The Labour Party was not only successful in maintaining social order; the efficiency of the wartime economy gave legitimacy to the concept of common or national ownership, a matter that appealed to the trade unionists whether or not they supported socialism (Worley, 2005: 8). In 1945, after Germany had surrendered, general elections were held in Britain, the first since 1935. The Labour Party’s social commitments did not go unnoticed. It won the elections and a welfare state was subsequently organized. The National Insurance Act of 1946 was established with all British citizens entitled to unemployment benefit, sickness benefit, old age pensions and widows pensions. The National Health Service was also introduced in 1948 (Cole, 1948: 463-468)

6.4 – Out of Power Social Reforms

The Left’s lack of official representation is a reason behind its inability to change the Lebanese system. But this lack of representation also led leftists in general to choose broad principles, of which secularism is the most popular. Although such
principles are the bases of the left, and an essential aspect of reform, it is very difficult to implement them or even achieve their broad acceptance before transforming Lebanon from a quasi-federal non-state model to a civil state based on the idea of equal rights among all its citizens. A necessary part of this process is spreading a sense of belonging to the state among the labor class through improving its standards of living and shaping a sustainable social security network.

During the inter-war period (1919-1938) the BLD was out of office. Nevertheless it helped improve living standards put its socialist principles into practice on a small scale (Cole, 1948: 466). The BLP’s members were minorities in their councils but they mounted campaigns to protect and increase living standards level. They worked on detailed reform demands and adopted a policy of municipal socialism to work out problems such as poor health, insufficient housing and general security.

If the Lebanese Left-wing had initiated cooperation with one another at an early stage, a higher level of social reform could have been accomplished. With the PSP in parliament and a minority in the government and the LCP’s large influence on trade unions, reform could have been possible. In Britain, the BLP’s campaigning enabled them to pass legislations allowing working class families who have no bathrooms to use public bath for free and distributing free milk and meals for school children. Through their campaigns to improve the access to health care, they were able to introduce medical aid associations in 1944, when they were a minority in the government, and a maternity and child welfare centre (Worley 2005: 170 and 169 and198-200). In 1934, they were able to raise London households to 31 percent, and use the profits to treat London’s poor and provide homes, additional free education, and enhance hospitals (Hogan, Time Magazine 11 March 1935). The social welfare
policy adopted by the BLP did not only bring assistance to the poorest sectors of society but also provided employment chances and self-development methods through the funding of education and library facilities (Worley, 2005: 167).

By promoting legislation in favor of labor, the BLP developed from a pre-war pressure group to a national opposition, and then a minority government in 1924, and finally won a majority in the 1945 parliamentary elections. According to Worley this was an extraordinary accomplishment, changing British politics forever and serving to constitute a new age of mass democracy (2005: 20-21). Unlike the BLP in Britain, the LCP in Lebanon was able to rise to the position of a national opposition, settled in this position for a long period and then gradually declined. As for the PSP, it began as a minority group in government with social demands but degenerated into a sectarian party. The decline of the two most influential leftist parties in Lebanon is in part a consequence of their elitist ideological principles, rather than popular demands that citizens could relate to.

6.5 – Elections on a United Platform

As Jonathan Olsen notes, all parties progress within a triangle defined by three strategic goals: a policy goal where parties seek to exploit their impact in public policy, an office seeking goal were they try to achieve political power, and a votes goal were they seek to maximize their share of votes in electoral competition (2010: 8). While out of power, Lebanon’s leftists did not maximize their impact on public policy. They were also unable to maximize their vote shares and thus could not reach office since influential left-wing movements in Lebanon never ran for elections as a united group. Moreover, they only allied together after decades of their formation, and
when they did, the core of their alliance was the Palestinian cause. This dynamic should be compared to the experience of the Popular Movement of France.

The Popular Front of France was formed in 1934. It was an alliance of Left-wing movements that included the French Communist Party (PCF), the Radical and Socialist Party, and the French Section of the Workers’ International. This front was formed as a reaction to the economic crises caused by the Great Depression, the financial scandals and the instability of the government, and the rise of the Nazis in Germany. Thus, it was an alliance that stemmed from domestic concerns but also a collective concern towards an external enemy. The Popular Front’s concerns were similar to Lebanon’s left-wing parties: internal social disorder, corruption in bureaucracies, and an external enemy.

This alliance led the Socialists in France to win more seats than the Radicals during the 1936 general elections, two years after the foundation of the coalition. The Popular Front won 386 out of 608 seats. Even though their alliance did not last long in power, during their term in office they worked on social reform demands rather than external politics (Evans, 2003: 76-78 and Dutton, 2004: 118). The Popular Front government worked on implementing reform in an accelerated manner. It introduced new labor laws, created the right to strike, imposed collective bargaining on wage contracts, and increased wages by 12 percent. It also reduced the workweek from 48 hours to 40 hours, granted workers two weeks of paid holidays, and suspended the civil servant wage cut. The first public budget of the Popular Front increased progressive taxation but decreased standard taxes from 17.4 to 15.8 % of GDP. The Popular Front was able to accomplish 133 governmental laws within 73 days in parliament. The Bank of France was democratized with more representation from the government. The parliament voted for the creation of a wheat office to alleviate prices
and control speculation, the arms industry was nationalized, measures against illegal price hikes were taken, and loans to medium and small sized industries were given (Beaudry and Portier 2001: 76)

The Lebanese Left neither reached power united, nor did it unite to achieve its reforms. When they did unite under the LNM the reform battles of Lebanon had already taken shape. General elections had taken place over four times in the years that the two most influential leftist parties, the LCP and the PSP, had been established. However they only decided to run under a common electoral platform in 1972, when the Palestinian conflict in Lebanon had surfaced and the spiral to civil war had started. This undermined their ability to adduce their reforms. The French Popular Front’s experience shows that a different path in Lebanon could have been taken had leftist parties allied together over twenty years before the civil war had erupted under a social reform agenda, and had they run for elections under a united platform. By forming a reform coalition leftist parties could have gained the labor class’ confidence on a broad level. This process would have brought larger national appeal to the LNM’s secular state platform.

6.6 – The Left: Is it Right for Lebanon?

Today Lebanon is highly infected with corruption, backwardness, and overwhelmed with the interests of leaders over workers. Lebanon’s confessional state has proven to be unviable. It has developed a sense of belonging of the citizen to his predatory sectarian leader instead of belonging to the state as a whole.

Thus a need for system change in Lebanon is acknowledged even by sectarian leaders themselves. The leftists’ secular demands are valid guidelines for a modern state, how to achieve this state remains elusive. The left in Lebanon must play a
primary role in this process. Shaping a secular state requires the recovery of the Lebanese Left wing. Once secularism is prioritized over foreign politics, internal political conflict, or an external enemy then social and economic reforms could become the guidelines for action under a united leftist umbrella. Lebanon needs a secular civil state based on equal rights for all. But to do this requires a healthier economy. Common sense will prevail only after citizens are relieved from the burdens of poor living standards. Their dependence on sectarian leaders will decrease, their positive reception of the parties behind the battles of reform will increase and thus secularism can become a viable option for Lebanon.


