

# LEBANON

25.

## Soft Spot on Western Bloc's Armour

The present crisis in Lebanon cannot be separated from the inexorable decay of the global capitalist system. The most recent fighting -- the gruesome and massive destruction and death around Beirut -- is an essential part of the diseased body politic of imperialism; east must battle west for world domination.

An undisguised, but probably temporary, setback for the Western bloc has taken place. The withdrawal of the "Multi-National Peacekeeping Forces" and the collapse of the American-sponsored Lebanese Army must be seen not as the product of objective realities, or the cleverness of Syrian policy, but as an inability of the Reagan administration to make sufficient use of its newly dealt and high strategic cards in the region. For the short term, the opportunity to solidify a united front against the dwindling Soviet bloc proxies has been lost.

However the retreat in Lebanon must be counter-balanced by the geo-political and military advances of the U.S. bloc in other parts of the world and the overall defensive posture of Russian Imperialism per se. Since the last benchmark of the descent of the world capitalist system ('81-'82), the US ruling class has succeeded in shunting the main burden of hardship onto its less powerful European allies and the main debtor countries of the "Third World". This illusion of "recovery" has then given some partial ideological credence to American military expansion against the (other) "Evil Empire".

Outside of El Salvador, the US has gained ground in the Caribbean and Central America with its establishment of a permanent military outpost in Honduras the re-arming of Guatemala, the encirclement of Nicaragua and the gobbling up of Grenada. Passage of the Kissinger report recommendations -- huge influxes of economic and military aid -- will neutralise the Central American "problem" for the moment. Meanwhile both the Sandanistas and the El Salvador Left have come to understand that North American Imperialism is no "paper tiger" and are now crying uncle. With their smiling Stalinist faces, the ruling bureaucratic honchos of the F.S.L.N. and the F.M.L.N. are ready, and have been for some time, to either secure or get more adhesion to the hangman's rope of State-power over the proletariat.

Eastern bloc ventures into Chad and Namibia by Soviet surrogates Libya and Angola/Mozambique have been checked by France and South Africa respectively. Moscow influence in Iran -- the Tudeh Party -- is being physically liquidated as a just reward for its fidelity to the Mullah regime. The recent upsurge of war along the Iran-Iraq border is best seen as an insane result of small imperialist competition for control of the Strait of Hormuz, with the patriotism of the state and Islam as the prime movers of death. The Russians are further bogged down in Afghanistan and Ethiopia, with severe economic problems in Vietnam and Cuba as well as shortages within its own continental satellites. NATO's new Pershing II and Cruise missiles have now been deployed only scant minutes from the Kremlin.

Despite the failure of the Reagan Administration to pacify the discord in Lebanon, the West continues to hold a potentially winning hand there. The 1982 Israeli invasion north removed one Russian pawn - the Palestine Liberation Organisation -

from the area and subsequent events forced this statist body to split into pro-Western (Arafat) and pro-Soviet (Abu Saleh) factions. 'Moderate' Arab powers - Saudi Arabia, Egypt Jordan Iraq and now the Arafat-PLO have been brought closer together, Egypt has been recently reinstated as a member of the Islamic Conference Organisation; the former and Jordan are about to receive massive shipments of modern armaments from America. With a little smooth power-brokerage - of which the Reagan Administration is short on - this new Arab combine could reach a modus vivendi with Israel and thereby congeal a uniform face against both Syria and Islamic fundamentalist irrationalism.

That this new situation has borne no fruit for a solution to Palestine or Lebanon merely underscores the ineptness of American (Schultz') foreign policy to adequately pressure Begin/Shamir and Gemayel for strategic compromises. Military options have been reflexively placed in the forefront where political and economic carrots, like the Kissinger plan for Central America, should have been in the offing. (and with the Saudi treasury to pay the bill.) It's conjectural at this point whether the American bourgeoisie might actually prefer a more skilled diplomatic management, a new team - say a Gary Hart - in the White House for 1984, with the unions and Jesse Jackson's "Rainbow Coalition" still outside of power.

All the same a certain ideological profit has already accrued to the West from the constant televised pictures of inevitable fighting and human suffering (ie "war is coming and nothing can be done"), and the patriotism element in the deployment and funeral scenes of the US marines in Lebanon. The firing of the 16-inch guns of the New Jersey, the only active battleship in the world, is an apt image of the future of capitalist ruination if the proletariat fails to expunge at last the putrid system of wage labour and profit expansion.

But lets take a look at the actual Middle East scorecard, the events and players of the past two years.

In June 1982 with Alexander Haig at the helm of US foreign policy the Israeli Army under then Defence Minister Ariel Sharon was given the green light to strike into Lebanon with hopes of knocking out two Soviet surrogates - the PLO and the Syrian Army. This attempt to achieve a "strategic consensus" was initially successful: the Syrian airforce and ground defences were wiped out; the PLO was pushed back to Beirut, bombarded for 30 days and forced to evacuate from Lebanon by sea. The first contingent of US marines was sent into Beirut during August '82 to supervise the removal of the Palestinian militia. The political supremacy of the pro-western Christian Maronite Phalange Party was thus guaranteed by Israel (ie. American) force-of-arms.

On September 1st, Reagan announced a plan to implement what then seemed possible - an Israeli compromise on the West Bank and Gaza and a political state for Arafat and Co. in conjunction with Jordan. But newly-elected Lebanese President Bashir Gemayel, the Jose Antonio of the Maronite Militia was assassinated and replaced by his more urbane but less ruthless brother Amin. Several days later 900 Palestinian civilians were massacred in the Sabra and Chatila

refugee camps by Israeli sponsored Christian troops under Saad Haddad. The marines were sent back to Beirut in late September '82, ostensibly as a 'peace-keeping force'. Troops from other major Western Bloc countries - France, Italy and Britain, were duly added.

During this time the Reagan administration failed to follow through with its own political initiative, to press Israel to back off from the West Bank and pull out of Lebanon in concert with Syria. Yasir Arafat travelled to Amman to confer with Jordan's King Hussein, author of the Palestinian Black September slaughter; the former now appeared to be cozying up to a western-made solution to the "Palestinian question". This new attraction, however, was against the stated ideological wishes of both the PLO Executive Committee and the Arab League resolution on Palestine.

In the meantime Syria began to rearm itself. A \$2 Billion package of weapons was obtained from Russia, including new, advanced surface-to-air missiles, a computerised ground control system, more artillery and tanks and 7000 Russian military advisors and technicians. Syria then proceeded to galvanise and arm PLO members in the Bekaa Valley disenchanted

On May 17th 1983 an Israel-Lebanon accord was concluded between the Begin and Gemayel governments calling for the withdrawal of the Israeli army and the security of the latter's northern border. But the Maronite faction of the Lebanese bourgeoisie has made no political concessions to the disenfranchised Shiite Muslims and Druze; neither had Syria been consulted. The central government continued to be locked into the 1943 political covenant which legally guaranteed Christian predominance, smething which no longer reflected population realities. Syria then began to give military supplies to these disgruntled groups as well. The Lebanese opposition, Druze, Shiite, and Sunni moslems, demanded its fair share of State Power and the profits from commerce, banking, finance and real estate that such representation might bring in. This prospect, with all cover-measures of religion devotion and snctimony, "self-determination" or whatever, is in truth what the militiamen of Nabih Nerri's Amal and Walid Jumblatt's "Progressive Socialist Party" are fighting and dying for. From an article in the Feb.9th 1984 New York Times we find the following lines:

"The security committee statement issued over the state-run Beirut radio, now under the influence of the bands of West



U.S. Marines Leave Beirut. Testament to the Failure of U.S. Plans for Lebanon.

with the moderating Arafat. But Syria's imperialist ambitions were always, like Rodney Dangerfield, limited to "getting respect", to retrieve the Golan Heights from Israel and to re-establish the Lebanon as its traditional satrapy. Hafez al Assad, the Butcher of Hama, simply wants to be the Godfather of the Arab world. The Reagan administration, true to its own self-image, doesnt seem to be able to recognise every particular chessman on the table.

Beirut militias, also declared that as of Thursday (Feb 9th), "all police duties in West Beirut will be handled by remaining elements of the government's internal security force." It warned gunmen against any violation of private property or theft of government or army equipment."

Such are the radical politics of the "National Salvation Front."

In September Begin resigned as Israeli Prime Minister and was replaced by fellow Irgun terrorist Yitzhak Shamir. As their occupation army continued to take casualties from guerrilla assaults the Labor Party and "Peace Now" oppositions within Israel made headway. The economy was in a shambles: inflation ran at 140% during 1983, the foreign debt was at \$22 billion. Strikes inside the country were intensifying and the Shamir government, recognising its inability to jibe its military occupation with its new domestic austerity was forced to withdraw its troops south from the Shouf mountains to the Awali river. The Shouf area then became a hotbed of vicious military contention between the Christian Phalange/Lebanese army and the Druze militias supported by Syria.

It was during this period that US naval gunfire was first used on behalf of the Gemayel government troops. On October 23rd 1983 the American and French marines paid the price of imperialist exchange with 300 dead after a suicide truck bombing. Peace talks began in November in Vienna but the Christian faction gave no concrete ground to their Muslim and Druze adversaries. Again the Reagan administration failed to press home the need for political compromise to the Maronite chieftains.

Also in November the open rebellion against the Arafat-PLO led by Abu Saleh and Abu Musa, with material and propaganda support from Syria and Libya, stepped up. The former's irregulars were pushed out of the Bekaa valley and back to the northern Lebanese port-city of Tripoli. Again Arafat was entrapped and saved only by his new Western bloc friends, Greece and France. Despite the strong array of pro-western stitches - Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Egypt, Iraq, the Israeli Left and now Arafat - the Reagan administration was unable to sew up the open wounds of either Palestine or Lebanon. Massive doses of military aid were given instead to all of the US' clients in the area. But the Americans proved unable to parlay their military clout with political puissance vis-a-vis the recalcitrance of the Christian Phalange or the Zionist Herut. As in El Salvador the US-trained Lebanese battalions were shown to be hollow in the face of political realities - the absence of real bourgeois democracy in Lebanon.

While all this was happening the North American Left once again revealed itself to be totally incapable of any programmatic class analysis of the Middle East area: they can grasp nothing, or what's a modernist for? The position of the majority of these liberal ghouls is the ritual of Third World Guilt - they cross themselves every time they read the initials PLO. Pertaining to the Druze, the very words "Progressive" and "Socialist" alone make them shit (EDB-laced) blueberry muffins! Some of the more

extreme trotskyist morons like the Spartacist League can see Lebanon only in terms of tribal, feudalist warfare instead of understanding the profound bourgeois nature of all the political structures of the ethnic groups grappling for statist economic power. And then there's the various anarcho-idiots and Cardanites (usually one and the same) who skip along behind the Left with their own "US out of" pink lavender and green signs...anything but authentic Red and Black (Right"Maxine"?). We also shouldn't forget the anti-Zionist obsessionism of one Joffre Stewart and his Father Coughlin crusade against the most-unholy state of Israel. For the Wagnerian nuisance Stewart and likewise his equally jocular soft "anarchist" opponents hatred of the state becomes an exclusively subjective matter (as with everything else in this milieu) - some are worse (Israel for example) than others (Nicaragua for example). But all are agreed, including the devotees of the San Francisco ideology of "Anti-Authoritarianism", to maintain the institutionalized and global state of affairs of capitalism.

This past month (February 1984) has shown that the sectarian form of the Lebanese State and Army prevented it from becoming a sharpened claw of Western appetites in the area. Now surrounded by his capitalist rivals, Amin Gemayel appears amenable to a deal with Syria's Assad; like a Beirut Huey Long he will now "share the power" and thereby keep his Kingfish title.

All the while the television networks, first level instruments of bourgeois domination and mystification have conveyed thousands of hours of pictures of death and misery, terror and helplessness, which is meant to demoralise the world working class and oil the propaganda machinery for eventual WWII.

However the capitalist solution to this epoch's world-historic crisis is not a foregone conclusion. Freedom, that is to say libertarian communism, still hangs in the balance. As the big strike waves in Italy, Belgium, Holland, France, West Germany and Spain over the past year have broadcast, all decisive class confrontations have yet to occur and can only occur in Western Europe, at the centre and not the periphery of world capital. Workers' combativity in the metropolises (including the US - Phelps Dodge and Greyhound strikes) is on the rise and it is predominantly these forces which can develop a revolutionary perspective for the end of the old alienated and the beginnings of the new humanized world order. This can only be done through the collective class (the Workers Councils)<sup>\*</sup> elimination of both the nation-state apparatus (Bakunin) and the wages-commodity-profit system (Marx).

Tampa Workers Affinity Group.  
February 1984.

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\*See the following article for the debate between the CBG and TWAG on the question of Marxism versus 'Libertarian Communism' etc.

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In issues 5 and 6 of the Communist Bulletin readers can find a major two-part article on the Middle East

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