The Communist Movement in

SYRIA & LEBANON

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Tareq Y. Ismael and Jacqueline S. Ismael

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PREFACE

On a pleasant summer evening in 1968, I completed a public lecture at the American University in Beirut entitled "The Crisis in the Communist Parties of the Arab World." This lecture was subsequently published in the American University of Beirut's oldest academic Middle East journal, the *Middle East Forum* (vol. 45, no. 4,1969), which, seven years later, ended over sixty years of publication as one of the first casualties of the civil war.

A discussion ensued after the lecture in the Faisal coffee shop opposite AUB campus, which used to be the gathering point of an intellectual circle. My friend, the late Bulend al-Haydari, a distinguished Iraqi poet and independent Marxist, was at that point in exile in Beirut, driven from Iraq after the Baathist coup of 8 February 1963, having almost lost his life following a humiliating arrest. He introduced me to one of the people from the audience who had joined us, the late Dr. Hussein Mroué, a distinguished leader in the Lebanese Communist Party. They both began raising some issues that they thought were already being dealt with in the turmoil taking place at that time in the party. Dr. Mroué shook his finger and said, "You have good ideas and I think you should follow the debate raging in the Lebanese Communist Party." I began, from that lecture, to follow his advice. He was assassinated almost fifteen years later during the civil war and was one of the most missed intellectuals of the area. My friend, al-Haydari, who continued to live in exile in England, arranged for some meetings, first with his friend, Mohammed Dakroub, the devoted Lebanese communist who was then secretary of the party's journal, *al-Tareik*. He gave me a complete set of the journal, which was my first schooling in the thoughts and intellectual foundations of Lebanese communism; years before he wrote his magnificent book on the subject. He even went as far as writing some useful, introductory ideas. Soon after I met the charismatic intellectual founder of the Lebanese Communist Party of fifty years earlier, Yusuf Ibrahim Yazbak, still vigorous in his late seventies and still intellectually full of life and

ideas, a Marxist but not a communist, eager but not emotional, secular but not antagonistic and, above all, a magnificent human being. We struck up a friendship that lasted until his death in 1982 and that was cemented by both of us being members of the executive board of the Union of Arab Historians. While he was living in Paris, escaping the civil war, Abu Ibrahim served as my mentor, guide, and thermometer of Arab politics in general and the ideological web of the Lebanese Communist Party in particular. My friend Bulend al-Haydari was again forced to escape the raging civil war in Beirut and went to London where he continued his support and generosity toward the authors until his sudden death in 1996.

All of these individuals had a hand in encouraging the ideas that went into this book, and this book should serve as a living testimony to their spirit, but any defect must surely be attributed to the authors. They supplied us with all the documents they had and through the years took our work as a service to historical academia rather than to a narrow political expression of ideological convictions. I hope this book will contribute to the memory of these people and to an understanding of their contribution to history.

The nature of the communist movement in Syria and Lebanon is examined in this study in terms of the discourse conducted by the movement from its founding in the early twenties to the present. Party documents and publications—programs, communications, pamphlets, journals, and newspapers—constitute both the record of the movement's history and the imprint of the movement on history. As an impression on the landscape of history, discourse records the perspectives of its creators on their world in time and over time. In time, in other words, discourse records their definition of the situation; and over time it provides a record of continuity and change—in both the situation and in the perspective.

By the communist movement we are referring to the set of actors that subscribed to communism and played a role in the politics of communism in Syria and Lebanon. While the Communist Party is a central part of the movement, at any given time it may not have been the only actor. In other words, the communist movement encompasses the Communist Party, but is broader. *Movement* denotes purposeful motion—in this case motion in history; *party,* on the other hand, denotes an organizational form.

This is the second book in a trilogy on the communist movement in the Arab world that we have been working on for almost two decades. The first, *The Communist Movement in Egypt, 1920–1988,* was published in 1990; and the third, tentatively titled *The Communist Movement in the Arab World: International Foundations and National Cases—Iraq and Sudan,* is in draft form

and should be completed within the year. While the project was initiated long before the collapse of the Soviet Union and may not seem as relevant now as when it was initiated to understanding the forces operating in Middle East politics, this research indicates otherwise.

There are many systems of transliteration of names from Arabic, and no particular standards prevail. Transliteration used in this book followed the Library of Congress system, with one modification: diacritical marks are dropped.

TAREQ ISMAEL

PART ONE—
FOUNDATIONS OF THE MOVEMENT

Chapter 1—
Establishment of the Communist Movement in Syria and Lebanon

The early history of the Communist Party of Syria and Lebanon is much better documented than that of its counterparts in the Arab world because it developed in the open rather than in a clandestine manner. Thus, its emergence can be traced through publications and organizations. [1]

Geographical Syria, which encompassed Syria, Lebanon, and Palestine, was part of the Ottoman Empire from 1516 to 1918. Following World War I, British and French forces controlled the coastal areas and Arab forces the interior. Arab forces under the command of Sharif Faisal of Hijaz anticipated the independence of a united Arab state, including geographical Syria, by the terms of the Hussein-McMahon correspondence of October–November 1915. After the collapse of the Ottoman Empire in Autumn 1918, he set up an Arab national government in Syria's interior. It lasted from November 1918 to July 1920. During its tenure, an Arab nationalist party, Hizb al-Istiqlal al-'Arabi (Arab Independence Party) took up the banner of nationalism from al-Fatat (a leading Arab nationalist party in Istanbul in the last years of the Ottoman Empire). It rallied nationalist forces around Sharif Faisal, giving the Arab national government a base of support among Arab nationalists. In March 1920, a Syrian General Congress was held in Damascus with eighty-five delegates drawn from all over geographical Syria. It proclaimed Sharif Faisal of Hijaz king of Syria.

Under the guise of the League of Nations mandate system, Arab territories of the Ottoman Empire were turned over to colonial powers for administration. In essence, it was a case of the fox guarding the henhouse. The French and British had prearranged the dismemberment of the region into zones of influence in the secret Sykes-Picot Agreement of 16 May 1916. The San Remo conference of May 1920, at which the victorious allied powers settled the fate of the Arab provinces of the Ottoman Empire, allotted the

northern half of geographical Syria (which encompassed the territories subsequently known as Syria and Lebanon) to France and the remainder (i.e., Palestine) to Britain.

In Syria, the French administration set out to squash nationalist aspirations of independence and unity. At the Maisaloun battle on 24 July 1920, the French routed King Faisal and his nationalist forces. The separation of Lebanon from Syria and establishment of the State of Greater Lebanon on 30 August 1920 followed. The new country was created by the addition to the prewar Maronite sanjaq of Lebanon "all the Muslim areas it could safely dominate." [2] The wishes of the populations of those areas were not taken into account. According to the Basic Law of 23 November 1920, the French high commissioner, seated in Beirut, was responsible to the French foreign minister; and the French government was the intermediary between the high commissioner and the League of Nations. By 1925, the French high commissioner ordered the promulgation of a constitution for Lebanon. It was drafted by the Representative Council of Lebanon and formally proclaimed in May 1926.

Ideological Formations

The first predominantly Arab communist organization in the Middle East had its origins in the interplay of indigenous sociopolitical dynamics and imported ideological and organizational patterns. Against this background of nationalist fervor and colonialist intrigue, Marxist- oriented circles emerged in the major cities of Syria and Lebanon in the early twenties. They were initiated among small groups of enlightened bourgeois intellectuals who were influenced by Western humanist philosophies— the notions of the leftist wing of the French Revolution as well as the principles of the Russian October 1917 Revolution. Early attempts at organizing a communist movement in Lebanon and Syria stemmed from personal and individual initiatives taken by some of those educated intellectuals. Prominent among them was Yusuf Ibrahim Yazbak (1901–1982), who pioneered the formation of a Marxist circle. He was instrumental in establishing the first Arab communist organization in Lebanon and Syria. In an interview that I conducted with him about his early involvement, he said, "I was only a person who was deeply touched by the Lebanese starvations during World War I. I detested the Ottoman's colonialism. I used to read and be influenced by the outcome of French humanism. My family was relatively well off, and I sympathized with the poverty stricken and needy people and was

deeply touched by the conditions of my poor fellow citizens. I was an idealist who wanted to fight injustice and see that my people are freed from its burden. I was not aware of any theoretical ideas or any of their basic principles." [3]

After the First World War an embryonic press emerged in Beirut, and this was an important vehicle for the exchange of ideas and debate among the small class of educated elite. One newspaper, *al-Sahafi al-Ta'eh* (The Wandering Journalist), attracted reformers and activists. It was first issued on 28 September 1922 by Iskandar al-Riyashi (1890–1962).[4] This newspaper is considered to have laid the intellectual foundation for leftist thought, which in turn produced the organizational basis for Lebanon's early socialist movement, including Marxism and communism. The red banners of the newspaper read "al-Sahafi al-Ta'eh, al-Bardoni: The newspaper for the proletarian and oppressed class."[5]

The sequence of development of socialist thought, including Marxist and communist ideas, can be readily traced in *al-Sahafi al-Ta 'eh*. This newspaper became a lightening rod for the spread of socialist ideas among the young intelligentsia, and through its editorials, the theoretical basis of the Lebanese communist movement was formed. Moreover, the intellectual and organizational leaders of the socialist and communist movement had formative roots in *al-Sahafi al-Ta'eh*. As a friend of the newspaper's chief editor, Yusuf Ibrahim Yazbak became one of the main writers. He was its intellectual force and attracted a number of young Lebanese idealists who were sensitive to social problems and eager to advocate social and political change. Reflecting on the significance of the newspaper, Yusuf Ibrahim Yazbak told me:

> The newspaper gave us the opportunity to write what we wanted. In the meantime, it forced us to develop many of our ideas as it expected us to continue to contribute. In most cases when I wanted to write, I used to search, think, contemplate, analyze and become fully informed of what I wrote about. I used to read foreign books very carefully, particularly the French ones, and try to assimilate in-depth their theories, endeavoring to develop them in a way that would suit the social and economic conditions in Lebanon. We can safely say that this newspaper and its owner were two important factors in organizing my way of thinking. The initial stage of commencement of the Marxist, and particularly the communist intellect, should be called the "al-Sahafi al-Ta'eh" stage. It was our first school for the theoreticians of the

communist movement in Lebanon. It introduced the early socialists to each other, and consequently the communist party organization stemmed from that and formed its early leaders. [6]

In the fifty-eighth issue of *al-Sahafi al-Ta 'eh* (5 May 1923), Yazbak published his seminal study "Socialism in Lebanon": "I have looked at the world with an objective eye and found it to be a major battlefield between the rich and the poor, the strong and the weak." After describing the character of capitalism and the aims of socialism, Yazbak wrote:

> We do not expect at present to be able to fully implement socialism in Lebanon. I do not call upon you now to embrace socialism, as its ideology is not yet rooted in our country. Our fellow citizens should attain their rights before they attend to their duties. They are used to being lazy, and seem to enjoy slavery. Our fellow citizens do not want to lead the respectable life. That is the reason why I do not call upon you to implement socialism at present.

> But do you not want to be happy? Do you not want to liberate yourselves from slavery? Do you not want to have your share of dignity and a place under the sun and moon? Do you not like to see that your beloved children are comfortable? Then why are you asleep? . . .

> Workers are no doubt the major promoters and leading supporters of the socialist ideology, because they have realized that it serves their interests. In almost all the parliaments worldwide, the labour representatives are among the socialists.

> Where are the labour syndicates? Where are their associations? Where are their aid funds? Where are their shelters for the aged persons? Where are their schools? Where are their libraries? Where are the workers themselves?

After its initial year, the writers of *al-Sahafi al-Ta 'eh* began to broaden their audience by writing in newspapers with wider circulations such as *al-Ma 'radh* and *al-Dabbour.* Socialist ideas were gaining a broader base of interest. By 1924, Yusuf Ibrahim Yazbak started to write under his own name rather than his pen name (al-Shabah al-Baki). This coincided with the arrival of the Lebanese communist syndicalistic Fouad al-Shamali (1894–1939), who was expelled from Egypt by the British authorities because of his communist organizing activities which included efforts to form an Egyptian communist party and a socialist association among Syrian and Lebanese workers in Alexandria. His arrival in Beirut in June 1923 was one

catalyst for the formation of a Lebanese communist party. [7] In an interview with the Egyptian newspaper *al-Ahram,* al-Shamali declared that his objective was the economic liberation of Syria and Lebanon: "We called it the Syrian Lebanese Socialist Party. . . . Based on the Third International, the party aims at handing over as early as possible, whenever there is an opportunity, the ruling power to the proletariat and farmers. This is the cornerstone of our principles. We are nothing but the spokesman of the oppressed working class."[8]

In August, al-Shamali reached Beirut after he was expelled from Egypt. Coincidentally, the officer in charge at the Immigration and Port Control happened to be Yusuf Ibrahim Yazbak, who had previously read about al-Shamali's news. Yazbak immediately took al-Shamali under his wing, initiating a friendship that lasted twenty years until al-Shamali's death.

Soon after his arrival in Lebanon, al-Shamali moved to Bekfia City to work in its tobacco factories. Cigarette factories were one of the region's fastest growing enterprises, and their workforce reached about 2,000. Al-Shamali started to organize its labor and in early August 1924 formed the General Syndicate of Tobacco Workers. Bekfia was the center of the syndicate. The syndicate established contacts with other labor groups, establishing in November 1925 the Supreme Committee of Syndicates (al-Lajnah al-Naqabiyah al-'Uliya), which included representatives from tobacco workers, print press workers, cooks, carpenters, shoemakers, and drivers. Among the most active of the General Syndicate of Tobacco Workers organizers, in addition to al-Shamali, were Farid Toma, Butros Hishimah, and Bashara Kamil.[9] In September 1924, al-Shamali and ten of his colleagues, whom he had organized, attempted to contact the Comintern and to associate themselves with it.[10]

Formation of the Lebanese People's Party

In late autumn of 1924, Yazbak was visited by Joseph Berger, a representative of the Palestinian Communist Party, who posed as a Polish journalist. Berger was interested in contacting socialists in Beirut, and Yazbak set up a meeting with al-Shamali.[11] According to Yazbak, Berger was assigned by the Palestinian Communist Party to set up a branch in Lebanon. Berger told Yazbak that the Palestinian Communist Party had a predominantly Jewish membership and was unsuccessful in attracting Arab members. Thus, Berger was sent to Beirut to contact Arab socialists in an attempt to expand the party's base beyond the confines of the minority Jewish community.[12]

After two meetings were held in October 1924 at al-Hadath (a suburb of Beirut), a communist party in Syria and Lebanon was formed on 24 October 1924 by five Arabs (four workers and one intellectual): Yazbak, al-Shamali, Farid Toma, Ilyas Qashami, and Butros Hishimah. They selected Yazbak as secretary general and called the party the Lebanese People's Party (LPP) as a public front for the communist party. The Supreme Committee of Syndicates constituted the main membership of the communist party and its front organization, the Lebanese People's Party. This was the first organized and constituted communist party in the Arab world.

Almost since the very beginning there were signs of major disagreement between the representative of the Palestinian Communist Party, Joseph Berger, and the Lebanese communists in connection with the rejection by those present of the Palestinian guardianship of the Lebanese party. It was obvious that the Palestinian Communist Party wanted the Lebanese party to be a branch, whereas the Lebanese insisted on maintaining their independence. This occurred in spite of the coordination that was going on between members of the party and their counterparts in Palestine during the party's first decade.

The Communist Party of Palestine, which was then almost exclusively Jewish, was at that time the most ideologically mature, organizationally coherent, and genuine communist outpost in the Middle East. Its leaders believed the party to be "the only communist front in the Arab Orient" and considered it their duty "to pay attention to every question . . . in relation to the revolution . . . to look into matters relating to Syria, Egypt, and Islamic Congresses in Cairo, Mecca, and elsewhere." [13] However, their aspirations were soon curtailed by the Secretariat for Oriental Affairs of the Executive Committee of the Communist International, which in December 1926 "censured" the Palestinian communists for their "ambitious demand to monopolize work in contiguous countries" and considered it to be a malady, harmful for the further expansion of communist influence in the region. [14]

In the first six months of the LPP, the party concentrated on gathering supporters and organizing the scattered members. Fouad al-Shamali was able to incorporate the General Syndicate of Tobacco Workers in Lebanon into the party. [15] Explaining the party commitment and conditions in 1925, Yazbak wrote:

> Some of us have participated in the establishment of the first Arab led communist party in the East. But was there among us somebody who scientifically and truly understood Marxism?

Was there any of us who read Lenin? Or who has at least read his eternal directive study "What Is To Be Done?" [16]

Has any one of us reviewed the ABC's of communism?

Frankly I say "No."

I am not ashamed of confessing. They said that I was the most culturally cultivated comrade, the more knowledgeable about Western literature than any of the others. Modestly, I would state that they said that I was "the intellectual and political leader"—I confess that during the year 1925, I was, on many occasions, directing our Party contrary to the Leninist principles. We were going on haphazardly.

We were ignorant of what we should have following in our path. Do we fight the colonialist rulers who occupy our land . . . ? Do we fight for the sake of a national democratic and constitutional order so that the powerful reactionary forces can win elections and conspire with the Mandate authority behind our backs? Do we fight capitalism and feudalism in all the Arab world? Such a fight would weaken the common front against imperialism. Do we struggle to realize the demands of all workers and peasants and call for international revolution? And where are we vis-a-vis the leadership of the said revolution which does not even acknowledge us? Rather, where are we vis-a-vis our own local revolution prior to considering [the question of] joining the international revolution?

In other words, do we politically cooperate? Do we socially cooperate? Do we struggle on both fronts?

We were motivated by sincere devotion and snobbish self-pride. We were completely ignorant of the Bolshevik movement (this is what the communists were called in the early days), and we had no contacts with anybody outside Lebanon, except with individuals from the Communist Party in Palestine. Such relationships were of minor nature and not deep. They were merely contacts between a member from our side with another from that party, and not a strong tie between two "brother" parties.

If somebody asked me about our political identity: Who are you? and do you have a popular following? My answer would have been: At that time, we were a wonderful entity in terms of quality and a very little thing in terms of size. In terms of quality, we were the vanguard who shook the brains of people. . . . We were bold and initiated fights against all the powerful bodies at all levels, whether rich or rulers, clergy, or traditional leaders. . . . That was our character and our identity in the Lebanese community.

As regards our number, it did not exceed nine young Lebanese, which went down in history as the secret founders of the first Communist Party in the Arab world. These were the nine truthful, courageous, young inexperienced persons who formed the first "purely" Arab communist party.

I called it a "purely" Arab party because they were all Lebanese Arabs whose party had a Lebanese Arab leadership; its will was Lebanese Arab; its brains were Lebanese Arab. That was not the case, neither in Palestine nor in Egypt. When communism started in those two sister countries, it was seen by the national population to be a foreign rooted movement, in terms of religion, race and class. [17]

On 30 April 1925, the party put in an application for a license to operate. Once legal and public, it was able to celebrate May Day at Crystal Cinema in Beirut. Yusuf Ibrahim Yazbak used the occasion to articulate the labor demands, which were:

1. Ban night work and impose a limit of eight hours on the working day.

2. Introduce legislation to establish a minimum wage and to establish social security insurance.[18]

The May Day celebration was attended by a great number of Lebanese activist intellectuals and notables. The media gave the event considerable coverage. Two weeks later, Yazbak, as party secretary general, issued *al-Insaniyyah* (Humanity), a weekly newspaper (named after the official organ of the French Communist Party, *L'Humanité*). That was the first official Arab communist newspaper and carried the recommendations, teachings, declarations, and circulars of the party in Syria and Lebanon. In the editorial of the first issue, published on 15 May 1925, the newspaper's mission was declared:

This newspaper was established by poor victims of injustice living in a victimized society. It is dedicated exclusively to the support of the people victimized by tyranny, monopoly and oppression. It stands for the unification of workers and peasants, and speaks out not only in protest but to restore their usurped rights.

In the second issue of *al-Insaniyyah* (24 May 1925), the party's principles appeared as party policies:

1. Promotion of Lebanese industry, agriculture, and trade; advocating the levying of a tax on mechanical, agricultural, and industrial

equipment which causes labor redundancy. Alternatively, the government could own such machinery and allow importation of only that which assists the economy and the national workforce.

2. Encouragement and strengthening of the civil spirit in public affairs, fighting religious fanaticism and sectarianism, discouragement of clerical interference in political matters.

3. Advocacy of public education, compulsory for both males and females. Foreign schools should be subject to national educational standards. The government must promote Arabic as the language of instruction which should prevail in all schools, public and private.

4. Organization of mass labor and peasants' unions to defend the interests of toilers and protect their rights such as banning child labor, imposing a maximum of eight hours for the work day, and a minimum wage. Advocacy of legislation making obligatory a two month fully paid maternity leave, effective from one month prior to delivery.

5. Promotion of a tax on inheritance and on wealth and a reduction of taxes on the masses.

6. Advocacy of public control of religious endowments.

7. Promotion of women's liberation.

8. Reliance of the party on the Lebanese people, whether inside or outside Lebanon; unification with parties which have the same common goals, adopting all possible means to reach goals.

In the next three issues (31 May, 7 June, and 15 June 1925), *al-Insaniyyah* became strident in its advocacy of better working conditions and its attacks on the French mandate. The party's relative freedom was short-lived, however. The newspaper was closed down on 16 June 1925 by government authorities after only five issues. An order was issued for the arrest of its editor and the party leadership. This was a result of the party's support for the Syrian uprising which began in July 1925. In early 1926, the party distributed a circular in French, Arabic, and Armenian calling on the people to support the uprising and the French soldiers to join the rebellion. To avoid arrest, Yazbak fled to France, where he contacted *L'Humanité* newspaper and the French Cmmunist Party. That constituted the commencement of communication between the two parties, although the intellectual relationships between the leaders, particularly the contributors of *al-Sahafi al-Ta 'eh,* dated back many years.

Almost half a century later, reflecting on the early foundations of the communist movement in Lebanon, Yazbak observed:

We copied everything of Marxism and often we over-exaggerated it. We imagined that to be revolutionary required opposition to everything that we identified as causing society's problems. We mistook religion for sectarianism, nationalism for chauvinism, and patriotism for ethnocentrism. We thought all the evil conditions of the world—poverty, ignorance, exploitation, corruption—could be eliminated with this new doctrine. This must be understood against the background of the early 1920s with the West in occupation of the Arab lands and the Soviet Union a revolutionary state extending its hand to the rest of the oppressed world. As young intellectuals disillusioned with the conditions of our society, we enthusiastically grasped the extended hand. [19]

In this period, Hizb al-Sha'ab (People's Party), a nationalist party headed by Dr. Abdul Rahman al-Shahbander, was organized in Damascus in May 1925. It was a bourgeois liberal party advocating a platform of social reform and was the first political party France allowed to be licensed. In the party's first public meeting on 5 June 1925, which was attended by more than 1,000 people (although its membership was only about 200 at the time), al-Shahbander declared:

The foundation of Europe is being threatened with a fierce war called a class war. The essence of this war is that nine-tenths of the Western people are workers who toil day and night to feed the stomachs of the remaining ten percent and fill their pockets. . . . If we stop ten people walking in any European capital, we would find nine of them will denounce the horrible conditions of most of the Western governments. These are the ones who will say when they hear of the atrocities and injustices committed in their name that there is no misunderstanding among the people of this planet. This conflict is that of the capitalists. With the bankruptcy of the colonialist countries, these governments will return to the [control] of the working class. All will cooperate to liberate humanity.[20]

The basic party platform called for the unity and constitutional independence of Syria and for the encouragement of economic development.[21]

Establishment of the Communist Party of Syria and Lebanon

At the May Day celebration at Beirut's Crystal Cinema in 1925 (discussed earlier), representatives from the Armenian communist organization Spar-

tacus League initiated contact with the Lebanese People's Party. The seeds of organized communist activities were sowed among the Armenians in Beirut in early 1924 through the establishment of the communist organization by Artin Madoyan and Haykazun Boyadjian, two émigrés from Turkey. They called it the Spartacus League after the communist organization established in Germany during World War I. The May Day meeting was the first time the two groups met, and an immediate outcome of this was the unification of the league and the party under the name the Communist Party of Syria and Lebanon (al-Hizb al-Shiouy'ie al-Suri al-Lubnani). An interim Central Committee was formed of three members of the Central Committee of the Lebanese People's Party (Yusuf Ibrahim Yazbak, Fouad al-Shamali, and Ilias Abu Nadher), two from the leadership of the Spartacus League (Artin Madoyan, the Spartacus League's secretary general, and Haykazun Boyadjian), and Eli Teper (from the Communist Party of Palestine). The new party held its first conference, a clandestine meeting, on 9 December 1925. [22] It was attended by fifteen representatives drawn from Beirut, Bekfia, Zahla, and Aleppo. The interim Central Committee was duly elected with additional members added. A formal program was approved and organizational rules and procedures adopted. The agenda of the meeting included:[23]

1. Report of the Central Committee on (a) conditions in Lebanon; (b) the organizational structure of the party; (c) the workers' movement.

2. Election of the Central Committee.

The conference arrived at the following decisions:[24]

1. To support the Syrian revolution.

2. To strengthen the struggle against imperialism.

3. To struggle for national independence and democratic freedoms.

4. To struggle for workers' rights in Syria and Lebanon.

5. To advocate the confiscation of the property of landowners who did not support the revolution.

On 18 July 1925, a mass uprising in Syria began among the Druze and spread throughout Syria, spilling over into Lebanon. By September, nationalist groups in Damascus, particularly Hizb al-Sha'ab's leader al-Shahbander and others of its prominent leadership, joined the uprising, proclaiming a general Syrian rebellion and the formation of a national government. In October, the French high commissioner, General Sarrail,

ordered the bombardment of Damascus. However, the rebellion continued to spread. By the end of 1925, it engulfed all of Jebel Druze, Damascus, parts of Homs, and southern Lebanon.

Following the outbreak of the rebellion, suppression of political activism in Lebanon became ruthless. This was aptly demonstrated by the reaction to a public demonstration to protest abolition of rent control that was organized by the party and held on 20 July 1925. Thousands of protesters gathered in front of the Government House. The police opened fire on the demonstrators, killing ten, wounding forty, and arresting sixty. [25] On 22 July 1925 the party issued a circular in Arabic, French, and Armenian denouncing the government's brutality in breaking up the demonstration and declaring its support for the Syrian uprising. It announced in the name of the newly formed Communist Party of Syria and Lebanon that it would "coordinate with the international communist movement to support the great Syrian revolution."

Shortly thereafter, al-Shamali, representing the Central Committee of the party, met with representatives of the Comintern who were also members of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Palestine: Abu Ziam and Eli Teper (alias Max Kogal). They agreed to supply the Syrian revolution with material and moral and political support and to seek the cooperation of all branches of the International Comintern in this endeavor.[26] On 22 July 1925, the party issued a circular announcing its support for the Syrian uprising and declaring in the name of the Communist Party of Syria and Lebanon that it would "coordinate with the international communist movement to support the great Syrian revolution." Following this declaration, the party leadership was arrested. On 26 January 1926, the Mandate authorities arrested the rest of the party leadership, including Yazbak who had just returned from Paris. They were not released until 18 January 1928, when a general amnesty was granted to all political prisoners. With their arrest, the party ceased to function.

However, during that period the outlook for communism in Syria and Lebanon was debated at the Secretariat's session on Oriental Affairs of the Executive Committee of the Communist International in December 1926. The Oriental Secretariat noted regretfully "the silencing of the voice" of the Lebanese-Syrian Party, and in spite of certain restrictions decided, at least for the present, that the Palestinian Communist Party should be responsible for "control and organization" of Lebanese and Syrian communists.[27] The Communist International also approved Haim Auerbach's suggestion to create a "Communist Center for the unity of parties in Arab countries"[28] and in July 1927 sent a special mission to Syria to create in Aleppo "a center

exclusively for Arabs." [29] The mission, which also included as one of its members Eli Teper, vice-chairman of the Palestinian Communist Party, turned out to be a complete failure, and communist activity in the area did not start to revive until the political prisoners were released.[30]

Two weeks after their release, the Central Committee met in February 1928 to look into rebuilding the party. Yazbak left the party. The Central Committee was reconstituted and composed of Artin Madoyan, Haykazun Boyadjian, Farid Tuma, and Nasim al-Shamali, with Fouad al-Shamali as secretary general. The strategy of the party, according to Fouad al-Shamali, was to "work diligently to deceive the authorities so they will not put us under surveillance and harass us. We must first strengthen our party organizations . . . so we can replace those comrades who will be arrested with other comrades so the party will not be dissipated. They must continue to publish leaflets, manage the party, and lead it forward. We only advertise the party's existence when we are sure that we're not vulnerable."[31] Thus, all leaflets and announcements carried the name of individual members of the party, but not the party name.

From 17 July to 1 September 1928, the party participated in the Comintern Sixth Congress and was admitted to membership in the Comintern. It thus acquired independence from the guardianship of the Communist Party of Palestine. As soon as Fouad al-Shamali returned from the Comintern meeting in Moscow, the name of the party was changed to al-Hizb al-Shiouy'ie al-Suri—a branch of the Comintern. This indicated the party's refusal to accept the French division of Syria, which was the dynamic developing in Syrian politics.[32]

In 1928, the Syrian Constituent Assembly was elected to prepare an Organic Law for Syria as a stage in the evolution toward self-government, in compliance with the terms of the Mandate. The nationalists, represented by the National Bloc, opposed the formulation of a constitution, fearing it would institutionalize the fragmentation of greater Syria, especially the separation of Lebanon. They insisted on adding amendments to the constitutional question guaranteeing the unity of greater Syria.

The National Bloc was a political organization formed after the collapse of the Syrian rebellion by moderate remnants of Hizb al-Istiqlal al-'Arabi and the Damascus-based Hizb al-Sha'ab, parties that accepted peaceful means to pursue nationalist goals. From its emergence until 1945, it played a powerful role in Syrian politics. It emerged in July 1927 from the National Congress of Beirut, a conference organized to bring together nationalist groups for participation in the upcoming elections scheduled for 24 April 1928. The National Bloc won a majority of seats in the Constituent Assem-

bly and put forward the draft of a constitution that guaranteed basic national and individual rights. It had 115 articles in all. The French high commissioner, in an effort to safeguard French superiority, added an article that declared all parliamentary decisions required the approval of the high commissioner. In effect, he held an absolute veto. The assembly balked, and after delaying its meeting three times, he dissolved it on 22 May 1930. He then unilaterally declared the constitution as amended. In reaction, the National Bloc split into moderates who favored working within the mandatory system and activists who opposed the mandatory system. [33]

On the constitutional question and separation of Syria and Lebanon, the Syrian Communist Party Central Committee declared, "We strongly reject [all] imposed constitutions and announce that all those who accept or work for their implementation directly or indirectly are the enemies of Syrian unity and the country's independence . . . The Syrian Communist Party calls upon you to: (1) strongly reject all declared constitutions in all the Syrian country; (2) expose the treasonous national leaders; (3) call for the holding of a popular Syrian congress composed of freely elected representatives to express the real will of the Syrian people."[34] With this, the party decided to move its headquarters to Damascus to elude the security services in Beirut.[35] One of the activist leaders declared, "The new Constitution and all imposed constitutions by the French authorities . . . aim at fragmenting the country into mini-states and governments."[36]

The newly constituted Communist Party of Syria concentrated on educational and public affairs activities. Members were active in the creation of the Popular Election Committee. This committee was formed by political activists and unions to mobilize the working classes and the poor to participate in the parliamentary elections scheduled for 1930. Its electoral platform was:

1. Secularization of politics.

2. Democratization of the electoral system.

3. Free public education.

4. Freedom of the press.

5. Government regulation of the economy.

6. Protection and promotion of Lebanese agriculture and industry.

7. Reform of the tax law to a system of progressive taxation.

The government dissolved the committee in late April 1929.[37]

On 17 March 1930, Fouad al-Shamali issued a new weekly newspaper, *Sawt al-Umal.* The paper's basic aim, declared in its inaugural editorial,

was to "stand with the oppressed against the oppressor, with those whose rights were usurped." The paper was closed down after four weeks.

In this environment, the Communist Party publicly announced its existence. In April 1930, the second national conference of the party was held in Beirut. It was attended by thirty-six delegates; they came from party branches in Beirut, Damascus, Aleppo, Tripoli, Bekfia, Balbak, Zahla, Homs, Agar, Nabk, and Ybrod. The most important decisions were first to publicly declare the party and then to initiate its public presence. The Central Committee was charged with drawing up a platform to identify its basic aims and its position on important social issues. [38]

In the wake of its inauguration onto the public stage, the party initiated a vanguard role in organizing labor, which was severely impacted by the Great Depression. In June 1930, the Tobacco Workers Union election took place. Fouad al-Shamali was reelected its secretary general. On 6 July 1930, the union issued a call for the creation of a general workers union with the basic aims of achieving a social security system for all workers.[39] This call was positively responded to by the Printers' Union, Umal al-Matabiec, which announced in its newspaper, "The Executive of the Printers' Union discussed the announcement of the Tobacco Union and their call for a general congress. The Executive decided to fully support the idea."[40]

In early 1931, the party began issuing a clandestine four-page newsletter, *al-Fajr al-Ahmar,* in Arabic and Armenian. Journalists and important political figures in major cities in Syria and Lebanon were targeted on the newsletter's mailing list. It explained the party's position on important issues. As labor activism was a central issue for the party, one of the early issues of the newspaper called for all unemployed workers to participate in a public meeting to be held in Beirut on 4 February 1931, to discuss working conditions and unemployment. However, the meeting was banned.[41]

Despite the efforts of security forces to stop the publication of *al-Fajr al-Ahmar,* they were ultimately unsuccessful. Its publication continued and became an important medium for the coordination of labor activism. The Tobacco Workers Union sponsored clandestine meetings on working conditions and social problems among workers. It succeeded in organizing a network of affiliated unions, among them electricity, tramway, port, and petrol workers and drivers. In March 1931, there was a public outcry against the high costs of electricity and public transportation. The party and the unions participated in organizing a boycott campaign against utilities and tramway companies. The boycott continued for three months and by mid-July 1931 resulted in the reduction of electricity prices by 40 percent

and tramway prices by 20 percent. After this initial success, the labor movement in Syria and Lebanon rapidly spread. [42]

On 7 July 1931, the Central Committee issued a detailed program under the title "Limatha Unadhil al-Hizb al-Shiouy'ie al-Suri: Ghayatuhu wat shaie' min proghramuhu" (What Does the Communist Party of Syria Struggle For: Its Ultimate Goal and Some of Its Programs) and printed under the imprint of the Communist Party of Syria Press as the first publication in a series.[43] This was a direct challenge to the authorities, who were trying to close down the party and silence it. The program identified the party's mission as "dismantling the imperialist-capitalist system and creating a socialist system."[44] In establishing the goals of the party within the framework of this mission, the program identified the following priorities and action plan:

1. Liberation of Syria: rejection of the mandate and withdrawal of all foreign forces from Syria. This includes: (a) unity of Syria: rejection of the fragmentation of Syria and the pseudo-legal means—constitutional and electoral—for institutionalizing this; (b) abolition of foreign concessions and monopolies: rejection of the special privileges given to religious missions and foreign companies; (c) freedom of press and political prisoners.[45]

2. Improvement of workers' conditions: This includes enactment of labor laws to regulate minimum wages, working hours, working conditions, and the development of a basic social security system.[46]

3. Improvement of the peasants' conditions, which constitutes the majority of the population. This includes:[47] (a) abolishment of debts and debtors prison for small farmers; (b) reduction of taxes on small farmers; (c) nationalization of water resources; (d) abolishment of forced labor; (e) enactment of labor laws and social security to protect agricultural workers; (f) land reform and abolishment of feudal practices.

4. Women's liberation and rights. This includes:[48] (a) the full legal and social equality of women and their political and economic empowerment; (b) the abolishment of the veil and forced marriages; (c) abolishment of restrictions against women's entrance into the professions; (d) maternity leave for working women; (e) enactment of labor laws to protect the rights of working women.

5. Child labor legislation, which includes the abolition of child labor below the age of fifteen; reduction of working hours for workers aged fifteen to eighteen; equal pay for equal work; allowing young

workers to join unions; free, compulsory education for all children. [49]

6. Other internal goals which include an equitable, progressive taxation system, rent controls, development of accessible, universal health care and education, expulsion of colonial administrations, rejection of sectarianism.[50]

7. Other external goals which include working for the liberation of colonialized peoples and the right to self determination; working for international solidarity; working for a common unified Arab front against imperialism; working for the creation of alliances between workers and peasants in the Arab world.[51]

The program essentially signaled the stage of ideological and organizational development the party had reached. This was further indicated in a conference of the communist parties of Palestine and Syria held in 1931, where the tasks of the communists in the Arab national movement were outlined. According to the final resolution of the conference, "In Syria, Palestine, and Egypt . . . the urgent and immediate task of the Communist parties is an agrarian peasant revolution and the organization of their work in accordance with the aims of anti-imperialism and anti-feudalism."[52] The conference, in effect, signaled to the Comintern and other communist parties throughout the region the coming of age of the Communist Party of Syria and its introduction onto the stage of regional politics, as reflected in the final resolution, which noted:

The following steps are necessary in order to strengthen the activities of Communists in all Arab countries:

1. To develop a mass educational campaign on the aims and tasks of the anti-imperialist Arab national liberation movement, interlinking it with the regular tasks of the workers' and peasants' movements in the corresponding countries.

2. For this purpose, it is necessary to hold large and small meetings, and wherever possible demonstrations, to issue special leaflets, to organize anti-imperialist committees to assume the initiative in the struggle, whose representatives are chosen from rural and urban working populations.

3. To create a general press organ, for the time being, for the communist parties of Egypt, Syria, Palestine, and the communists in Iraq. To establish a more regular and lasting contact for the exchange of experience and to coordinate the work in the early stages among the communist parties of Egypt, Syria, Palestine, and the commu-

nists in Iraq, bearing in mind the fact that in the future it will be necessary to secure the over-all collaboration of the communists of Tripoli, Tunisia, Morocco, and Algeria. Having taken special measures to organize and to unify the communists in Algeria, Tunisia, and Morocco, the future course must be to detach the organization of all these countries from the French Communist Party and make them independent units. [53]

End of the Formative Stage

In this period, 1930–33, the party initiated expansion in Tripoli, Aleppo, and Damascus and recruited a number of young activists. They included Khalid Bakdash, Mustafa al-'Aris, Hasan Quraitim, Yusuf Khatar al-Hulo, Fouad Kazan, Nikola Shawi, Faraj Allah al-Hulo, and Rafiq Ridha. What is significant about this is that many from this group were subsequently sent to the Institute of Marxism-Leninism in Moscow for training and were thoroughly imbued with a Stalinist perspective. The first manifestation of their impact on the party was the Khalid Bakdash coup against Fouad al-Shamali. In the autumn of 1932, Bakdash had al-Shamali expelled from the party on the basis of unsubstantiated and specious allegations that he had connections with the Security.[54]

The coup signaled that the formative stage in the development of the communist movement in Syria and Lebanon was drawing to a close. While its ideological formation was nurtured by Yusuf Ibrahim Yazbak, Fouad al-Shamali had nurtured its organizational development. His ouster from the party marked a turning point in the movement. Reflecting on al-Shamali's contribution to the party a half-century later, Yusuf Ibrahim Yazbak observed:

> It's true I left the party, but I continued an emotional and intellectual attachment with it. . . . Whatever I did, I gave the Communist Party priority in it. When I published my paper *al-Sayar,* the party's news and activities were prominent in it. Thus, I developed views on the party and its leadership as an objective, though sympathetic, observer. I must testify for the historical record that no man contributed more to the development of the party, or was more devoted and paid a higher price personally than Fouad al-Shamali. The foundations of the party must be credited to him.[55]

The change in the party's leadership cadre coincided with an effort at arabization of the party leadership. According to Nikola Shawi, the Comin-

tern had issued a report to the party in 1932 emphasizing the need for arabization. The problem, from the point of view of the Comintern, revolved around the predominant role of minorities in the communist movement in the Middle East—i.e., Jews in Palestine, Armenians in Syria and Lebanon, French in North Africa. [56] According to Yusuf Khatar al-Hulo, "this was a major issue that almost split the party in the period 1931–1933."[57]

Between 1932 and 1936, party activities concentrated on political education among the Arab intelligentsia. In January 1934, the party acquired the journal *al-Duhour,* a defunct publication revived by the party under the editorship of an American-born Lebanese Marxist and long-time party activist intellectual, Salim Khayatah (1910–1966). Under his editorship, the journal quickly revived and became a popular forum for ideological and political debate throughout the region. As an extension of this, Khayatah helped organize the Congress of Arab National Liberation held in Zahla in March 1934. The congress called for the creation of an Arab journal of anti-imperialist thought.[58] It also called for a federal Arab state in which foreign policy, defense, economics, and armed forces were under a central authority. The gathering identified imperialism as the major enemy of the Arab people and ignorance, poverty, and sectarianism the most serious social problems. The congress also specified that the struggle against Zionism was not religious but political, stemming from the imperialist nature of Zionism.[59] *Al-Duhour* was published for less than a year, however, and produced only ten issues. Within a few months, its editor was arrested and deported and the press denied permission to operate.[60]

Thereafter, the party concentrated its efforts on building a popular front of progressive intelligentsia in Syrian and Lebanese politics. To this end it established cooperative activities with other groups. The establishment of *al-Tali 'ah,* a journal dedicated to "intellectual liberation" (as announced in its subtitle), was the main manifestation of this cooperation and of Salim Khayatah's efforts. Its first issue appeared on 16 April 1935. Its editorial board included Fuad al-Shayeb, Kamel 'Ayyad, Salah El-Din al-Mahayeri, and Michel Aflaq.[61] In an editorial in its first issue, the editors declared, "The journal disclaims any association with any group or sect, either in this country or any other country. An issue may contain conflicting viewpoints and dispositions. Our main objectives are to foster a healthy intellectual environment and to disseminate knowledge." *Al-Tali 'ah* quickly achieved prominence among Arab intellectuals and became the vanguard publication of political thought in the Arab world. The critique of capitalism and imperialism emerged as dominant themes in its literature. In the summer

of 1937, the objectives of the journal were identified as "the rekindling of progressive thought in Arab culture and literature and promoting development of young Arab intellectuals and introducing them to humanist thought." [62]

From its inception up to the end of World War II, most of the articles of *al-Tali 'ah* were exclusively directed against fascism and its racist doctrines, highlighting its attitudes toward the Arabs. Commenting on Adolph Hitler's book *Mein Kampf, al-Tali'ah* noted that "Hitler classified the Arabs among . . . the apes at the bottom of the [evolutionary] ladder."[63] The party made an effective contribution to the 1935 formation of the Anti-Nazi and Anti-Fascist League of Syria and Lebanon ('Usbat Mukafahat al-Naziyah wa al-Fashiyah fi Suriya wa Lubnan). *Al-Tali'ah* devoted a special issue exclusively to the publication of the proceedings of the first Syrian-Lebanese Anti-Fascism Conference, held in Beirut on 6 and 7 May 1939. Introducing the issues, the editors declared that "Fascism is no longer a theory or principle which the Arabs can consider. . . . Fascism is a potential danger which threatens the Arab countries."[64] On 20 December, the Anti-Nazi and Anti-Fascism League of Syria and Lebanon published a magazine called *al-Tareik* which was edited and supervised by Marxist and progressive nationalists. The first editorial, by Anton Thabit, entitled "The Mission of the League," declared:

> The Anti-Fascism and Anti-Nazi League was formed in Syria and Lebanon in 1935 for the sole purpose of defending the oppressed, struggling against their mortal enemies and unveiling the potential dangers of political and social ideologies which threaten civilization and human values. *Al-Tareik* was established in order to bring all [antifascist] forces together in order to define the agenda, the route and methods of reform. We desire to maintain our cultural heritage, renew, enliven, and strengthen it in order that the free Arab intellect may fulfill its historic humanitarian mission. How can Arab dignity tolerate acceptance of an aggressive state such as [Fascist] Germany which despises ou history, disrespects our heritage and mocks our models and ideals.

The First Stage in Historical Perspective

The epistemological foundations of the communist movement in Syria and Lebanon can be traced through the writings of young Lebanese intellectuals. Politically marginalized by the Mandate system and culturally margin-

alized by the colonial ethos of imperialism, they found expression for their disaffection in the social critique of the humanist tradition. Newspapers such as *al-Sahafi al-Ta 'eh, al-Ma 'radh,* and *al-Dabbour* provided a medium for their discourse. In this context, socialist formulations generally, and communism in particular, supplied a ready ideological model for this discourse.

The phenomenological foundations of communist organization in Syria and Lebanon can be traced to the arrival of Fouad al-Shamali to Beirut in 1923. A seasoned communist activist and labor organizer, al-Shamali initiated labor activism in Lebanon and in effect quickly transposed the praxis of the movement from social critique to labor activism. Initiating this new praxis with the organization of the General Syndicate of Tobacco Workers in Bekfia in August 1924, he directly facilitated the organization of the first Arab communist party, the Lebanese People's Party, in October 1924. With party roots established in the labor movement and with labor activism its central platform, the movement moved outside the pale of social critique and into the trenches of class warfare. As the only member of the LPP with any substantive grounding in Marxist theory or communist praxis, al-Shamali was in effect the party's ideologue. Under al-Shamali's tutelage, the LPP's bent for labor activism soon brought it in confrontation with Mandate authorities.

Until late 1925, the Syrian and Lebanese communist movement was centered in Lebanon. Communist activity in Syria was essentially confined to the Armenian community. Liberal nationalist forces, represented in the People's Party (founded in May 1925), were the major voice of opposition in Syrian politics. With the initiation of the Syrian rebellion in July 1925, the LPP became increasingly active in the Syrian arena in support of the rebellion. In December 1925, the LPP amalgamated with the Spartacus League to form the Communist Party of Syria and Lebanon, in effect signaling the expansion of its revolutionary mandate. With the spread of the rebellion, government suppression of political activism, then outright oppression, followed suit. Party leaders were arrested or fled in early 1926, and the party ceased to function until their release two years later.

With the release of the members of the party's leadership in 1928, the party reconstituted itself, achieved full membership in the Comintern (in effect signaling its recognition as a member of the world communist movement), and changed its name to the Communist Party of Syria. Ontologically, this both constituted an implicit challenge to French plans to divide Lebanon from Syria and signaled the entrance of the party into the arena of regional politics. The new identity was directly linked to the reality of labor

politics, which remained the central praxis of the party through the rhetoric of imperialism and national liberation as objectives of class struggle.

With expansion of the party into Syria, a new breed of young idealists were recruited from Aleppo, Tripoli, and Damascus. Some were sent to the Moscow Institute of Marxism-Leninism for ideological training and were in effect transformed into a new breed of communists. Through a coup against Fouad al-Shamali in 1932, they took over the party and initiated its transformation into their image of communism—an image reflected from the centers of communist power (the Comintern and Moscow) rather than one molded by the rank and file in labor activism as under the tutelage of Fouad al-Shamali. The first manifestation of this was the arabization of the party, prompted by the Comintern. Under the leadership of this new breed of communists, the party's ties to the labor movement weakened as party praxis increasingly concentrated on the education of the Arab intelligentsia against fascism rather than on labor activism against capitalism and imperialism. The coup against Fouad al-Shamali signaled the closing of the formative stage and the initiation of a new stage in the evolution of the communist movement in Syria and Lebanon.

Chapter 2—
The Bakdash Regime:
Stalinization of the Party

For the next four decades, Khalid Bakdash was the best known, if not the most prominent, communist leader in the Arab East. [1] His long career, which started in the early 1930s and ended with his death in 1995, was marked by dramatic changes and political reversals. Due to his highly influential and for a long time almost dictatorial position in the communist movement in Syria and Lebanon, his ideological and political contributions inevitably had a major impact on the works and ideas of both his friends and his enemies and should be viewed as an intriguing part of the complex twentieth-century history of the area.

Khalid Bakdash joined the newly founded Communist Party of Syria and Lebanon (CPSL) in 1930 as a young student of law (just eighteen years old) in Damascus. His family was of Kurdish origin but his father (who was in one biographical version a former junior artillery officer, and in another just a watchman who guarded olive trees in the neighborhood of the Syrian capital)[2] was well known both for his toughness and his hostility to the French mandatory rule in the country. Both features— toughness and ideological zeal—were inherited by his son. His career in the communist party's apparatus started very early.

In early 1931, Khalid Bakdash became secretary of the Damascus branch, and by mid-1931, sponsored by Artin Madoyan, he was appointed to the Central Committee. Six months later (in early 1932), he became the party's secretary general after having al-Shamali ousted.[3] On 23 December 1933, Bakdash departed to Moscow to attend the Institute of Marxism-Leninism where he stayed until 1937. While there, again sponsored by Madoyan, he was appointed to the Comintern in 1934 as the permanent representative of Arab communist parties.[4] The fact that Bakdash and his associates received additional training in the Communist University of the

Toilers of the East in Moscow probably contributed to their political knowledge and sophistication, in which they generally far surpassed other Syrian and even, for a long time, Lebanese politicians. [5] While Bakdash was in Moscow, Madoyan, on behalf of Bakdash, ran the Communist Party of Syria with the help of new members, Faraj Allah al-Hulo and Nikola Shawi.[6] There was no formal party structure at this time. According to Madoyan, "I relied on Salim Khayatah, Nikola Shawi and Faraj Allah al-Hulo to function as a central committee and maintained close contact with them. . . . When the Central Committee was formally established, they became its members. As of March 1936, Faraj Allah al-Hulo became its secretary general. During that period (1934–36), I was also in close contact with Yusuf Khatar al-Hulo and Louis Sa'ab [new party activists]."[7] Artin Madoyan and Sa'ad El-Din Mumna, a party member, ran for parliamentary seats in the Lebanese election of 21–22 January 1934. They ran under the banner of an alliance of workers and peasants and used their campaign to publicize the party's basic slogans, such as national independence, democratic freedoms, and the rights of labor and land reform.[8] In May 1934 the party initiated publication of a clandestine newspaper, *Nidhal al-Sha'ab,* and in 1935 a press was purchased to print it. At the same time, a clandestine Armenian paper, *Mardaghotsh,* was also initiated.[9]

The ideological outcomes of the Comintern Congress of 1934 and the rise to power of the Popular Front coalition in France in 1936 soon provided them with new opportunities. The Comintern Congress asked communists in colonial and semi-colonial countries to "work for the creation of an anti-imperialist front" and to cooperate with the "national reformist elements . . . on the basis of a concrete anti-imperialist platform."[10] When the new French mandatory authorities made the party's activities semi-legal, Khalid Bakdash called the victory of the Popular Front "a victory of the Syrian people against imperialist assault and of the French people against Fascism."[11] Following the Comintern's injunction, the Syrian communists sought cooperation with the nationalist camp and made national liberation their principal demand.[12] Consistent with this, the party's domestic social program was also conspicuously moderate and conciliatory toward the various economic and political forces of Syrian-Lebanese society.[13] However, at the same time, Khalid Bakdash advocated Franco-Syrian treaties proposed by the French government and called for maximum cooperation with France against the Fascist menace.[14] This fell far short of nationalists' demands.

In this period, the Communist Party of Syria and Lebanon emerged as the de facto guardian of communism in the Arab world. Khalid Bakdash's

colleague, Artin Madoyan, proposed to the Comintern the formation of a federation of Arab communist parties with a central leadership and representatives chosen from all Arab communist parties. This was rejected by the Comintern for security considerations. [15] Nevertheless, the Comintern in effect delegated the role of regional guardian to the Communist Party of Syria and Lebanon. In 1935, for example, the general secretary of the Comintern delegated to the Syrian Communist Party the selection of representatives from the Iraqi, Palestinian, and Egyptian communist parties to the seventh Comintern Congress.[16]

In the same period, political activities became very vibrant in Syria. In Damascus alone in the period from 1928 to 1934 there were twenty-five active political parties.[17] The growth of social tension and political activities was stimulated by both internal and external developments. In the domestic field, the mandatory rule intensified the isolation of the Syrian economy from the greater parts of its former markets.[18] Syrian currency was now tied to the French franc and suffered frequent fluctuations and depreciation; the world's economic crisis of the early 1930s had a further detrimental impact on the already impoverished conditions of a majority of the populace. At the same time, the number and aspirations of the largely Western-educated urban elite markedly increased and there was certainly no lack of would-be leaders for the expression of popular discontent. The right- and left-wing political parties which then started to multiply followed largely European patterns and tried to adapt Western ideologies to the local conditions. The Communist Party of Syria and Lebanon was one of them; capitalizing on the frustration of the intellectuals and the protest of the workers, it soon found itself in the forefront of Syrian politics.

In late 1934, textile workers in Damascus and Aleppo were organized, with the CPSL playing an important role. Their demonstrations resulted in bloody events, and in February–March 1935, student unrest also broke out. The death in November 1935 of Ibrahim Hananu, a widely respected nationalist leader in Aleppo, resulted in more political unrest. Syrian developments were also influenced by the consequences of the Italo-Abyssinian War and the simultaneous political turmoil in other countries of the Eastern Mediterranean, particularly Egypt and Palestine. With the partial exception of the Lebanese Maronites, Syrian and Lebanese populations deeply sympathized with the fate of the Palestinian Arabs, who were threatened by Zionist encroachment. They were resentful that the French mandate did not follow the steps of neighboring Iraq, which had been set on the way to independence by the Anglo-Iraqi Treaty of 1930. On 11 January 1936, public demonstrators clashed with police and the French army, and on 19 January

a successful general strike spread rapidly from Damascus to the other towns and paralyzed the country. The National Bloc (which became the leading political force of the uprising) demanded independence and unity of the country in its National Pact: equality of rights for all citizens, raising the socioeconomic standards of the population, and, in accordance with the nationalist movements in other Arab countries, the abandonment of the policy of the Balfour Declaration in Palestine. [19] Those demands found great support in Lebanon, where a strike paralyzed Beirut, demonstrations took place in Tripoli and Sidon, and a message of solidarity was sent even by the Maronite patriarch, Msgr. Arida.[20] The Syrian Revolution of 1936 broke out as a result and the French authorities were forced to look for a compromise.

Public Activities, 1936–1939

Following the agreement with the French high commissioner, M. de Martel, on 1 March 1936, a Syrian delegation left for Paris to negotiate with the French government for the termination of the Mandate and for the country's independence. The French government, however, procrastinated and played for time, until the Popular Front government of Leon Blum came to power in France after the May 1936 elections. The Communist Party of France was a partner in the Blum government. On the advice of the Comintern, and with the help of the French Communist Party, Khalid Bakdash left Moscow to join the Syrian delegation in Paris negotiating the treaty.[21]

The new left-wing Popular Front cabinet showed much more understanding of the Syrian cause than did its conservative predecessor, and the Syrian delegates received a relatively sympathetic hearing from the French foreign minister, Yvon Delbos, and his liberal undersecretary, Pierre Viénal. The Anglo-Egyptian Treaty of July 1936 also did not remain devoid of some influence, and under relatively congenial circumstances, both parties initialed the Franco-Syrian Agreement on 9 September 1936. The treaty was to put an end to the French mandate in Syria while maintaining, in a modified form, French control over military, cultural, and financial affairs as well as foreign policy. It was based on the following premises:

1. France will grant Syria the same rights Iraq achieved in the Anglo-Iraq Treaty of 1930.

2. France will assure Syria of the unity of Syrian lands as expressed by the 1929 constitution and division of the country among the separate " states" will be ended.

3. The restoration of the parliamentary system and free popular elections.

4. France will receive a representative Syrian delegation in Paris to finalize implementation of these agreements.

The treaty, which was supposed to come into effect as soon as it was ratified by the French parliament, was welcomed with joy and celebrations in Syria and in other countries of the Arab East. A Franco-Lebanese treaty that was in principle similar to the Syrian followed suit and was accepted unanimously by the Lebanese Parliament on 13 November 1936. [22] However, this treaty was strongly opposed by Arab nationalists and a large number of Sunni Muslims, especially from Tripoli, who wanted their district returned to Syria. It had been claimed from Greater Syria by the French authorities and attached to Greater Lebanon against their wishes in 1920.[23] Their wishes notwithstanding, the protocol, added to the Franco-Syrian treaty, implied the Syrian government's recognition of the separate existence of the Lebanese Republic, declaring its readiness to enter into negotiations with Lebanon in order to settle the problems of common interests and all other outstanding issues.[24]

The victory of the Popular Front in France in the 1936 elections led to some relaxation of repressive measures in Syria and Lebanon and to more tolerance of the Mandate authorities toward communist activities. In addition, there was increased organizational coordination between the Communist Party of Syria and Lebanon and the French Communist Party. This helped to increase the influence of the French Communist Party and the pressure exerted by it on the Mandate authorities in Syria and Lebanon. Coordination between both parties was formalized, and Rafiq Ridha, a member of the Central Committee of the Syrian Lebanese Communist Party, was dispatched as the liaison during the period from 1936 to 1938. He was resident at the headquarters of the French Communist Party in Paris.[25] He was succeeded by another member of the Central Committee, Fuad Qazan, who continued for two more years. The French party assisted the Syrian and Lebanese party with general financial and political support.[26]

When restrictions on the press were relaxed in Beirut, the Communist Party of Syria and Lebanon issued its official news organ, *Sawt al-Sha'ab* (Voice of the People); the first issue appeared in Beirut on 15 May 1937. In its first issue, the newspaper called for improvement in relations between Lebanon and France on the grounds that France under the leadership of the Popular Front was "Democratic France." The paper argued that "the Syrian people should support the Popular Front and its government in France and

should strengthen ties with them, in order to strengthen their support for our struggle against the tyranny of the foreign companies and the falcons of money."

On 3–7 February 1937, the CPSL held a meeting of party leaders to determine its course of action. Khalid Bakdash put together a formal Central Committee composed of Faraj Allah al-Hulo, Nikola Shawi, Rashad 'Isa, Fawzi al-Za'im, Yusuf Khatar al-Hulo, Fuad Qazan, Mustafa al-'Aris, Louis Sa'ab, Abd al-Jalil Sarys, Nasib al-Jundi, Tanous Diyab, Artin Madoyan, and others. A Secretariat was also formed, composed of Bakdash, al-Hulo, Shawi, and 'Isa. [27] At a meeting of the new Central Committee held in Damascus on 6–7 July 1937, Faraj Allah al-Hulo gave a detailed report entitled "Organization Is the Foundation of Success." With the party structure articulated and all positions occupied by Bakdash protégés, the party was under the firm grip of Khalid Bakdash, and he moved quickly to expand its role in Syrian politics. In November 1937, the CPSL entered the Lebanese parliamentary elections with three candidates: Nikola Shawi (running for the seat in the Greek Orthodox Community), Sa'ad El-Din Mumna (running for the seat in the Sunni community), and Artin Madoyan (running for the seat in the Armenian community). None of them won a seat. On 6 February 1938 the first Armenian communist weekly, *Jo Ghoforty Tsyyn* (Voice of the People) appeared, under the editorship of Madoyan. Reflecting a half-century later on party developments in this period, Madoyan, one of the chief architects of Bakdash's meteoric rise in the party ranks, observed, "in this period, he [Khalid Bakdash] did not respect the principle of democratic leadership in the Leninist doctrine. As a result, a personality cult was created. "[28]

In spite of its popular support in the country, the 1936 Franco-Syrian Agreement was ill-fated. Religious and ethnic minorities in the Jebel Druze, Latakia, and Jazirah objected to being submitted to the unqualified rule of the Muslim-Sunni majority,[29] "and their voices were supported by the Vatican and the powerful political forces in France. Most of the French politicians considered the Treaty 'incompatible with the interests of France'[30] and blamed Leon Blum's government for making 'a unitary treaty with the least unitary nation in the world.'"[31] France's Popular Front government collapsed in June 1937, and its successor had a much more conservative and colonial-minded orientation. The efforts of the Syrian prime minister, Jamil Mardam Bey, to save the treaty by making more concessions to French interests caused protests by opposition groups in Syria, which were led by Dr. Abdul Rahman Shahbander, leader of the People's Party. In contrast, the CPSL newspaper emphasized the necessity of the Syrian-French alliance in

order to realize the independence of Syria and urged ratification of the agreement. [32] However, in view of the volatile political situation in Europe, France was even less willing to weaken its strategic outposts in the Levant. As Syria's political crisis, fomented by nationalist protests, became more serious, on 10 July 1939 the French high commissioner, Gabriel Puaux, suspended the Constitution and dissolved the Syrian Parliament.

In September 1939, World War II broke out. The French government dissolved the French Communist Party and suspended the newspaper *L'Humanité,* while the Mandate authority closed *Sawt al-Sha'ab* on 25 September 1939. During the next two years a number of communist leaders were arrested, but Khalid Bakdash was not. As soon as the Soviet Union entered the war in June 1941, all of the Arab communist parties, including the Syrian party, organized their operations in full support of the Allied war effort. *Sawt al-Sha'ab* appeared once again on 20 January 1942. In the editorial, Khalid Bakdash defined the policy of the Syrian Lebanese Communist Party and affirmed its support for the Allied war effort in fighting fascism.

Both Syria and Lebanon now started their real move toward independence. On 8 June 1941, the day of the invasion of the still Vichy-ruled territories, General Catroux, delegate general and plenipotentiary of Free France in Levant, declared that Free France intended to put an end to the Mandate and to proclaim Syria and Lebanon "sovereign and independent peoples." Their sovereign and independent status was going to be guaranteed by a treaty that Catroux promised to negotiate with their representatives.[33] In an uneasy fulfillment of those obligations, Free France had to proclaim the independence of Syria and Lebanon in September and November, respectively. However, French authorities were, in fact, reluctant to transfer real power to the new states, and General de Gaulle himself was opposed to the reestablishment of the parliamentary regimes and the call for elections in both countries.

The general public discontent which followed provided an occasion for the revival of the National Bloc and the increased influence of radical, including communist, ideologies and organizations. According to Professor Albert Hourani, however, "this was due not so much to the spread of Marxist doctrines as to the universal discontent with the existing order and the eagerness to snatch at any hope of change."[34] Facing both Arab disenchantment, which included even traditionally friendly Lebanese Maronites, and pressure from its allies, who were concerned about their strategic interests in the region, Free France in March 1943 decided to reestablish democratic freedoms in both Syria and Lebanon.[35]

When the parliamentary election took place at the end of August 1943, the CPSL adopted a moderate platform. During this period, the party avoided any confrontation with the military authorities and modified its demands. It even denied commitment to the establishment of a socialist system in Syria or Lebanon and assured property owners and merchants of their rights of private ownership and profit. [36] As the undisputed leader of the party, Khalid Bakdash deviated from communist orthodoxy when he declared to the established classes: "We assure the national capitalist, the national factory owner, that we do not look with envy or with malice on his national enterprise. On the contrary, we desire his progress and vigorous growth. All that we ask is the improvement of the conditions of the national worker. . . . We assure the owner of land that we do not and shall not demand the confiscation of his property. . . . All what we ask is kindness towards the peasant and the alleviation of his misery."[37]

Similarly, in a speech on 1 May 1943, Bakdash assured his audience, "The issue before us is not to establish socialism in Syria or Lebanon. All that we want . . . is the introduction of certain democratic reforms talked about by everyone."[38] These reforms included "the amelioration of the conditions of workers and democratic labour legislation . . . leniency to the peasant, relief from poverty and ignorance, and the spread of education and sanitation in the village . . . facilities for mutual trade with the Arab and other neighbouring areas and restrictions on unlawful profits accruing from atrocious monopolies or deprivation of the people."[39]

The party also attempted to arrive at a formula for establishing mutual understanding with other political forces, particularly al-Kutlah al-Wataniyah (National Bloc), under the slogan of national unity for the purpose of realizing independence and freedom. Shukri al-Qwatli, a rich landowner, was then the head of al-Kutlah al-Wataniyah, but Bakdash was untroubled by the apparent contradiction in proposing that the Communist Party of Syria and Lebanon work under its leadership.[40] The party newspaper justified this as follows:

> National unity: This is the major national aspiration and is the aim of our Communist Party. . . . If we demand national unity, and if we demand the unity of all national forces, that is only because it is in the interest of our country and realizes our welfare. There is not one organization which can claim that it has the unanimous support of all people. Our fate depends to a large degree on our unity. . . . If it is quite difficult to convince all people to belong to this party or that one, what is preventing us from uniting all the national forces and all parties

under one umbrella and around one national target? Our national communist party, through its patriotic entity, structure, policies and objectives, extends a fraternal hand to all the sincere and loyal nationalists regardless of their class, their wealth, or their ranks and positions. [41]

Reflecting the dampening of ideology by the time of the summer 1943 parliamentary elections in Syria and Lebanon, party candidates entered the election campaign with traditional bourgeois slogans. As the main candidate for the party, Khalid Bakdash declared that the program of the Communist Party was "National Liberation, National Unity, a Democratic System and the happiness of the Syrian people."[42] Although the party did not win any seats, on 7 September 1943 the Politburo issued a statement expressing its confidence in the new Parliament.[43]

Calling for national unity, the party argued that it was "not in the first place a party of social reform." Bakdash considered even such an allegation as something "pinned on us by people who are bent on relegating us to the margin of national life so as to have the national movement all to themselves." According to him, the Communist Party of Syria and Lebanon was "above all, and before every consideration, a party of national liberation, a party of freedom and independence."[44] He also traced the derivation of the communist alliance with the Soviet Union from their Arab nationalism. He declared, in the name of the party: "We approach this issue [of relations with the USSR] as patriots and as Arabs . . . not because the Soviet Union has a particular social system."[45]

The National Congress of 1943

The National Congress of 1943 was held in a volatile climate, both nationally and internationally. At the national level, the complex interplay between regional and domestic affairs pitted the forces of fragmentation of the Arab world against the forces of consolidation. The main forces of fragmentation were the Zionist movement in Palestine, which had strong links with international colonialism; the Mandate powers in the Middle East—Britain and France—which manifested international colonialism regionally; and the petty bourgeoisie, which constituted a local linkage between the domestic political economies and international trade. The Arab nationalist movement, decimated by the World War I settlements that abrogated big-power promises of Arab independence in a united state (the Hussein-McMahon correspondence), represented a weak force for consolidation at

the regional level. At the domestic level, however, public sentiment proved to be strongly anti-imperialist and Arab nationalist.

Parliamentary elections were held on 10–12 and 26 July 1943 in Syria and on 19 August 1943 in Lebanon. Although in both countries only at most 50 percent of those entitled to vote cast their ballots,[46] nevertheless, with the exceptions of Beirut City and some Maronite centers in Lebanon,[47] the nationalist opponents of mandatory rule were brought to power by an overwhelming majority. In Syria, the National Bloc won the majority, and its leader at that time, Shukri al-Qwatli, was elected president of the republic on 17 August 1943.

On 21 September 1943, the newly elected Lebanese Parliament, which by virtue of the agreement on the re-division of the seats between the confessional groups included thirty Christians and twenty-five Muslim members, elected Bishara al-Khuri as president of the republic. Riyadh al-Sulh, a Muslim from Sidon and a well-known Arab nationalist, became prime minister.

The dissolution of the Comintern on 15 May 1943 was a pivotal point in the history of the world communist movement. Reacting immediately to this development, the Politburo of the CPSL held a meeting on 25 May 1943 to address the impact on the party and its future policy. The dissolution was hailed as a positive step in the evolution of world communism which would provide greater flexibility to the Communist Party of Syria and Lebanon. Khalid Bakdash stated, "This congress is being held after the dissolution of the Comintern, which will free all the [communist] parties from any connection with an international center and from international communist control. This will enhance . . . the efforts of our party to unify the nation for the achievement of the ultimate national goal."[48]

The Politburo recommended that a general meeting of the Central Committee be held. This took place on 27 May 1943, and the Central Committee called for a national congress to be held within two months. A preparatory committee was struck, which included Khalid Bakdash, Faraj Allah al-Hulo, Nikola Shawi, Artin Madoyan, Rashad 'Isa, Yusuf Khatar al-Hulo, Mustafa al-'Aris, Abd al-Jalil Sarys, Abd al-Qadir Ismail, and Meir Mus'ad (all Bakdash protégés).[49] The congress was held in Beirut from 31 December 1943 to 2 January 1944 and was attended by 200 delegates. It was essentially orchestrated by Bakdash,[50] who advocated splitting the party.

In his report to the National Congress, Bakdash justified splitting the Syrian and Lebanese factions into separate parties for the following reasons:

1. The national movement in Lebanon is less developed than in Syria; it slogans and tactics are different.

2. Certain Lebanese circles are afraid of Syria and the other Arab countries. The imperialists are responsible for having created this fear. The establishment of a separate Lebanese Communist Party will make it possible, however, to reach these circles and allay their fears.

3. Democracy is more deeply rooted in Lebanon than in Syria. In Syria the feudal landlords still continue to rule and want to limit the freedom of expression and association of the working class.

4. Separation will benefit the internal organization of both parties and will make it possible to concentrate in the future on definite concrete objectives and to adopt decisions swiftly. It will also bring about an infusion of new blood.

"However, this does not mean that collaboration will cease altogether; close contact will be preserved between the two party executives. The party newspaper (printed and published in Beirut) will serve as the common organ of both parties until the Syrian Communists launch an organ of their own." [51]

The congress adopted the following resolutions:

1.Division of the party into two parties to be called the Syrian Communist Party and the Lebanese Communist Party. The secretaries of the respective parties were designated chairmen. Each party was to have an independent political program.

2.Continuation of existence of one common Central Committee for both of the two parties.

3. Ratification of the national program for each of the Syrian and Lebanese parties. Faraj Allah al-Hulo was named the chairman of the party in Lebanon; and Khalid Bakdash chairman of the Syrian party.[52]

The national program of the Syrian Communist Party included the following: [53]

1. The independence of Syria and its complete sovereignty and full national liberation.

2. A democratic republican regime.

3. Strengthening national solidarity ties between the Arab peoples in order to realize their full national liberation.

4. Strengthening economic and cultural ties between Syria and all the sister Arab countries.

5. Extending national sovereignty over foreign financial, industrial, and commercial institutions.

6. Equality between all Syrians regardless of differences in religion or race; strengthening of the fraternal ties among them.

7. Ensuring both collective and individual democratic rights, and most importantly freedom of conscience, speech, press, and assembly; freedom to form associations, parties, unions; freedom of worship and respect for people's religious beliefs.

8. Regulating administrative and judicial affairs democratically in the pursuit of justice and the public interest.

9. Expanding public education and promoting national consciousness through the appreciation of Arab cultural and intellectual heritage and physical education.

10. Reinforcing the status of intellectuals, scientists, artists, and teachers.

11. Increasing and spreading the number of schools throughout all cities and villages. Primary education should be compulsory and free.

12. Giving priority attention to public health; ensuring availability of medical treatment free of charge for poor citizens.

13. Protecting the Syrian family from the potential dangers of illiteracy and poverty; upgrading the status of women; and providing free health care to both mother and child.

14. Raising economic standards, stimulating trade, upgrading agriculture, extending irrigation, protecting national industries and encouraging them, improving the transportation infrastructure.

15. Protecting and assisting small producers, both urban and rural.

16. Dealing with unemployment, fighting poverty and misery, guaranteeing a minimum standard of living for the people.

17. Protecting workers by enacting labor legislation to safeguard their rights and regulate relationships between them and their employers on the basis of justice and national interest.

18. Liberating the Syrian farmer from backwardness, misery, and illiteracy.

19. Upgrading the standard of living of government employees and workers in private businesses.

20. Redistributing taxes in an equitable manner to reduce the burden on merchants and producers.

The First Congress of the Lebanese Communist Party (LCP), held between

31 December 1943 and 2 January 1944, adopted the same principles with minor amendments to the phrasing and the integration of article 3 and 4 into one article.

This was, at best, a bourgeois program that did not address socialist principles at all and was devoid of any concept of the party as a revolutionary vanguard. For example, tenets basic to even a moderate socialist program, such as land reform and the eradication of feudalism, were absent. The program did not even mention the word *socialism;* introducing it, Bakdash declared that "those who talked of attaining socialism at this stage were mere *left sectarians.*"[54] In accordance with Marxist-Leninist theory, he argued, Syria and Lebanon had to achieve independence and a reasonable level of modern development before being able to look forward to "the next stage of development."[55] The unified Central Committee for the Communist Party in Syria and Lebanon held its meeting, and on 23 July 1943, in the presence of 118 delegates representing 10,000 members in Syria and Lebanon, it declared the existence of two independent parties, the SCP and the LCP. The following resolutions were adopted:[56]

> The Central Committee of the Syrian Communist Party (SCP) is to be formed of the Syrian members in the Central Committee as elected by the first national congress. The current Central Committee for the Lebanese Communist Party (LCP) is to be formed of the Lebanese members of the Central Committee elected by the national congress. The Central Committee of the Syrian Communist Party constitutes the leadership of the Syrian Communist Party and operates its organizational and financial matters in an independent manner. Both parties cooperate in political affairs as required for the best interest of both countries and as stipulated by their mutual interest . . .

> The general policy of the newspaper is supervised by a joint committee with equal representation, members of which are nominated by the leadership committee in both parties until the Syrian Communist Party establishes its own newspaper.

Each member in the Syrian Communist Party who resided in Lebanese territory automatically became a member of the Lebanese Communist Party (and vice versa). These decisions were to be presented for ratification to the first congress of each of the two independent parties, but neither party held a congress until a quarter century later.

In effect, Khalid Bakdash maintained control of both the Syrian and Lebanese parties. Under the reality of this control, party structure and pro-

cess were a fiction. Reflecting his absolute control, in late 1946, he hastily called for a common meeting of the Central Committees and insisted upon removing Faraj Allah al-Hulo from the chairmanship of the Lebanese Communist Party. According to Artin Madoyan, "this change definitely was aimed at the destruction of a distinguished comrade. This was a tactic Khalid Bakdash utilized to destroy any comrade who achieved prominence . . . and to superimpose his cult of personality inside the party." [57] Another member present at the meeting noted that "the politburo has no right to impose or elect a chairman. . . . Nevertheless, the decision was made and Nikola Shawi appointed in less than 15 minutes."[58]

As World War II came to an end and popular opposition against mandatory rule increased, Bakdash steered the party toward more definitive nationalist positions. When in April 1946 French troops finally left Syria, Bakdash not only fully endorsed the nationalist goals outlined by President Shukri al-Qwatli in his inaugural address, but, stressing goals of national unity and solidarity with the rest of the Arabs, he urged, "our policy should not follow Washington, London or Moscow. It must be a Syrian and Arab policy."[59]

The Partition of Palestine

In spite of all their internal problems, by 1947 the communist parties of Syria and Lebanon were playing prominent roles in national politics and had about 18,000 members.[60] Union organizing activity expanded and about seventy trade unions had been established, including nearly 30,000 workers in the most important sectors of the economy (electricity, drivers, railways, printers, construction, etc.) The party enforced a moratorium on strikes during the war, which it lifted in autumn 1945, after which Lebanon was plagued with a series of strikes directed against the mandate authorities. The party established the General Union of Workers (GUW) in 1945. The GUW was responsible for enacting the first progressive labor 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 September 1945.[61]

The party reached the zenith of its influence in Lebanese politics in 1948, when it became, in Walter Laqueur's words, "one of the strongest parties in the country."[62] However, its prominence was quickly dissipated after the partition of Palestine. This resulted directly from the party's shift in policy on the Palestine issue to accommodate Soviet policy. The party had always supported the Palestinians in their struggle against Zionism and had

strongly rejected partition. Only ten days prior to the Soviet UN vote in support of partition, on 19–20 October 1947, *Sawt al-Sha'ab* (the party newspaper) declared: "The solution to the Palestine question is withdrawal [of British forces], independence, abolishment of the mandate, and unequivocal rejection of partition." However, when the Soviet Union decided to cast its UN vote in support of partition, Khalid Bakdash immediately shifted the Palestine policy of the Syrian and Lebanese parties to be consistent with Soviet policy. This reflected another dimension of Khalid Bakdash's control: his subordination of the party to Soviet policy.

According to Yusuf Khatar al-Hulo, a member of the Central Committee at the time: "That took place in spite of reservations held by a number of party leaders—including Faraj Allah al-Hulo, Rashad 'Isa, and Meir Mus'ad. Faraj Allah al-Hulo suggested that we should at least express our disappointment with the Soviet position; but Khalid Bakdash strongly rejected this." [63]

The party rapidly lost public support as a result. On 29 November 1947, on the eve of the UN vote on partition, the party headquarters in Damascus was burned. Arab nationalists joined governments in declaring open season on the communists.[64] In late November 1947, the party paper, *Sawt al-Sha'ab,* was banned. It had a circulation of 10,000 on weekdays and 18,000 on weekends over the last three years of its publication. The State of Israel was declared on 15 May 1948. On 8 June 1948, the Lebanese government banned the Communist Party.

In September 1948, an enlarged meeting of the Central Committee took place in which Khalid Bakdash and Faraj Allah al-Hulo analyzed the condition of the party. The views of Khalid Bakdash were challenged openly by the conference delegates. According to Artin Madoyan, "Hashim al-Amin, Rashad 'Isa, and Qadri Qal'achi were the most outspoken, and accused Khalid Bakdash of destroying the party. They threatened to quit the party. I was firm and asked for them to be expelled from the party. At the time I was not in Khalid Bakdash's good graces and did not occupy any position of responsibility in the party. Faraj Allah al-Hulo felt this was not the time for internal bickering. We both wanted to re-establish ourselves in the Party in these devastating times."[65] Nevertheless, Faraj Allah al-Hulo reportedly advocated holding a public news conference to condemn the partition plan and the decision of the Security Council. In response, Khalid Bakdash initiated a campaign against him, accusing him of anti-Soviet attitudes. By early 1949, Faraj Allah al-Hulo was kicked out of the party's leadership. To maintain his membership in the party, he was forced to sign a humiliating self-criticism in 1952.[66]

Contention over the party's position on the partition of Palestine seriously fractured the party. The dissidents were expelled and many others withdrew. Party ranks shrunk dramatically, with membership dwindling to a few hundred. In analyzing the problem at this time, the Second National Congress, held in July 1968, maintained, "The party looked at the Palestine issue and the Zionist conspiracy from a narrow perspective. . . . The party did not appreciate the concrete political and national impact of the Palestine issue. . . . We should have admitted that the reason for that was our demeanment and neglect of national issues and failure to understand them objectively. . . . This was a result of our incorrect outlook on national issues as bourgeois issues only, as if workers, peasants, masses do not have national feelings." [67]

The inglorious defeat of the Syrian army during the first Arab-Israeli war in 1948 and the loss of Palestine caused a shock in Syrian society, which reacted with waves of strikes, riots and growing political unrest. The Qwatli-Mardam Bey government was held responsible for the failures and widespread corruption, and on 30 March 1949, with substantial popular support, an army coup led by Lieutenant General Husni al-Za'im put an end to the first period of the parliamentary republic in Syria.

As Patrick Seale has pointed out, "the putsch was the first intervention (after World War II) of the army in politics in the Middle East; it set a fashion which was to be widely followed."[68] In spite of foreign intelligence input[69] into its origins and final failure, Husni al-Za'im's coup d'état sprang from a long accumulation of popular grievances[70] and at least originally was powered by the rise of radical pressure groups and parties which were now claiming to provide a new view of politics and set new goals and aspirations for younger generations. Al-Za'im, whose rise to power was initially welcomed as a "blessed revolt," in fact introduced some social and political reforms. At the same time, however, under the leadership of Husni al-Za'im, persecution of communists was initiated. The party retreated into secret operations, and the center of Communist Party activity moved from Damascus to Beirut.

In response to the growing opposition within the party to his leadership, Khalid Bakdash turned to his old ally, Artin Madoyan, to reestablish his hold. In August 1950, a Central Committee meeting was held and a decision was made to reunify the Syrian and Lebanese parties. Khalid Bakdash was selected secretary general; a new Secretariat was composed of Bakdash, Madoyan, and Hasan Quraitim; the Politburo was composed of the members of the Secretariat plus Nikola Shawi.[71]

Report to the Central Committee, 1951

The two developments interfered with the communist rapprochement with the national bourgeoisie. As a result of the Palestinian disaster, the whole region entered a period of turmoil, military coups and collapse of more liberal political structures. Although Husni al-Za'im's personal rule ended abruptly on 14 August 1949, the new military leader, Colonel Sami al-Hinnawi, did not abrogate the ban on the Communist Party. In fact, under his successor, Lieutenant ColoneXl Adib al-Shishakli, communists suffered ruthless persecution, and many of their achievements of the previous period of semi-legal activity were dismantled. The party's reaction was to close its ranks and withdraw into a more sectarian and doctrinaire ideological position. This reaction was intensified by the simultaneous eruption of the Cold War and worldwide ideological struggle and political tension between the Soviet Union and the Western powers.

Bakdash's report before the central command of the Communist Party in Syria and Lebanon in January 1951 was a classic summary of the strategy and tactics of contemporary Stalinist communism. It contained severe, almost bitter criticism of the party's previous activity. He blamed this on the weakness in the party that was revealed in the 1948–49 period. Bakdash argued, "Like most communist parties in extremely underdeveloped and backward countries like ours, our party grew up in a milieu far removed from Marxism—a milieu without any previous traditions of a labour movement or of socialist thought." [72] Therefore, he maintained, in order to familiarize society with communist ideas and policies, the party "was obliged to create the greatest possible noise about them."[73] Under the prevailing circumstances of social unrest and underdevelopment, and the weakness of the class struggle, such noise inevitably attracted the circles "referred to as 'enlightened' . . . from among the students, intellectuals and the petty bourgeoisie in general."[74] "Consequently, however, nearly 75 percent of [the party's] activity, whether in propaganda, organizing, or daily work, has been confined to petty bourgeois elements in cities and villages on the one hand and selected workers on the other."[75] The broad mass of workers and peasants which, according to communist theory, were supposed to constitute the "firm base" of the party, "have received hardly any attention and have been the object of little . . . political and organizing activity."[76] The party lived and worked in a still "generally petit bourgeois milieu and atmosphere"[77] and such a negative situation could be held responsible for a number of other undesirable developments. The proper way out

of the deadlock seemed to be adoption of the strict Stalinist rules on the party's political direction and internal structure with the main stress being on its class character and relentless struggle against the entire national bourgeoisie and all its political and social representations. According to the report, even though some bourgeois nationalist elements may occasionally "support the revolutionary movement against imperialism" and their interests " often clash with the interests and policy of imperialism," the national bourgeoisie as a whole "is not a revolutionary class and cannot play a basic, decisive, or guiding role in the struggle against imperialism." [78] In the report's view, therefore, "the principal orientation of . . . [the party's] effort and activity must be toward isolating the nationalist bourgeoisie and putting an end to its influence among the people."[79] The communists were also instructed to "unmask groups and parties claiming to be 'socialist,' such as the Arab Socialist Party, the Islamic Socialist Front, and [the] Baath . . . Party in Syria; and the Progressive Socialist Party of Jumblat, etc., in Lebanon."[80] Even a temporary election agreement with the bourgeois opposition was considered unacceptable.[81] The differences among the various non-communist parties were considered to be in name only, and all of them were located "in the camp of Anglo-American imperialism and the camp of feudalism."[82] As the report put it, the bourgeoisie, "no matter how much the names of its parties may vary, uses its influence to deceive the people and turn them away from the revolutionary struggle; it works for an accommodation with imperialism."[83]

The report maintained that the most urgent task of communists was to transform the party into "a party of the masses with strong foundations among the workers and fellahin."[84] The party had to be the party of the working class and revolutionary workers should have constituted "its core and backbone" even though "the best elements from among the peasantry, especially the poor ones, and the cream of the educated groups and other elements from among the toilers" might also have been included.[85] Such a party was supposed to be a vanguard party representing politically and intellectually the interests of the working class and not simply expressing the current opinions of the workers, who by themselves could not transcend the trade unionist mentality. As Bakdash said, it was a "wrong idea that communist workers . . . represent the working class in the Communist Party and in other party bodies. . . . The truth . . . is that they represent the Communist Party among the workers."[86] According to him, the party was "the political leader of the people" and represented "a higher class of worker interest . . . based on the struggle for peace, independence, and socialism."[87] Being "the highest form of organization," the party was

charged with the direction and control of all other types of social organization including ones such as trade unions, peasant committees, the peace movement, and women's organizations. [88] But although all of them should have played the role of the party's "transmission belts" to their corresponding constituencies and disseminated among them communist views, the party should not have identified with any of them, but should have carefully preserved its own leading ideological and political profile. Bakdash made this point quite strongly, indicating that although "our party supports and participates in the Partisans of Peace activities . . . this does not mean that our views and positions on every question are the same as those of the Partisans of Peace."[89]

In the same way, the separation between rural party organizations and mass organizations that the party worked to establish among the fellahin was "necessary and very important."[90] The mass organizations and movements included various social groups and ideological orientations. Their aim was to struggle for some concrete and immediate goals against the government, the feudalists, and/or Western imperialism. It was only to be expected that their ideological level was often much below or even at odds with the communist requirements. For all practical purposes, the communists were willing to tolerate that, but at the same time they were ordered not to hesitate to propagate their own correct views and opinions.[91]

In considering party strategy, two issues were addressed:

1. The issue of a united front, which had been so prominent in communist tactics in the previous period. Bakdash recalled Stalin's injunction that a united front "can have a revolutionary significance only under the circumstances and conditions in which the Communist Party enjoys complete freedom to carry out its political and organizing activity, to organize the proletariat into an independent political force, and to mobilize the fellahin against the big landowners."[92]

2.The party's strategic aim at the present stage was democratic national liberation, which was not and could not be achieved under bourgeois leadership. This implied "putting an end to imperialist political and economic domination of the country and its agents, liquidation of the remnants of feudalism . . . [and] the establishment of a popular democratic regime."[93] All of those goals obviously required a broad social base of support and the cooperation of various other social groups and political movements, but both the solid class basis and ideological hegemony of the Communist Party were still seen as necessary to be preserved and promoted. Communist par-

ticipation in the national struggle was consequently seen as predominantly a tactical action—a part of the above-mentioned "greatest possible noise . . . [to achieve] its goals in political life." [94]

Any consideration of the problems of the Arab national liberation struggle and even the outcomes of the 1948–49 Palestinian tragedy were completely omitted from the report. The political philosophy of the movement was focused on class antagonisms and cooperation with "the world of peace, socialism and democracy led by the Soviet Union." [95] One of the main features of the party, the report argued, should have been "complete faith in the first homeland of socialism, the Soviet Union, and its leader, the great Stalin, the teacher of the workers of the world and their guide to the way of national and social liberation." [96]

Although Bakdash's report in 1951 was soon going to be replaced by other relatively more moderate and updated party documents, its historical importance seems to by far exceed its rather short period of formal legal force in the internal life of the Syrian and Lebanese communist parties. The report presented the main elements of the party's worldview and recipes for action—which proved to be surprisingly difficult to transform in spite of the numerous formal shifts and changes that would later take place.

Bakdash Returns to Damascus

After the closing of *Sawt al-Sha'ab* in October 1947, the party did not have a paper. To compensate for this, on 20 November 1951 the party acquired the weekly, *al-Sarkha,* in Beirut. During the parliamentary elections in Lebanon of 1953, it was issued daily. In November 1954, the party also acquired the newspaper *al-Akhbar* (Beirut), and it became the official party organ. A clandestine party organ, not circulated publicly, *Nidhal al-Sha'ab,* was also published in Beirut. These papers were widely circulated in Lebanon and Syria.

In the spring of 1954, the party issued a statement signed by Faraj Allah al-Hulo, Nikola Shawi, Hasan Quraitim, and Artin Madoyan which essentially announced the party program and analyzed existing conditions in Lebanon, the mutual defense treaty with the U.S., and Western penetration of Lebanon. The program called for workers' rights, a labor code, social insurance, defense of women's rights, and land reform. Because the party was officially banned, the Lebanese government charged the signatories under martial law. They were sentenced in absentia to a month in jail.

Meanwhile, in Syria on 4 July 1953, the leaders of the National, People's, Arab-Socialist, Baath, and Communist parties and an additional number of independent politicians met in Homs to sign a National Pact to overthrow

the Shishakli dictatorship. [97] The repressions he ordered against the Druze and other minorities as well as his interference in the internal affairs of Arab regimes unfriendly toward his government accelerated his downfall. On 25 February 1954, facing a military insurrection, Shishakli had to resign and leave the country. With the end of his regime and the reinstatement of democratic life in Syria, Khalid Bakdash returned to Damascus after five years of residency in Beirut (1948–54).

In September 1954, a new parliamentary election took place in Syria. Although still providing a firm majority to the traditional conservative forces, the election nevertheless opened the chamber to a substantial number of new, more progressive elements (meaning those elements that espoused the values of nonalignment in foreign policy and social justice in domestic policy as the normative basis of national policy). The Baath, which united with the Arab Socialist Party of Akram Hourani, won sixteen seats, and the secretary general of the Communist Party, Khalid Bakdash, was also elected. He was the first candidate to win an election in the Arab East on the basis of declared communist principles. According to Yusuf Khatar al-Hulo:

> The party decided to nominate Khalid Bakdash for a Damascus seat. This required moving the entire party leadership to Damascus. The first to be moved were Nikola Shawi, Faraj Allah al-Hulo and tens of the Lebanese cadre. . . . After Khalid Bakdash won his seat, Faraj Allah al-Hulo stayed in Damascus to be a main editor of the party newspaper, *al-Nour*. We did not have any contact with Faraj Allah al-Hulo. Nikola Shawi, the chairman of the Lebanese party, was also moved. His task during the election campaign was to supervise election lists, print leaflets . . . when the election was over, Faraj Allah al-Hulo and Nikola Shawi stayed in Damascus. Sawaya Sawaya, Artin Madoyan and I stayed in Lebanon to run the party. . . . Every time I went to Damascus to see the residing leadership there to report on the situation in Lebanon. I only gave a short report which usually was received with a shout and reprimand. . . . In Lebanon we were suffering from disorganization and confusion in direction.[98]

According to Madoyan, "This decision to move the entire party leadership to Damascus was no doubt an incorrect one. Yusuf Khatar al-Hulo was the only one [of the Central Committee] left in Lebanon. It was naturally difficult for him to manage the party's activities in Lebanon. The party was damaged by this decision. . . . All this was to curry favour with Khalid Bakdash."[99]

The trend in Syria toward the increased participation of progressive forces in public life was apparent. According to some estimates, four other communist candidates might have been elected if political pressure had not prevented their election. [100] Even more important, at least for the time being, was the strength of the independent and neutralist Democratic Bloc list headed by Khalid al-'Azm, which, largely due to popular reaction against American pressure, won thirty-eight seats. As Patrick Seale has stressed, the elections "marked the triumph of neutralism in Arab opinion. The men whom the elections revealed as the most powerful and dynamic in Syrian politics were all committed to rejecting treaties, pacts and indeed any formal tie with the West."[101]

Bakdash's 1951 report was an expression of ideological rigidity and political toughness. Under the new political circumstances which emerged after Stalin's death in 1953 and Shishakli's overthrow in 1954, such a patently dogmatic posture could not last long. Bakdash provided an assessment of the new situation and prospects for the future in his article "The October Revolution and the Arab East," published on 18 November 1955. Stressing the contribution of the Soviet Union to putting "the Arab question onto a new plane" and the importance of its support to the successes of the Arab peoples, he stressed that the September 1954 Syrian parliamentary elections "were held in an atmosphere of comparative freedom, never before known either in Syria or in any other Arab country."[102] In addition to a communist deputy (Bakdash himself), a fair number of other non-communist progressive candidates were elected and "nearly all of the candidates known as the avowed agents of imperialism suffered ignominious defeat."[103] In view of the "obvious vigilance, conscientiousness and militancy of the Syrian people . . . the imperialists could not impose their military enslaving plans on Syria by their usual methods."[104] In contrast to his 1951 position, Bakdash now called on all "enemies of feudalism, reaction and imperialism to join forces"[105] and "search for points of agreement, not points of difference, with all sincere nationalists."[106] According to him, the Communist Party was "directing all its efforts in Syria towards building up, on the basis of joint action by patriots of various trends, a strong, broad and solid national front with a common patriotic program acceptable to all."[107] A program of cooperation with a large segment of national bourgeoisie was reinstated and expanded, and Bakdash and his comrades had strong hopes for the future of Syria as a progressive country with positive neutralism as the basis of its foreign policy, and with increasing domestic influence for the party.

Once in parliament, Khalid Bakdash became an effective player in the parliamentary bloc that was formed. In 1955, in a speech before parliament, he declared:

> We, the communists, always announced, and repeat today, that the center of our policy is to find meeting points, not disagreements, with all true nationalists. . . . Our program in this national democratic liberation stage that our country is now experiencing is crystal clear: to strengthen the foundations of independence and sovereignty . . .; to participate in strengthening world peace; and to challenge imperialist conspiracies; . . . to spread democracy and strengthen it; to liberate our economy and work to improve it; to reform our agriculture; to raise the standard of living of workers, peasants and all toilers. After the achievement of national democratic liberation, we open the door to a higher stage of socialism . . . scientific socialism admits that the road of each nation toward socialism must be consistent with the characteristics of each nation and with its historic evolution, economic conditions, and the other national specificities of the society . . . this is our program, and these are our grand aims. Show me where these conflict with the interests of Syria. [108]

The Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in January 1956 confirmed the party's new direction. The Soviet Union forsook the hitherto sacrosanct Stalinist dogma that the dictatorship of the proletariat should come to power in the oppressed nations under the auspices of the communist parties; advocated was a more pragmatic thesis that the USSR should cooperate with progressive elites actually holding power irrespective of their Marxist-Leninist credentials, even if they opposed communism.

The Communist Party of Syria and Lebanon was represented by Khalid Bakdash, Nikola Shawi, Artin Madoyan, and Yusuf Faisal at the congress. Madoyan observed,

> The Twentieth Congress had a great impact on our party's international outlook. . . . The regular meetings of the Central Committee held in Damascus from 22–25 April and 6–7 May 1956 took a number of decisions in accordance with the direction of the Twentieth Congress. . . . Thus, the party policy and its tasks in Lebanon were delineated to be as follows:

to strengthen national independence and liberate it from foreign influence;
to create better conditions for the national economy;
to foster the development of democratic freedoms in Lebanon;
to support peaceful evolution in Lebanon;
to establish the foundations of a national front in Lebanon.

The bases of party policy in Syria were delineated as follows:

to give priority to and to safeguard and strengthen national independence;
to foster peaceful evolution and utilize parliamentary means to achieve the fundamental changes Syria needs;
to foster the basis for the formation of a national front in Syria.

The meeting also took the following decision: "One of the tasks of the Syrian Lebanese Communist Party is to achieve collective leadership in the party and the practice of internal democracy and to raise the political and intellectual level of the party." Khalid Bakdash added the following sentence: " Inside the party and at all levels as the responsibility for leadership and direction cannot be laid on one member of the leadership alone (that is, not the general secretary alone)." [109]

Union with Egypt

The time from the September 1954 elections to the union with Egypt on 1 February 1958 was, for Syria, a time of unusually grave international problems and intensive domestic struggle. In the international arena, the main challenges arousing the passions and splitting the ruling elite apart were the question of Syrian membership in the pro-Western Baghdad Pact in 1955–56 and the Eisenhower Doctrine in 1957. In the domestic sector, the struggle was fought between the conservative, pro-western People's Party and Munir al-Ajlani's right-wing, pro-Hashemite independents on the one hand, and on the other the progressive nationalist front. The front united Baath leaders Akram al-Hourani and Salah al-Din al-Bitar with Khalid al-'Azm and his Democratic Bloc and the Communist Party supporting him, which was led by Khalid Bakdash.

Developments during this period had a cataclysmic effect on the party's fortunes and ideological bearings. Jamal Abdul Nasser's brand of Arab nationalism—anti-colonialism, neutralism, and Arab socialism—posed a serious threat to the party, since Nasser's appeal was broader and more firmly rooted in the beliefs of the Arab masses than the CPSL. The Baath

was another serious ideological competitor. The basic strategic concept underlying the ideology and activity of the CPSL was the concept of a national front. As Bakdash wrote in the fall of 1955, the party was "directing all its efforts in Syria towards building up, on the basis of joint action by patriots of various trends, a strong, broad and solid national front with a common patriotic program acceptable to all." [110] The party's effort, directed primarily to the Baath and to essentially bourgeois but sympathetic politicians such as Khalid al-'Azm and even Ma'ruf al-Dawalibi, was successful, at least up to a certain point. According to Patrick Seale, "Syria had been ruled since 1956 by 'a progressive front' whose leading members were, on the one hand, Khalid al-'Azm and his communist associate, Khalid Bakdash, and on the other, the Baath leaders, Akram al-Hourani and Salah al-Din al-Bitar . . . poised between them the independent premier, Sabri al-'Assali, whose position was based on the skillful exploitation of the others' differences. "[111]

In the middle of 1957, the front seemed to represent the trend of the future in the country. The May 1957 by-elections were successful for the left-wing candidates, and on 6 August 1957, the Syrian minister of defense, Khalid al-'Azm, signed a new extensive economic and technical agreement with the USSR. During the same month, Syria expelled three Soviet diplomats who were accused of being involved in a conspiracy against the regime, and Colonel 'Afif al-Bizri, who was known for his pro-communist sympathies, became chief of staff of the army.

However, the growth of communist influence inevitably led to increased anxieties and suspicions amongst its partners in the national front. The ruling national front was split between Khalid al-'Azm and his communist allies, led by Khalid Bakdash, and the Baath leaders Akram al-Hourani and Salah al-Din al-Bitar, with an independent premier, Sabri al-'Assali, trying to maintain a mediating position. The ensuing confrontation between the Baath and the communists, which Khalid al-'Azm tried in vain to prevent,[112] finally brought the country into a complex political crisis and contributed decisively to its precipitous union with Egypt.

Facing what they considered to be a growing communist threat and being unable to seek allies among the right-wing political forces, the Baath leaders decided to boycott the municipal elections on 15 November 1957 and to attempt instead a quick solution of their problems with an immediate and total unification with Egypt. This opinion that the union was "the only way to check the progress of communism in the country" was shared by many other politicians including the prominent and highly respected former premier, Faris al-Khuri.[113] Still, total merger with Egypt would not

have been possible without the particularly strong support of the Syrian army. In spite of its notorious facetiousness in the decisive moments of January 1958, virtually all the leadership of the army, including its chief of staff 'Afif al-Bizri (a Marxist), placed itself unreservedly in Nasser's hands. [114] According to the semi-official Cairo daily *al-Ahram,* on 20 January 1958, during the four-hour meeting between Nasser, Bitar, and Bizri, "a historic decision had been taken [and] . . . Union . . . had entered its 'practical and concrete phase.'"[115] Both the Syrian army and the major political parties, with the exception of the Communist Party, had to accept Nasser's conditions that "the first should withdraw from politics and that the second should be dissolved."[116]

Communist reaction to the critical developments vacillated and underwent a complex transformation. For the Syrian communists, the prospect of union with Egypt was a difficult and unpleasant challenge which they had tried to cope with since the latter part of 1956. On the one hand, unification with Egypt confronted them with the prospect of a dictatorial regime extending to Syria, which would certainly destroy their achievements and probably not even tolerate their political existence. On the other hand, however, in the aftermath of the Suez crisis, Nasser emerged as a hero of the Arab world, and to openly oppose unity with him would seem politically inept. As a result, the communist leadership initially supported unity based on a loose federal formula which they thought might have protected their position in Syria. By the end of 1957, however, during their political struggle with the Baath, they tried to outbid their rivals, demanding a total union with Egypt. In addition to a desire to earn for themselves the best nationalist credentials, they probably also expected that neither the Baathists nor Nasser himself would be willing to accept such a bold proposal. On 15 January 1958, the Central Committee even issued a resolution that stated, "the unity between Syria and Egypt will enhance the prestige of the two liberated Arab republics, increase their importance in the international realm and will serve the interests of the Arabs and international peace."[117] However, later in January 1958, facing the real prospect of its imminent implementation, the party called for "the necessity of an understanding between communists and Baathists who form the cornerstone of the National Front."[118] They also returned to the project of a federal union, which would give due recognition to the "peculiar conditions prevailing in each of the two countries . . . [and] would provide opportunities for the further promotion of freedom and democracy." Their last-minute proposals, however, were apparently ignored, and even the Marxist-oriented general 'Afif al-Bizri did not take them into account, supporting the pro-Nasser army officers.

The communist leaders now fervently opposed Nasser's demand to disband the political parties, arguing that "the Syrian people fought hard for democratic freedoms and could not now surrender them." [119] Their position, however, was far from unanimously accepted within the party. The chief editor of the party's journal *al-Nour,* Faraj Allah al-Hulo, supported Syrian unity with Egypt, and when Nasser visited Syria after the formulation of the UAR on 26 February 1958, he wrote an editorial entitled, "Welcome to Arab Damascus Abdul Nasser."[120] This was well received by nationalists, but Khalid Bakdash was displeased with it.

During union negotiations between the Syrian and Egyptian leadership, Khalid Bakdash was surprised by the final agreement. His strong opposition to unity and to Nasser can in part be explained by personal reasons: that he was left out in the cold and that Nasser never received him.[121] By far the most important reason, however, was that the party's leadership was in disagreement over the manner in which unity was achieved.

In a report to the Soviet Central Committee on 2 February 1958, Khalid Bakdash reported that all decisions regarding the party were the collective decisions of the leadership. He predicted problems for unity for the following three reasons:[122]

1. Unity would depress the Syrian standard of living, which was higher than that of Egypt.

2. Unity would result in the repression of the democratic freedoms enjoyed in Syria but not in Egypt.

3. Syrians would resent the hegemony of Egypt as the center of Arab nationalism.

He demanded that a federal state be established between Egypt and Syria under which each would continue to have its internal identity and its own executive and parliamentary organizations as per the Soviet Union's pattern.

Before the Syrian Parliament voted on the proposed unity plan on 5 February 1958, Bakdash and some other communist leaders left Damascus for China, objecting to the establishment of the unitary state. However, the party, at least temporarily, was allowed to continue its activities without interference. Its paper continued to be published. Nasser sent a special representative to Faraj Allah al-Hulo with the request that the party freeze its activities, as did the Baath. All other political parties supported the union and dissolved themselves into the newly formed Socialist Union (modeled after its Egyptian counterpart). Pressure for the Communist Party to follow suit came from many sectors. However, Khalid Bakdash refused, arguing

that "we will not dissolve the Communist Party . . . even if we announced its dissolution, the communists would reject us as their leadership and elect a new leadership." [123]

It was proposed that the party paper be taken over by the government and the party compensated. The party refused the request. Faraj Allah al-Hulo thought the party should have considered the request and tried to work within the system.[124]

Repression of the Party

In late November 1958, Bakdash returned to Damascus. In late December 1958, the Central Committee met and in response to the new conditions decided again to separate into Lebanese and Syrian parties. Thus, the Syrian members of the Central Committee formed the Syrian Central Committee, and the Lebanese members formed the Lebanese Central Committee. The decision was announced in the party's official organ, *al-Akhbar,* in mid-January 1959.[125]

At the same time, the Central Committee adopted a platform which analyzed the political situation in the region and put forward the current needs and goals of the Syrian communists. The platform called for both democratic freedom and "a firm alliance and solidarity among the Arab peoples."[126] According to the Syrian communists, Arab unity "must be carried out and strengthened by genuinely democratic means . . . be established on a democratic foundation with due regard to the objective conditions in each Arab country."[127] In practice, they wanted to base the United Arab Republic on federal and liberal democratic principles. As the platform stated:

> It is necessary to create a parliament and government in the Syrian region and also a parliament and government in the Egyptian region, together with a central parliament and a central government concerned with national defence, foreign policy and other general matters. These bodies shall be created democratically on the basis of universal and free parliamentary elections.[128]

Consequently, the Syrian communists demanded "democratic liberties: freedom of the press, freedom of assembly, . . . the right to strike, . . . and the right of all the people and patriotic forces to free association."[129] Another demand was to "put trade and economic relations between Syria and Egypt on a normal footing, on a basis that will ensure the economic and particularly, industrial development of each region."[130]

The Syrian communist platform was in striking contrast to the political structures of the UAR that were in place at the time. The party's strong emphasis on the importance of liberal-democratic and federal institutions and the ensuing lack of any sympathy with even relatively progressive reforms of the regime brought them into bitter conflict with Nasser and caused quite a few of its members to withdraw from the party.

Bakdash returned to Damascus with twelve recommendations for implementing unity. These were announced in December 1958. However, it was too late. Bakdash left for Eastern Europe and Nasser unleashed a campaign against the Communist Party in Syria. Faraj Allah al-Hulo was sent to Syria by the Central Committee to lead the party. A week before his departure from Beirut to Damascus, in an interview with the author on 19 June 1959, Faraj Allah al-Hulo worried that Khalid Bakdash had put the party on a collision course with Nasser, the most popular leader in the Arab world. Since every member of the Central Committee had left Syria, he felt he would be at great risk in Syria. According to Yusuf Khatar al-Hulo, Faraj Allah al-Hulo stated, "No comrade can do anything [in Syria], and I should not be the one to be sent." [131]

Within a few months of Iraq's revolution of 14 July 1958, which toppled the monarchy, relations between the UAR and the new military regime of General Abdul Karim Qassem became hostile. In spite of deteriorating relations between the UAR and Iraq, however, the SCP continued to openly and vociferously support the Iraqi regime (which was closely allied with the Iraqi Communist Party by this time). This precipitated a campaign of repression against the SCP. Many party members and supporters were physically eliminated by Syrian intelligence. Faraj Allah al-Hulo was one of the most prominent victims of the campaign. He was arrested and tortured until his death in June 1959 by the Anti-communism Department of the Syrian Intelligence.

Lebanese Civil Strife

Nasser's suppression of the Syrian communists contrasted with the fortunes of the Lebanese branch of the party, which functioned in the relatively advanced and well-established liberal bourgeois and parliamentary system of Lebanon. During the Lebanese uprising of 1958 against the Chamoun regime, all progressive forces, including communists, rallied against the regime. The role of the LCP in the 1958 Lebanese events, though minor, was nevertheless active and noticeable. The United National Front, which opposed President Camille Chamoun, refused to include the Communist

Party of Lebanon as one of its official members, but the communists still supported it, largely because of its avowed anti-American and anti-Western foreign policy orientation. In May 1958, the Partisans of Peace, inspired by the LCP, strongly condemned the Lebanese government's complaint to the UN Security Council about Nasser's alleged violations of the sovereignty of the country, calling it "an invitation to foreign intervention." [132] When, on President Chamoun's invitation, American troops landed on Lebanese soil, the party called on the Lebanese population to "fight them wherever you find them with the bullets of your guns and machine-guns. Aim your bombs at them; attack them with everything that comes to your hands; tear them with your teeth; and make their life an inferno on our free land, so that they should depart vanquished."[133]

The American troops left Lebanon 24 October 1958 when a compromise solution based on an Egyptian-American understanding had been found and a new president, General Fouad Chehab, who was acceptable to all warring Lebanese parties, had been elected. The communists also achieved some gains from these events, which are sometimes called the second Lebanese civil war. According to one communist analyst, in addition to making renewal of President Chamoun's mandate impossible, the 1958 struggle increased among the people "a strong sense of belonging to a free, independent, and sovereign Lebanon."[134] Due to Soviet support of the Lebanese national forces, the USSR also achieved more popularity among the Lebanese and other Arab peoples. This was considered an important propaganda asset by the local communists. Their further rapprochement and cooperation with the Arab nationalists was, however, soon challenged by the renewal of ideological conflicts. An important factor contributing to this tension among nationalist and progressive forces in the country was the Lebanese communists' support for and unity with their Syrian comrades, accentuated by the longstanding common leadership of Bakdash.

The Lebanese communists were particularly enraged by the death of Faraj Allah al-Hulo, which the nationalists dismissed while the communist press was preoccupied with it. The LCP press compared his death with the infamous murder of Patrice Lumumba of the Congo.[135] The Lebanese communists considered Nasser to be merely a military dictator and essentially a representative of the greedy Egyptian bourgeoisie.

Ideological Warfare with the UAR

Khalid Bakdash claimed that his opposition to the UAR regime was based on the premise that "Arab unity must be built upon complete liberation

from imperialism and upon democratic foundations."[136] He staunchly opposed the dissolution of the Communist Party and the incorporation of its remnants into the state-run National Union demanded by Nasser's regime. He maintained, "We declared that we were for Arab unity, but that we would never vote for anti-democratic principles and would never agree to disband our party."[137] He also defended democratic freedoms in the political and social life of the country, recalling that in 1954–57, when Syria "enjoyed broad democracy . . . neither imperialism nor feudalism could make use of the democratic freedoms to their advantage. On the contrary, these freedoms sapped the positions of imperialism, feudalism and the reactionaries generally."[138] He characterized the present political situation in Syria as "an arbitrary rule unprecedented in the modern history of the country." As he described it, "All the national parties have been dissolved. Even the fundamentals of the provisional constitution unilaterally proclaimed by Nasser on the morrow of the unification, have been consigned to the waste paper basket."[139] He also strongly criticized the economic and social policies of the regime, arguing that "the policy of Cairo in respect to the Syrian region is a policy adapted to the interests of the Egyptian monopoly circles who regard the unification as a means for capturing the Syrian market and dominating the Syrian economy."[140] In addition, "all measures aimed at an agrarian reform have proved inadequate."[141] In his opinion, the national bourgeoisie in the post-colonial countries had neither the economic nor the political resources to solve the agrarian problem.[142] In the final analysis, he characterized the UAR regime as "a terrorist dictatorship"[143] whose "entire activity . . . [was] subordinated to the interests of the big bourgeoisie in Cairo."[144]

On the ideological plane, the central point of Bakdash's criticism was directed against "the chief form of revisionism . . . which denies the leading role of the Communist Party in building socialism."[145] The Nasserist type of socialism, he observed, "has brought the workers of Syria and Egypt nothing but the banning of their parties, trade unions, press, the arrest of union leaders, unemployment and higher prices."[146] His hostility was, however, also directed against the leaders of the Baath Party, whom he called "adventurers reminiscent of the right-wing socialists in Europe, who take their lessons from the Yugoslav renegade revisionists and play the basest possible role in the Arab East"[147] and who "lost the last vestige of the trust . . . of the Syrian people."[148] He argued that although "bourgeois nationalists and right-wing socialists assert that socialism in the Arab countries cannot be built by the Communist party . . . developments refute this anti-communist propaganda."[149] The principal goals of the SCP—"to strengthen the

party, its bonds with the masses, and its organizational and ideological foundations" and to effect its hegemony in the national liberation movement [150]—were reaffirmed. By late 1959, Bakdash thought it "necessary to start a united front in Syria in order to restore democracy and to review the bases of union between Egypt and Syria."[151]

Breakup of the UAR

The 28 September 1961 coup which separated Syria from Egypt and reestablished Syria as an independent state was welcomed with great enthusiasm by both Lebanese and Syrian communists. Addressing the Twenty-second Congress of the CPSU, the secretary general of the LCP, Nikola Shawi, welcomed "the victory of the Syrian nation in freeing itself from the regime dominated by tyranny and dictatorship . . . [it is] . . . also an event of the greatest importance for the Lebanese nation."[152] According to him, "the Lebanese nation, including all its various classes, was struggling against the danger of annexation and dismemberment with which Nasser's dictatorship threatened their native land."[153] Going even further, the Syrian party immediately issued a statement stressing that it "stood in the vanguard of those who, at the price of great sacrifice, fought the Nasser dictatorship from the beginning."[154] It now called for "a national, democratic and anti-imperialist regime based on free and democratic elections which will enable the people to elect a parliament and government of the Syrian Arab Republic."[155] According to the party, the new regime "can be formed only on the basis of a front uniting all the national forces and movements regardless of party affiliation . . . [and] it should restore democratic freedom (freedom of speech, the press, parties, and trade unions); annul all authoritarian and anti-democratic measures and laws which operated during the old regime."[156]

The Second Stage in Historical Perspective

The second stage in the evolution of the communist movement in Syria and Lebanon spanned the period from 1932 to 1961. Khalid Bakdash's iron grip on the movement in Syria and Lebanon is the defining characteristic of this stage. The concept of a "Bakdash regime" represents a leadership style based on a command management approach to administration. This leadership style resulted in the Stalinization of the party's internal organization as manifested in its centralization of authority, reliance on anti-democratic processes, establishment of a cult-of-personality political culture, and Stalinization of

party praxis through the subordination of party ideology and practice to Soviet policy. In the second stage, the process of Stalinization progressed through three periods of development.

In the first period, from 1932 to 1958, the consolidation of Stalinism in the Soviet Union and the trajectory of fascism in Europe provided the international backdrop to Syrian-Lebanese politics and the ideological context for Khalid Bakdash's Stalinist style. The Comintern Congress of 1934 advocated the de-radicalization of communist parties in colonized areas in favor of cooperation with nationalist forces to build an anti-imperialist front. Following Bakdash's return to Syria in 1937 after three years of ideological indoctrination in Moscow, Bakdash consolidated his grip on the party and accelerated its de-radicalization. Despite the moderation of party policies that followed the Comintern's 1934 dictum, during Bakdash's absence, the party, run by Artin Madoyan, continued its active role in Syrian politics in the vanguard of the labor movement and played a prominent role in the civil strife that culminated in the Syrian revolt of 1936 and the Franco-Syrian Agreement of 1936. After Bakdash's return, labor activism ceased, and the party did not play an active role in the political turmoil that gripped Syria after the collapse of the 1936 Franco-Syrian Agreement. In July 1939, the Mandate suspended the Syrian Constitution and dissolved parliament. World War II erupted in September 1939. Communist Party newspapers were closed down and party leaders arrested, but not Bak-dash. When the Soviet Union entered the war in 1941, communist parties in the Arab world, including the CPSL, threw their support behind the Allied war effort. Open suppression of communist activities subsequently ceased.

In June 1941, the Free France representative in the Levant committed France to acceptance of the independence of Syria and Lebanon. Although the Free France government moved haltingly to fulfill this commitment, in March 1943 parliamentary government was restored. Elections in Syria were held in July 1943 and in Lebanon in August 1943. The CPSL ran candidates for election under a platform of such moderate reform that it contradicted the most fundamental tenets of communist ideology or even social democratic theory. It failed to win any seats, and the elections were swept by nationalist candidates.

The CPSL platform reflected the ongoing process of de-radicalization of party ideology, a policy promoted by the Comintern less than a decade earlier. The dissolution of the Comintern in May 1943 reflected completion of the process of de-radicalization of communist ideology at the international level; at the local level, completion of the process was marked by the re-division of the party in December 1943. The moderate reform programs

adopted by both the reconstituted SCP and LCP reflected liberal bourgeois principles at best and signaled the party's drive to compete with bourgeois parties for popular support in the nationalist arena. Reflecting its success in competing with nationalist parties under a liberal bourgeois platform, in the 1947–48 period the SCP and the LCP played prominent roles in national politics. In Lebanon, party membership soared.

Thus, the first period represents the de-radicalization of party ideology. The process of de-radicalization reinforced the entrenchment of a personality-cult culture around Khalid Bakdash. By the end of the first period, Bakdash had attained control of not only party organs but also of the consciousness of party members. Henceforth, he ruled the party in the name of Khalid Bakdash, not in the name of communism.

In the second period, which spans the interval from 1948 to 1954, the emergence of the Cold War and of the Third World as a political force in the international arena provided the international backdrop to regional politics in the Middle East. The regional parallel to these international dynamics was manifested in the partition of Palestine in 1948, which signaled the emergence of the Arab-Israeli conflict onto the international stage, and the Egyptian Revolution of 1952, which signaled the rise of Nasserism as a nationalist force in Arab politics. Against this background of international and regional politics the second phase of Stalinization of the party unfolded.

The UN vote in late 1947 to partition Palestine marked the beginning of this phase. Khalid Bakdash's coordination of party policy with the Soviet vote in support of partition had serious ramifications. The development of critical opposition to Khalid Bakdash's leadership within the Syrian and Lebanese parties and the marginalization of the parties in national and regional politics were the immediate consequences. In the effort to maintain his grip on the party, Bakdash instigated first a purge of party ranks and then reunification of the SCP and LCP in August 1950. The 1951 Report of the Central Committee reflects his attempt to maintain an ideological grip on the party through mystification of communist dogma.

The loss of Palestine resulting from the UN partition and the 1948 Arab-Israeli war that followed set off political reverberations in every Arab country. In the immediate aftermath, communist parties were suppressed for their support of the Soviet vote. Khalid Bakdash fled Damascus to Beirut in 1948 to avoid persecution. Within a decade of the Palestine disaster, the Syrian, Egyptian, and Iraqi governments were toppled by military coups.

In Syria, the repressive dictatorship of the Shishakli regime, though short-lived (1952–54), anticipated the new pattern of politics in the Arab

world. A July 1953 National Pact of Syrian political parties forced Shishakli to step down, and for a short period (1954–57), Syria enjoyed a democratic revival. Parliamentary elections were called for September 1954, and Khalid Bakdash returned to Damascus, transferring the headquarters of the CPSL from Beirut. As a member of a parliamentary bloc of progressive forces, Bakdash brought the CPSL into ideological accommodation with nationalist forces, an alignment that was consistent with the post-Stalinist doctrine of the CPSU.

Thus the second period of this stage in the evolution of the communist movement in Syria and Lebanon is characterized by the alignment of party praxis with Soviet policy on the one hand and nationalist ideology on the other. This occurred in the international context of the Cold War. Over the course of the period, the Cold War environment of the international arena became entrenched in the regional dynamics of Middle East politics. This articulation of international and regional politics transformed the arena of local politics, in effect permeating local politics with international significance and international politics with regional significance. The issues of the Baghdad Pact and the Eisenhower Doctrine were in effect watersheds for the transformation of regional and local politics in the Middle East. In Syria, this transformation was manifested in the process culminating in the formation of the United Arab Republic in February 1958.

The formation of the UAR marked the initiation of the final period, from 1958 to 1961. In reaction to the unification, Khalid Bakdash split the party again and fled to Eastern Europe to conduct a war of words against the regime. Because of the persecution of communists in Syria, all of the members of the Central Committee left the country. The dissolution of the UAR in September 1961 brought the second stage in the evolution of the Communist Party to an abrupt close. By the end of the stage, under Bakdash's leadership, communist ideology in Syria and Lebanon had been rendered essentially irrelevant to national or regional issues. The political party functioned as little more than an organizational vehicle for the political empowerment of Khalid Bakdash. Reflecting this, the party had been reconstituted three times— split in 1943, reunited in 1950, and split again in 1958. Party members were reduced to functionaries. So powerful was the mystique of personality that Faraj Allah al-Hulo dutifully returned to Damascus in 1959 when ordered to in spite of his strong reservations.

Chapter 3—
The Ideological Crisis and the Challenge to the Leadership of Khalid Bakdash

Following the breakup of the UAR in September 1961, two major political factors contributed decisively to fundamental changes in the regional ideological climate: the rise to power of the Baath Party in Syria and the new Soviet "rapprochement" with Third World national movements. In this climate, the communist parties under Bakdash's tight control in the 1940s and 1950s underwent dramatic transformations.

Syria under the Baath

The Baath Party ascended to power in Syria in March 1963, but it was soon disrupted by an acute ideological conflict and internal power struggles. The more conservative traditional party leaders, such as the founders Michel Aflaq and Salah al-Bitar, were challenged by a younger generation of activists. This group curried favor among ambitious young army officers such as Major General Salah Jadid and Major General Hafez al-Assad, the latter then commander of the Syrian air force. The contested issues involved the goals of nationalization and socialism, and the "tug-of-war" within the Baath Party was watched closely by both Soviet and Syrian communists.

By the end of 1963, the Soviet ideologists, who had previously held totally negative opinions about the Baath Party and its regime in Syria, started to distinguish between the party's conservative and activist wings, between "the extremist right-wing leadership" and "the healthy forces of the party." [1] The Syrian communists, led by Khalid Bakdash, were rather more cautious with revisions of their traditional views about the situation in their country, and even in May 1964 their representative summed up the result of a year of Baath rule in Syria by writing that "it has led on the one

hand to unemployment and a rising cost of living, to a freezing of the agrarian reform law and disruption of economic life; and, on the other hand, it has discredited the idea of socialism which in the Baath version is nothing but anarchy, economic crisis and the constant retreat before the feudalists and the big bourgeoisie." [2]

Khrushchev's visit to Egypt between 9 and 25 May of the same year and the concomitant shift in Soviet policy vis-à-vis the Arab world had an impact on the SCP's appraisal of the Baath. The Central Committee of the SCP, headed by Bakdash, held a plenary meeting in June 1964 and welcomed Khrushchev's visit as opening "a new page in the history of relations between the Soviet and Arab peoples."[3] Praising the "positive changes in the domestic and foreign policy of Egypt" (alluding to Egypt's adoption of a more socialist path), the Central Committee also admitted that "in Syria, despite instability and anarchy, the people were able to win by their struggle many gains and laws (such as agrarian reform, nationalization, workers' legislation, etc.)."[4] The most important and revisionist part of the document was the statement that the "Syrian communists realize full well that they are no longer the only national force advocating socialism and struggling for it. World development and the concrete experience of Syria and other Arab countries have induced and continue to induce many Arab patriots to recognize socialism and sincerely work for its achievements. The SCP extends a fraternal hand to all those sincerely struggling for socialism and unity in attaining the noble common aim."[5]

The issues involved were soon further expanded by Bakdash himself in his interview with the French Communist daily *L'Humanité* on 8 September 1964. Arguing that in Syria, where "in spite of everything, important progressive steps have been taken since the winning of national independence," he maintained that the big problem facing the country now was "what way forward to choose?"[6] Is Syria going to choose the way which had already been taken by "a number of countries such as Algeria, Egypt, Ghana or Burma [where] measures have been effected which have brought about far-reaching economic and social changes—changes which may (I repeat, may) usher in the stage of transition to the building of socialism?"[7] The changes, he argued, "were not preceded by the establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat . . . but are the fruit of an alliance of all progressive forces . . . including . . . the progressive sections of national bourgeoisie not hostile to socialism."[8] However, Bakdash argued because of the widespread belief that only "the socialist way . . . ensures national independence and makes it possible to achieve the economic and social progress the country needs . . . the broad masses want socialism."[9] In his opinion,

Syria had "all the conditions it needs to develop along the non-capitalist path," and the main obstacle was "the disunity of the progressive forces fostered by the big bourgeoisie and elements who style themselves Nasserites and whom one would expect to back progressive tendencies." [10]

In the light of this position, it was only to be expected that the communists welcomed with great enthusiasm the nationalization decrees issued by the Syrian government on 2 January 1965. A member of the SCP Central Committee, Yusuf Faisal, suggested that "the root cause of the nationalization . . . [is] the struggle between two trends of development—capitalist and non-capitalist. . . . [this] constitutes the essence of the political situation in Syria [and] explains the phenomena taking place in the Baath Party."[11] Khalid Bakdash, in a telegram to the then prime minister of Syria, Amin al-Hafez, not only praised the decrees as important gains of the country and the Arab national liberation movement in general, but also assured him that "my comrades and I will exert every effort together with all progressive forces striving for socialism, to consolidate these gains, carry them into effect and develop them further."[12] In an article published in March 1965, Bakdash observed that "the communists and other supporters of socialism, all progressives, irrespective of political affiliations, marched side-by-side in demonstrations in defence of the people's gains [the promulgated nationalization decrees]."[13]

However, he also warned that it was "still too early to speak of the final defeat of reactionaries in our country . . . and . . . the class struggle for economic independence and social progress will not be simple and smooth."[14] Even the full implementation of the decrees on nationalization, he argued, would only create the prerequisites for the solution of the economic and social problems of the country and progress on the road to socialism. "To be precise," he maintained, "taking the non-capitalist path does not yet mean automatically moving toward socialism."[15] He perceived the major threat to socialism to be in the "form of state capitalism . . . which barred the people from any participation in guiding the national economy."[16] Such a situation could, he maintained, "lead to the emergence and consolidation of a bureaucratic bourgeoisie which, making use of the state sector, could under certain conditions enjoy the privileges of a bourgeois class without inheriting its property."[17] He also noted that as the Syrian economy and society included non-capitalists, capitalists, small commodity and pre-capitalist forms of production and social structures corresponding to them, "it is not enough to nationalize most of the big and medium industrial companies, or even all of them, to be able to say that a country has already taken the socialist path."[18] The most crucial factor for the future of the country was "the nature of

political power"[19] and "the sharp class struggle in the country could not but be reflected within the ruling circles as well."[20]

In light of this, Bakdash argued that the urgent task facing all progressive forces in Syria now was to create a political situation which would make possible a form of government that could enable the country to move forward along the non-capitalist path.[21] However, this task, and the development of the Arab national liberation movement in general, were achievable only under the conditions of "the unity and sincere cooperation of all democratic and patriotic forces without exception both in each Arab country and on the scale of the entire Arab world."[22] Largely because of that, Bakdash considered it to be of "paramount importance . . . to pursue a correct policy with regard to the small producers, shopkeepers and the middle strata in general."[23] Those social groups, he argued, should be persuaded to ally themselves with the progressive forces and not with big bourgeoisie and its supporters, and any offensive against them "would be a fatal mistake."[24] He also stressed that "the Syrian Communists . . . have supported and continue to support all progressive measures paving the way to socialism from whatever sources they may emanate."[25] As he put it, "we want to eat the grapes, not kill the watchman."[26]

However, just as in the late 1950s, he defended the existence and freedom of the Syrian and other Arab communist parties, stressing that "we do not consider it permissible to go so far as to deny the role of the communist parties and to call for their dissolution."[27] Bakdash was, nevertheless, now probably much more willing to accommodate and cooperate with other political forces than ever before in his political career, and his general attitude was markedly different from the one he had adopted in the 1950s.

Nidhal al-Sha'ab, then an organ of the SCP, reported that "the struggle for socialist reform in Syria and other Arab countries is gaining strength. The working class, the working masses and all progressive forces are exerting a growing influence in this struggle."[28] The ground seemed to be prepared for a kind of Baathist-Communist alliance in Syria, and when in February 1966 the young Baathist activist army officers succeeded in taking over the rule of the country, two months later Bakdash and other communist expatriates were finally allowed to return to Damascus.

Dissension within the Communist Party

Bakdash returned from exile greatly transformed in his ideological and political attitudes, willing to compromise and submit to the dictates of the Baathist regime. Forbidden to hold meetings or make speeches,[29] he ex-

panded his authoritarian and semi-Stalinist style of control over the party. From his family residence in the Kurdish quarter of Damascus, he attempted to reassert his unlimited power over the Syrian communist movement and to preserve his powerful influence in Lebanon.

Because of the more congenial and liberal political climate in Lebanon and Bakdash's relatively weaker personal control over the LCP (which since 1958 had been officially separate and independent), Lebanese communists were the first to openly express criticism of Bakdash's policies and leadership. Despite the fact that the original bylaws of the CPSL (which were the bylaws of the SCP and LCP) required a party congress every two years, for more than twenty years a congress was never held. This is attributed to the fact that a personality cult had developed around Khalid Bakdash. In effect, the party had been Stalinized and had forfeited democratic practices.

The 1958 division of the party into separate Syrian and Lebanese units brought some optimism that party reform could be achieved. This was manifested in calls for party congresses in both Syria and Lebanon. But in spite of the formal separation, Bakdash and his protégés were still running both parties. They created obstacles to the holding of any congress, using excuses about inopportune conditions. In the meantime, there were efforts to discredit and/or marginalize those pushing for reform. According to George Batal, a member of the Central Committee of the LCP, when Nikola Shawi (general secretary of the LCP) spoke at the Congress of the Bulgarian Communist Party in 1959, the text of his speech was censored by the Bakdash clique. [30] Reformers were accused of being Maoists, deviationists, revisionists, or personality cultists by Khalid Bakdash.

Several fundamental issues were at the core of growing disaffection within the LCP:

1. The relationship with the Soviet Union.

2. The relationship between the Arab national liberation movement and the communist movement.

3. The role of the petty bourgeoisie in the national liberation movement.

4. Authoritarian versus democratic practice in the party.

Divisions within the party were manifested in terms of a split between young members versus the old guard. In 1964, a number of educated second tier members in the party (led by Edmund 'Aun, Nakhlah Mutran, Suhail Yamot, Kamil Almur, Ahmed al-Hussaini, and George Hadad) formally asked the party leadership to hold a congress. They wanted to question the party leadership, particularly Nikola Shawi, on party policies and

its failings, especially in regard to the four issues noted above. Their request was denied on the basis that conditions were unfavorable for such a move at this critical juncture of the party's life. They were accused of being Maoist deviationists and suspended from the party. A year later they were expelled from the party.

Other groups followed suit. One was a group that called itself the Party of Socialist Revolution (Hizb al-Thawrah al-Ishtirakia). The members were drawn from the grassroots of the CPSL and were sympathetic to Maoist principles. The formal declaration of the party's formation attacked the LCP leadership, accusing it of treason and blind submission to Soviet policy:

> they transformed the party into a reformist society, and lost even the appearance of a political party. They transformed the unions into tools to destroy the working class. . . . They paralyzed party activity fearing the demands of the membership which continuously called for a party congress. . . . We accuse Khalid Bakdash and Nikola Shawi . . . of collusion with Khruschev for the annihilation of 40,000 Iraqi communists [in the Baathist coup in Iraq in 1963]. We also accuse them on the Arab level of collusion with those who work very hard to eliminate the Palestinian issue. . . . Thus, we accuse them of treason to the principles of Marxism-Leninism . . . because the faithful Lebanese communists could not endure this anymore, they decided to unify themselves and organize in a new communist party called the Party of Socialist Revolution . . . which will be guided by the great principles of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin. They [faithful Lebanese communists] declared their support for all true Marxist-Leninist parties headed by the great Chinese communist party. [31]

One of the most prominent groups was led by Kaisar al-Hayek, Michel al-'Azar, Ohans Aghbashian, and brothers Nasib and Hasib Nimr. Both Nasib Nimr and Aghbashian were members of the Central Committee of the LCP. They walked out of the party in protest of the authoritarian leadership and stagnation. In 1989, in an interview with *al-Majala* (London, 19–25 April), Nasib Nimr noted that "we argued that we should not be dominated by international parties. . . . Our main slogan was criticism with no animosity and support without dependency. . . . We sought collective leadership in the party and enactment of a party program to specify its short and long term objectives and to articulate by-laws to be equally enforced on all party members. Party decisions would be collective rather than subject to the moods and whims of the individual in the Stalinist manner."

This group of dissidents took over the Armenian-language journal *Ila al-Amam,* [32] which was the original party organ in the Armenian community. They collected around them all of the dissatisfied intellectuals from both the Lebanese and Syrian parties who wanted to reshape the party along Italian lines, follow a really independent political direction, and criticize established practices and ideological patterns. The group acquired a bimonthly journal and published it under the name *al-Fikr al-Jadid.* They adopted the name Itihad al-Shiouy'ieen al-Lubnanieen (Union of Lebanese Communists) and established closer contact with nationalist groups, particularly the Palestinian guerrilla movement. [33]

Their revisionist approach and criticisms of the established ideological and organizational structures of the Arab communist parties, particularly the Syrian and Lebanese, concentrated on five fundamental issues:

1. Dogmatic interpretation and uncreative application of Marxist-Leninist principles and ideology.

2. Relations with the USSR and other socialist countries.

3. Relations with the Arab national liberation movement and the communist movement, especially concerning Arab independence and the Palestinian question.

4. Relations with the existing Arab regimes and the possibility of national alliance with them, regardless of their form of government.

5.The authoritarian organization of the Arab communist parties, which were still largely Stalinist in character and tradition, and the necessity for real democratization and responsibility to be shown by their elected leaders.

The *Ila al-Amam* group, similar in this case to some groups of the Arab New Left which were then emerging,[34] put great stress on the dialectical aspects of Marxist-Leninist heritage, which they considered to be "a working guide and not a rigid doctrine"[35] and which they argued should be made relevant to local conditions. As one of the leaders of the group, Nasib Nimr, maintained, "life always produces phenomena that are not subject to any plan. The plan should be subjected to reality and not vice versa. The plan is . . . not an idol to be worshipped."[36] Expanding on this thesis, he wrote:

> Lenin did not hesitate to reject a lot of Marxist theory, although he preserved its basic principles and essence. He not only believed in it and propagated it, he developed and enriched it through the incorporation of new scientific knowledge. . . . This means that Leninism was

subject to change and evolution, just as Marxism was in every respect except its basic principles and essence. . . . The greatest mistake of Arab Communists, socialists and revolutionaries is their confusion between main principles and derived ones. They did not understand what should be adapted and what should not. . . . The majority of us did not benefit from Lenin as we should; we benefited from the form, but not from content. . . . We did not build on it or adapt it to our conditions. [37]

The traditional communists were seen by the reformers as "petrified" and without any "ability to think and express themselves . . . people who only think and speak what they remember of the sentences they read in 'books.'"[38] They recalled that Lenin himself rejected "The communist who adopted communism, literally, and not in concept"; furthermore, he "denied the communism of those who shout the ready-made and generalized slogans . . . that fit every period of time, while in fact, they are unfit for any period of time."[39] The communist reformers, therefore, wanted to be free to make their own analyses and decisions and believed that they "should not blindly copy the experiences of others" and "consider . . . the national traditions of a certain socialist country as scientific socialist principles that should be blindly followed."[40]

In the present global stage of transition from capitalism to socialism, the *Ila al-Amam* group argued the state of "socialism . . . represents a world similar to the still unborn child."[41] The existing socialist states, including the USSR, were consequently still incomplete and imperfect creations from the developmental perspective, subject to various limitations. Therefore, they did not provide either indisputable political leadership or an indisputable model of socialist development. Bakdash and his followers were particularly attacked for their subservience to the Soviet official line and the misleading representation of the sociopolitical realities in the existing socialist countries. One of the authors in *Ila al-Amam* called them a "clique who, with the foolishness of the pagans, pictured the lands of socialism as a Utopia where people soar with smooth white wings, surrounded with holiness. They neglected their duty to be honest with the people and picture the situation as it really is, with its good side and . . . with its bad side."[42] Bakdash's stress on "agreement on the policies and the political struggle" of the Soviet Union was attacked, and one member asked, "After this, what independent status did he [Bakdash] leave for himself and his supporters?"[43]

Another important implication of the stress on the free use of Marxist dialectics was the *Ila al-Amam* group's firm support of the national libera-

tion struggle of Third World peoples. According to them, although the basic contradiction of the era still remained the one between labor and capital, this nevertheless did not prevent the second basic contradiction between the metropolitan countries and their dependencies from presently playing a leading role. [44] They saw this contradiction as playing a "leading role to the point of resorting to armed struggle . . . (Vietnam, Latin American nations, the Middle East)."[45] Their adversaries, who underestimated its importance and still paid critical attention to the contradictions of the industrialized or semi-industrialized societies and the superpowers' political conflicts, were consequently accused of hostility toward the liberation struggle. As one of them described it, "What matters for them is to hold up the people's liberation war, rely on the socialist countries only, and reject the leading role made now propitious by the world's situation for all national liberation movements, including the Arab home."[46]

Although the *Ila al-Amam* faction was by no means anti-Soviet and many times it repeated its gratitude to and essential solidarity with the Soviet Union, "because we are only one part of the great people's army that faces imperialism and backwardness,"[47] nevertheless its followers wanted to keep a distance from Soviet-Chinese quarrels.[48] As they wrote, "We are not here concerned with backing one side against another, because our procedure differs from that followed by those who back Moscow against Peking, or Peking against Moscow."[49] They called instead for ideological and political independence from both Soviet and Chinese hegemonies and a focus on Arab problems and the Arab struggle for their national and social freedom and development.

'Afif al-Bizri, a prominent *Ila al-Amam* group member and former chief of staff of the Syrian Army, in his four-part article on the conflicts within the socialist camp, argued that the Soviet-Chinese quarrels indicated that the whole communist movement had "departed from realism and diverted to the road of changes and upheavals."[50] He stressed first of all that "we must distinguish between . . . the beginning of [the] worldwide stage of transition and the moment when the laws of the socialist order will completely prevail over every other system that may exist in the world."[51] At the present still imperfect and unstable, transitory stage of history, because of the uneven level of development of various countries and different sets of prevailing local circumstances, "the movement of every society towards transition from the old order to the new order or from capitalism to socialism, . . . differs from other movements, as much as the circumstances differ between one society and another."[52] The inevitable outcomes of such a situation are differences or even sharp contradictions within the general move-

ment of progress, which "may reach the degree of hostility when the contradicting parties . . . stand far from realities of life." [53] Al-Bizri called attention "first and foremost to the great diversification of the movements which are part of the general movement of change." He counted among them not only the communist and socialist revolutions, but also "all the nationalist and democratic revolutions, all kinds of struggle against imperialism and exploitation in every country of the world, all intellectual and material developments in the fields of technology and all other fields." [54] According to him, despite all their differences, all those movements "pour into the general mainstream—the stream of change from capitalism to socialism" [55] and have their own special role to fulfil as the many faces of the one universal struggle for progress. In place of submissiveness to Soviet or Chinese ideological hegemony, al-Bizri suggested a broad, pluralistic vision of many progressive forces and tendencies, which differed greatly depending on the local circumstances surrounding them but which nevertheless should have mutual respect for each other's independence and particular mission.

The fate of the Palestinians and the struggle against Israel were a main subject of the *Ila al-Amam* group's intellectual debate and ideological dissent. When in the wake of the Arab-Israeli Six-Day War the leadership of the official communist parties, which followed the Soviet line, accepted UN Security Resolution 242 and merely spoke about the Israeli withdrawal from the Arab territories occupied in 1967 and the "liquidation of the traces of the recent aggression," [56] the *Ila al-Amam* communists opposed recognition of Israel and called for the elimination of the outcomes of "the original aggression of 1948." [57] Also, in contrast to their more traditional comrades, they did not want to rely only on peaceful political means of action and felt that "armed struggle is the only way to liberation, . . . the only way for the Arabs to eliminate the recent aggression, the basic aggression and any future aggression." [58] They asked rhetorically, "The enemy bombarded us with napalm and other terrible weapons; should we bombard him with politics, and peace expressions—surrender?" [59] They believed that "Revolutionaries do not resort to arms unless all peace methods have failed, or the enemy used armed force." [60] But, "If the enemy resorted to armed force, should we still continue our political struggle?" [61] Therefore, they wondered why Bakdash, who supported "the war which is carried on in Iraq by the Kurds . . . shouldn't . . . support a just war that could be carried out by the Arab countries against a more dangerous enemy?" [62]

In this struggle, however, the *Ila al-Amam* followers did not want to make an alliance with the existing reactionary Arab governments. In con-

trast to Bakdash's appeal for "joint action between Arab rulers, regardless of their form of government," [63] they distinguished between the joint action of the people and the action of governments. They rejected the possibility of a common front with any of the governments.[64] Reactionary rulers, they argued, would only sabotage common efforts because such efforts are inevitably threatening to their power and interests.[65]

The main focus of the group's repeated attacks was the set of established communist leaders who wanted to find common understanding and cooperation with at least some "progressive" regimes and who violated the principles of the party's internal democracy and its proper social and moral rules of behavior. 'Afif al-Bizri compared his comrades with their former leaders, asking:

> Are we the ones who have been assuming the leadership of a party for more than one third of a century, without any kind of referendum on their leadership? Are we the ones who are surrounded with supporters posing as members of the Central Committee or in charge of areas or partisans of peace or "democrats," etc., while the party is completely unaware of the circumstances that brought these supporters to the party? . . . Are we the leaders of the party in harmony with the will of our nation? But soon they tore that resolution to pieces, trod on it with their feet and issued, instead, a one-man decree in the name of the party, supporting the partition plan! . . . Are we the ones who let their comrades become victims of hunger for many years, when they dare criticize their leadership, especially when the criticism is related to the state of democracy in our party, and when these victims become humiliated with hunger and surrender, they bring them to commit an act falsely called "self-criticism"?[66]

According to Nasib Nimr, the underlying cause of all those lamentable developments within the communist party was the basic fact that "we stripped Leninism of its democracy and we kept centralism. . . . Democratic centralism is only a slogan, a curtain we hide autocratic rule and personality cults behind."[67] The *Ila al-Amam* communists wanted instead to promote openness and genuine self-criticism among the party's membership.[68] They recalled Lenin's caution that "All revolutionary parties which died up to now have died because they had become victims of arrogance, did not see the source of their strength and were afraid of talk of their weaknesses."[69] Instead, the *Ila al-Amam* communists called for meetings with other progressive and socialist groups in the region[70] to try to come to an

understanding, to make an effort to break out of ideological isolation and take an active part in the life and struggles of contemporary Arab society.

Despite the short-lived existence of the group and its relative political weakness, its voice and activities did not pass unnoticed. The mainstream of the official LCP had to take seriously into account the changing circumstances and challenges of the day. The group led by Aghbashian called for reexamination of the party's existing structures and policies, and although in 1964 the old clique was still able to expel him from the party, the subsequent negative reaction of the majority of the members forced the leadership to introduce some changes. [71] By mid-1964 the LCP had become more active in Lebanon's internal politics. In March 1965, the Central Committee adopted a position of involvement in Lebanon's internal issues and general Arab issues and joined forces with progressive Arab nationalist groups such as the Arab Nationalist Movement and Kamal Jumblat's Progressive Socialist Party. The party participated actively in the creation of the Front of Progressive Nationalist Personalities,[72] and in December 1965, the Central Committee enlarged itself, co-opting some new reform-minded members such as Karim Mroué, Nadim Abd al Samad, Khalil Na'lus, and Elyas al-Bawari.[73] The Khalid Bakdash clique objected to this new policy, but when in 1967 two of its leading members, Hasan Quraitim and Sawaya Sawaya, were expelled from the party, the younger members achieved more influence and the door was finally open to fundamental change in the party.[74]

The *Ila al-Amam* group presented a fundamental ideological challenge to the official Lebanese party. Their main theoretical underpinnings, which were highly critical of mainstream Arab communism, were articulated in Nasib Nimr's book *Falsafat al-Harakah al-Wataniyah al-Taharoriyah.* This book demonstrates the most complete expression of the position of the dissident group. The main thrust of the work was to expose the weaknesses of Arab nationalism and Arab communism and their impact on the "national liberation movement"—a concept that Nasib Nimr developed from both Arab and foreign materialist traditions. He was mainly concerned with discerning the fallibility and dangers of the conception of an "exclusive" Arab path to socialism and the risk of claiming the existence of an Arab socialism. According to Nimr, "we were directly encountering rightist opportunism on the one hand, and leftism on the other, in particular, their philosophical and ideological viewpoints towards the current Arab development path and its impact on the evolution of the national liberation movement."[75] He argued that the call of Arab nationalism is propagated by deviationists who exaggerate national traits, disregarding their compat-

ibility with socialist laws and their general outcome. He argued that whether it is the doctrinal rigidity of scientific socialism or the chauvinism of Arab nationalism, deviationism is the path to petite bourgeois ideology, which serves the exploitive interests of the bourgeois system. [76] Nimr suggested that Arab socialists must lead an internationalist and nationalist path at the same time. However, taking that route is deemed to be difficult unless both ideological petrification and deviation can be overcome.[77]

Detailing the importance of the class nemesis, Nasib Nimr maintained that "there have been certain times in the past where the Arab left ignored the struggle against its class enemy, and launched a struggle against each other. The main factor behind this complicated situation was that some groups of the Arab left denied the impact of objective circumstances, national specifities and Arab heritage. They have been estranged like the alienated tourist and the wandering gypsy, ever and always on land, never attached to heritage or . . . a place whereby objective conditions could ripen to establish a specific social system."[78] He was also critical of the call to an exclusive path to Arab socialism because this would lead certain segments of the Arab left falling victim to deviationist ideas.[79] Nasib Nimr stressed that nationalism could not exist without internationalism to prevent deviationism. On the one hand, a viable progressive idea needed to be compatible with scientific socialism. On the other hand, a sound scientific socialism in the Arab world that addressed the relevant revolutionary necessities had to consider the progressive dimensions of Arab heritage as well as the objective circumstances and national specifities of the Arab world.[80]

Nimr argued that there was a general trend among communists to ignore the theoretical foundations of Marxism-Leninism in practice. Ideological principles, he maintained, were utilized to rationalize and legitimate actions, not to formulate strategies for action. He saw a serious crisis in communism in general, and in Arab communism in particular, stemming from this. To deal with this problem, "we must make ideological principles the point of departure and scientific analysis the path. Nationalism and internationalism are guides for action."[81]

Writing in the mid-sixties, Nimr argued that Arab socialism as a concept is limited to symbolic Arab heritage and not meaningful to the objective conditions of the Arab world. Leftists have limited orthodox Marxist ideology to the symbolic communist heritage of the Soviet Union. It is also not meaningful to the objective conditions of the Arab world. A scientific approach to socialism necessitates the primacy of objective national conditions in the context of the international environment. This must be the

foundation of a unified revolutionary national liberation movement in the Arab world. [82]

Nimr formulated a theory of the national liberation movement as an interpretation of the socialist experience in the Arab world. Arguing that the movement synthesized anti-imperialist and idealist thought, he maintained that as an objective matter the movement articulated a philosophy that:

1. addresses the interests of the majority of Arab toilers, whose conditions had gravely deteriorated because of their blind surrender and reliance on metaphysical power to change their destiny;

2. meets the abstract level of thinking we have reached and—by virtue of being close to barbarianism—falls into the trap of metaphysics.[83]

Nimr also argued that religion was manipulated by exploiting classes to ensure compliance with the oil cartels and foreign banks. He argued that "by unveiling the real interests of those who manipulate religion, we can then make use of the positive and human aspects embodied in it."[84]

Nimr identified two groups that criticized the philosophy of the national liberation movement: first, socialists or traditional communists who believed that this philosophy was irrelevant to scientific socialism; and second, the Syrian social nationalists who believed in the philosophy of national liberation but rejected scientific socialism as obsolete.[85] According to Nimr, "the philosophy of the national liberation movement drew on some materialist philosophies; its conceptual underpinnings, however, derived from other sources and these distanced the philosophy of the national liberation movement from scientific materialism."[86]

The main contradictions that fermented inside the capitalist system were identified by Nimr as being: "a) the contradiction between work and capital; b) the contradiction between the imperialist countries and the oppressed colonized nations; c) the contradiction arising from the competition among imperialist countries which usually takes a form of conflict since government in the capitalist system represents executive committees for capital."[87] On a world scale, Nimr argued that the contradiction between labor and capital is manifested in the struggle between revolutionaries and the advocates of class coexistence. The national liberation movements in colonized countries are a product of the contradiction between imperialist and dependent countries. The struggle between investors and toilers in the dependent countries is the most significant manifestation of that contradiction. "The Palestinian example leads to the conclusion that

the liberation of the occupied territories by revolutionary armed struggle is inseparable from the liberation of the 'unoccupied' land by revolutionary struggle; the two processes are inextricably linked." [88]

Nasib Nimr categorically pointed out that the philosophy of the national liberation movement envisaged the nationalist and class aspects—disregarding the way they ranked—within their historical context, and that "the tangible historical conditions"[89] are the basis that revolutionary struggle draws from to launch its action against the class nemesis. The national liberation movement, therefore, has to stand against opportunism, deviationism, and narrow nationalist dogmatism.

The philosophy of the national liberation movement—in its association with scientific socialism—is grounded in the objective reality of the Arab world and the entire world at large. It believes that the emergence of a new version of Marxist-Leninism in a socialist country does not necessitate—by any means—recurrence of that experience in other places. However, the main principles and the general outcome of scientific socialism, and in particular dialectical materialism, historical materialism, etc., are the main sources that every single revolutionary movement in contemporary history must rely on. It is a mistake to consider the emergence of a specific form of scientific socialism in a certain country as a full representation of the main principles and the general outcome of scientific socialism. It is equally important to understand scientific socialism profoundly, and as a guideline. In this respect, it is crucial to disassociate scientific socialism from what others take as doctrinal religion. Moreover, an ideological shift from the distorted dialectic to a practical one is necessary.[90] However, Nimr cautioned about the dangers of deviationism entailed by ideological flexibility: "deviationists are even more threatening than the ideologically rigid. The former relate to context while the latter relate to form only. Deviationism negates the content of scientific socialism, replacing it with content that is not scientific. Ideological rigidity preserves the content of scientific socialism; however, it emphasizes the form over the content which eventually results in an ideological distortion of scientific socialism."[91]

Nasib Nimr did not reject Arab nationalism outright but questioned its nature and class dimension. He argued, "Marx and Lenin—and the rest of classic Marxists—maintain that every nation embraces two subnations; every nation holds two subcultures; based on this we conclude that in every 'nationalism' there exist two nationalistic dimensions. Our Arab nationalism is no exception in this regard. . . . The feudalists and the capitalists attached to imperialism rebuffed our national characteristics a long time ago; it is, therefore, our right and a revolutionary duty to negate their na-

tional traits and re-invigorate ours. This process is very essential and can only be realized on the basis of scientific socialism." [92] Indeed, the right attempts to justify the schemes of feudalists and capitalists under slogans of leftist rhetoric. By virtue of the very nature of this evolving nationalist expression, the ideology of the national liberation movement would be diverted from its national path.[93]

Nimr also discussed the importance of drawing upon different sources of materialism to formulate a sound and articulate Arab socialism. He argued that Marxism did not emerge out of a vacuum, but drew from different streams of materialism. Similarly, Arab revolutionaries, in their attempt to achieve scientific socialism, should draw on the materialist traditions of Marx, Engels, Hegel, and even Ibn Rushd, Ibn Khaldun, and other Arab materialists who acknowledged the superiority of substance over thought. Their ideas were obliterated because of the metaphysical and religious interpretations during their times.[94]

Nimr was uncompromising in his opposition to any form of coalition with the bourgeoisie. He perceived the nationalistic position of the bourgeoisie as only governed by immediate interests that cut through national boundaries. He argued that if the interests of a certain bourgeoisie were found to be in contradiction (at a specific historical period) with the interests of international monopolies, or if a positive inclination toward the national liberation war was detected in the behavior of the bourgeoisie, that did not mean that the bourgeoisie had forsaken its class interests. This would only indicate that it was safeguarding its class interests by taking the right side. "The transformation from one position to another is governed by sensing a major threat to its class and the international capitalist interests as well."[95] Examples are found in the expressions of some Arab countries; the bourgeoisie in these countries sometimes had led the national struggle against colonialism, occupation, and mandatory rule. Then, when political independence was attained, the bourgeoisie started to strive toward accomplishing the economic independence which is considered a precondition for consolidation and protection of political independence. Moreover, it introduced grassroots changes that affected the prevailing relations of production and threatened the interests of the bourgeoisie itself.

Nevertheless, we have also seen this bourgeoisie become the main tool of opposition to the national liberation movement.[96] This, argued Nimr, denoted an irrevocable negation of the unity of the land as well as an absolute reconfirmation of the following statements: "There is no permanent home for capitalism; this statement does not differ from the other statement that has been mentioned in the renowned communist manifesto that Marx

and Engels put forth for the first internationale, calling for the rejection of a permanent home for workers." [97]

Nimr also discussed the differences between nationalism and the national liberation movement. He argued that the former is generally appeased with political independence and a privileged role for the bourgeoisie in the post-independence era, while the latter equates political independence with economic and social liberation and seeks to bring about grassroots changes in the society on the basis of transforming relations of production from private to communal ownership. Consequently, the bourgeoisie could not be on top of the society after the attainment of political independence and the de-linking of imperialist ties. The bourgeoisie class and the old relations of production would be undermined by the triumphant toilers.[98]

Nimr noted that Marxism was adaptable and dynamic. He pointed out that Lenin did not hesitate to change and adapt many of Marx's ideas. However, he maintained the main principles and the general truth.[99] That clearly indicated that Leninism could also be subjected to adaptation and change, like Marxism. Yet the main principles and the general truth should remain intact. Since Lenin was mainly guided by the essence of Marxism, then Marxists should elicit guidelines from Marxist-Leninism as well. They needed to embark from the foundations of dialectical materialism, historical materialism, and political economy.[100] The mistake made by some communists, socialists, and Arab revolutionaries was the mixture of basic and secondary issues in Marxism. "They did not recognize what aspects of Marxism-Leninism have to be enhanced and maintained or even altered to fit the constantly transforming objective conditions."[101] The confusion in Arab socialist thought resulted from the fact that the majority of communists and Arab revolutionary socialists did not benefit from Leninist thought to guide them.[102] Nimr asserted that the majority of the leftist organizations benefited superficially, but not contextually, in that they studied Leninism, understood it to a certain limit, but never wove their ideas into its logic.[103] Pointing out the superficial understanding among Arab socialists regarding Marxist-Leninism, Nimr maintained, "we studied Lenin; the letter, the word, the theory, but failed to understand Lenin, the human being, the ethical person—who set a wonderful prototype for high moral being in his own individual or social life. Hence, we approached the Leninist text to the letter, but were distanced from the Leninist intellect and heart."[104] He also criticized the reduction of Marxist-Leninism to mere centralism with no democratic content. He considered this a great harm done to Leninism: "we stripped Leninism of its democratic nature, maintaining

only centralism, or vice versa. Therefore, Leninism turned out to be either centralism with no democracy (a form of dictatorship in organization) or democracy without centralism (a liberal bourgeois form in organization). In the final analysis, however, democratic centralism boiled down to only a slogan being chanted . . . to magnify personality cult and dictatorship." [105]

Nasib Nimr expounded on the validity of scientific socialism if understood contextually. His philosophy of the national liberation movement stemmed from a pool of sources including scientific socialism, Arab material traditions, and other international heritages. However, he did not explain how he could make use of all these traditions. His main thesis was that scientific socialism was popular and applicable to any conditions if it was understood correctly as Lenin did, but that the "traditional left" did not grasp it fully; they limited themselves to a superficial understanding that could not dig in depth into Marxism to present interpretations for current problems. Nimr adopted a critical approach to leftist politics. He touched upon issues such as democratic centralism and the dangers of generalizing the Soviet experience as it might be both damaging to Arab conditions and to the future of scientific socialism in general.

The ideas of Nimr were considered quite radical at the time. They represented a breakthrough from the mainstream communist movement in Lebanon and the Arab world at large. The *Ila al-Amam* group adopted these ideas and with more elaboration they started to challenge the official policy of the LCP.

The Third Stage in Historical Perspective

The third stage in the evolution of the communist movement in Syria and Lebanon spanned the period from 1961 to 1967. It is characterized on the one hand by the accommodation of the SCP with the Baath Party and on the other by the struggle of the LCP to transcend the ideological stultification imposed by Khalid Bakdash's leadership. The contrasting trajectories of the two parties occurred within an unfolding international environment dominated by the Sino-Soviet split in international communism, the growth of the non-aligned movement in the Third World, the acceleration of the arms race in the Cold War, and the intensification of the war in Vietnam. At the regional level, these disparate yet interrelated themes of international relations played counterpoint to the nationalist struggle between Baathists and Nasserites, the Arab-Israeli struggle over national identity, the Palestinian struggle for an organizational ontology, and the corporate struggle for suzerainty over Middle East oil.

In this charged climate, the theatre of local politics was transformed into an ideological battlefield where international and regional political dynamics were played out. In 1963, the Baath came to power in Syria and initiated establishment of a totalitarian regime, in effect closing the door on continuation of Syria's political evolution. The Baath easily co-opted the de-radicalized SCP into its ranks. Having successfully squashed efforts in the late fifties to challenge his leadership and reform the party, Khalid Bakdash returned to Damascus from his self-imposed exile in Eastern Europe and initiated his role as manager of the SCP on behalf of the Baathist regime.

In Lebanon, the effort to silence the call for reform was not so successful. By 1964, discontent was formalized with an explicit request that a party congress be convened to question the party's leadership. While the malcontents were purged from the party, dissension within party ranks continued, culminating in the party's fragmentation and the formation of a number of splinter groups. These groups subjected the party, its leadership, policies, organization, and praxis to a thorough critique, and in the process they learned to master the fundamentals of Marxist-Leninist theory and the dialectics of critique.

**PART TWO—
THE LEBANESE COMMUNIST MOVEMENT**

Chapter 4—
The Lebanese Communist Party

The LCP's prolonged crisis of profound ideological ferment converged on the issues of Arab unity, Palestine, and the nature of Arab regimes. The June 1967 Arab-Israeli War and the humiliating Arab defeat aggravated the crisis. Reflecting the severity of the internal struggle, local organizational units of the party began withdrawing their confidence from its acting leadership and called for an enlarged meeting of the Central Committee in September 1967. The meeting which expelled Quraitim and Sawaya and their followers from the party is considered by Lebanese communists to be a historic landmark on their difficult path to independence and internal democracy.

Serious preparations then started for the convening of a long overdue second party congress, which was intended to reexamine party policies during the twenty-five years since the first congress in 1943–44. The congress gathered in Beirut in 1968, and the contents of its debates and resolutions were collated, published, and widely distributed under the title *Twenty-five Years of the Lebanese Communist Party's Struggle for National Independence, Democracy, and Socialism.* Under the slogan "Forward for a Mass Communist Party," the congress selected a new program, internal organization, and Central Committee. The party showed a great deal of vigor in recruiting new members, particularly among youth. It also became clear that the party's organs were prepared to open discussions on all issues.

In 1971, the party regained legal status from the minister of the interior, Kamal Jumblat—typical for the Lebanese party, which enjoyed periodic spells of legality since its inception, but unusual within the ranks of the Arab communist parties, which were still almost universally banned by their respective governments. The political bureau of the Lebanese Communist Party commented, "The permission of open operation of the party epitomized the party's dedicated historical struggle for the liberation and social progress of our people. In particular, it crowned the party's struggle

in the light of the second congress. It was also a result of the party's policies and alliances whether in Lebanon or in the Arab world, as well as the party's fidelity to the concept and practice of international proletarian solidarity. The existence of strong friends of the party, the vanguard of which is the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, has helped immeasurably." [1]

In June 1971, the Central Committee called on the party membership to prepare for a third congress. The third congress began on 5 January 1972 and lasted nearly a fortnight. It represented a serious attempt by the party to become a meaningful political force in the region in the post-1967 war period.

LCP Third Congress

Utilizing a number of particularly favorable circumstances of place and time, the Lebanese communists struggled to overcome the traditional communist ghetto of isolation and sectarianism and to make a strong, convincing appeal to the Arab public at large. To this end, they sought to develop cooperation with the other nationalist and progressive parties and organizations, both in Lebanon itself and throughout the area. The third congress was unusual in several respects:

1. It seemed to presage an increase in the frequency of party congresses, which formally was the highest authority within the party. Only four years had elapsed since the second congress in 1968 compared to the twenty-four years that had elapsed between the first and second congresses.

2. It enabled the grassroots of the party to participate directly in the formulation of all aspects of party policy and select the leadership (to hold office until the next congress), a hitherto rarely seen exercise of inner-party democracy among Arab communist parties.

3. The congress was the first held since the legalization of the party by interior minister Kamal Jumblat in 1971. Eager to capitalize on the publicity enveloping the congress, the party opened its doors to the Lebanese and sympathetic foreign news media as well as to representatives of other progressive Lebanese social groups and organizations (trade unions, teachers' unions, etc.).

4. The party intended the congress to serve as a summit of all of the Arab communist parties, at which they could discuss the basis of a common program and coordinate political strategy.[2] Non-commu-

nist Arab progressive ruling parties such as the Syrian and Iraqi Baath, the Kurdistan Democratic Party, the Egyptian Arab Socialist Union, the Southern Yemeni National Front, and the PLO, along with non-Arab ruling and non-ruling communist parties, [3] were also invited. It was the first such gathering ever held in an Arab country; because of deterioration in the political climate in Lebanon, it has never been repeated.

Perhaps the substance of the deliberations was of less importance than the mere existence of the congress. After the debates were concluded—foreign observers were surprised by their candor and vigor[4]—the final political resolution summarizing the main conclusions and containing the outlines of the program of future communist activities was adopted. The document was based on two main assumptions.

The first was that the basic contradiction in the region was the struggle between the Arab national liberation movement and all its segments and the hostile trinity of imperialism, Zionism, and Arab reaction, which was led by the Saudis.[5] It therefore seemed to them both wrong and potentially dangerous to give precedence to the intrinsic contradictions and quarrels among the Arab national and progressive forces over the fundamental confrontation between all of them and the powerful common enemies. The political resolution of the congress stated, "Unity of the patriotic and progressive forces is based on a common progressive attitude to the solution of the main problem of the region, namely, the contradiction between the Arab national liberation movement, on the one hand, and imperialism, Zionism and Arab reaction, on the other."[6]

Unity of these forces, which in addition to the working class and the poor peasantry involved "very large sections of salaried workers, clerical personnel, intellectuals and handicraftsmen,"[7] was seen as even more pressing because of the growing external threats and reappearance of rightist trends in the area. Lebanese communists believed that imperialism and its local allies would be willing to "do their utmost to perpetuate the dissociation of the [progressive] forces . . . and to provoke strife and bickering among them."[8] Therefore, they solemnly declared that their party "will firmly and energetically oppose every measure against any patriotic or progressive force, whatever the party's ideological and political differences with it."[9]

The second fundamental assumption reflected in the third congress's political document derived from its socioeconomic analysis of Lebanese society itself and its needs for the future. In accordance with the program of their 1968 second congress, the Lebanese communists considered Lebanon

as a capitalist country with bourgeois relations of production prevailing in most sectors, including agriculture. But in spite of its relatively advanced level of development in the region, Lebanon still remained dependent on foreign capital: it was a country with distorted social and economic structures, with the service sector dominant over the main and vitally needed productive sectors. According to the congress, the attempted reforms by the big bourgeoisie forces were doomed to failure because "they did not get at the root and main causes of the crisis: the supremacy of the financial oligarchy, which fully controlled the economic and political destiny of the country, and the dependence of the Lebanese economy on neo-colonialism." [10]

The necessary task ahead was therefore to "establish national democratic power and complete the stage of the general democratic struggle, preparing the ground for the transition to socialism."[11] The party called for setting up "a national democratic regime representing the alliance of the workers, peasants, urban petty bourgeoisie, revolutionary intellectuals and those sections of the middle bourgeoisie linked with domestic industrial and agricultural production."[12] If it gained power, such a regime would liquidate the assets of foreign (predominantly American) monopoly capital, nationalize the holdings of Lebanese financial capital, establish a public sector assuming control of foreign trade, develop the industrial sector, and enact far-reaching agrarian reforms. Although the tasks to be undertaken by the national and democratic regime were not going to be of a socialist nature, the Lebanese communists nevertheless expected that they would provide a stage for the role of the working class, which "will determine the pace and process of the transition to socialism."[13]

The congress was "[of] the opinion that close cooperation between the LCP and the progressive Socialist Party [of Jumblat] constitutes the nucleus of an alliance of the country's patriotic and democratic forces [and expressed] interest in developing [communist] cooperation with the Baath Party, progressive Nasserites and all anti-imperialist and democratic forces and organizations."[14] The united action of progressive forces was to be based on a sound partnership, with the communists setting "an example of commitment to the common cause. They would eschew isolationism and parochial points of view; and would attempt to win over members of other parties to the alliance."[15]

Facing a growing socioeconomic crisis and the reappearance of rightwing tendencies, the Lebanese communists put enormous stress on safeguarding and extending democratic freedom as "a prerequisite of success in the fight for concrete demands and social progress."[16] The party refused

"to content itself with official recognition of its legal status and freedom of action but wants the same rights to be extended to all patriotic, progressive and democratic forces . . . and even to other political forces whatever their political differences . . . so long as there is agreement on the need to safeguard freedom and promote democracy. [17] Consequently, abolition of the confessional system as the basis of Lebanese political and judicial life was recommended. In its stead, a secular democratic constitution which would entrench democratic freedoms for all those respecting "democratic consensus underlying Lebanese political life" was proposed.[18]

The flexible and broadly cooperative character of the domestic program was also extended into the field of regional inter-Arab relations. The party hailed the establishment of progressive regimes in some Arab countries as "one of the most important gains of the national liberation movement,"[19] and held that despite their shortcomings, "these regimes still play a positive role."[20] It positively assessed the proposed (but ill-fated) Tripartite Federation between Egypt, Libya, and Syria, with the provision that the communist parties and progressive forces should remain vigilant against reactionary tendencies in each of the three countries.[21] The Sudanese revolutionary adventure in the attempted coup of July 1971 was cited as an example of a failure of progressive forces. The party pointed to the emergence of some right-wing trends within the regimes of Libya, Egypt, and Syria but denied that "factions on the right have won a final victory."[22] According to the Lebanese communists, such an opinion would not only "contradict the facts, but also obscure the struggle inside these regimes,"[23] the struggle in which both the Arab communists and all other progressive forces should become most actively involved.[24] As LCP Central Committee member Nadim Abd al-Samad put it, "what actually collapsed after the setback of June [1967 War] was not the progressive Arab regimes, but some people's delusions about these regimes."[25] Instead, a dialectical Marxist approach to the nature of these regimes was adopted that stressed both their positive qualities and their elements of weakness.

The document repudiated the Bakdash position, which had denied a "leading role of the working class in the transition to socialism, and endeavoured to substitute eclecticism for scientific socialism and a loose and indefinite elite organization for the Marxist-Leninist party."[26] At the same time, however, the LCP, the document maintained, did not want to present "one particular form, to the exclusion of all others, for the organizational relations that should exist between the working class and the other toiling social groups in all Arab countries."[27] The party argued instead that the scale and effectiveness of working-class participation in government de-

pended on "the concrete situation [which determined] the relationship of forces with objective and subjective conditions." [28] Stressing the necessity of a dialectical evaluation of concrete situations, the Lebanese communists strongly condemned the "sectarian tendencies wanting to bypass intervening stages and calling on the working class to exercise its leading role in defiance of the objective conditions."[29] Instead, they advocated a common struggle of all national and progressive forces in the spirit of democracy and mutual understanding and the use of parliament to meet people's demands.

On the international level, the congress confirmed the Marxist-Leninist thesis on the necessary unity of the three main anti-imperialist forces: "the world socialist system, the revolutionary workers' movement in the capitalist countries, and the world national liberation movement."[30] The momentum of the world revolutionary process is "aided by the struggle of the peoples of Asia, Africa, and Latin America [a struggle which is] inimical to imperialism . . . [and results in] changes in the balance of power at the world level in favour of the forces of socialism, social progress, national liberation, democracy and peace." The congress also condemned Chinese deviationism, charging that the momentum of the world revolutionary process " could have been stronger and with fewer sacrifices if the Chinese leaders had not gone to extremes in their increasingly dangerous subversive activity . . . [which] has not been restricted to the ideological sphere." As examples, the congress document cited "the hostile attitude they adopted toward the question of the people of Bangladesh . . . and their support of the bloody massacres in the Sudan." In the Lebanese party's view, such a Chinese policy "actually rendered a great service to world imperialism and encouraged it to go to extremes in its aggressive policies."[31]

Summarizing the practical positions that followed from the congress's analysis, Nadim Abd al-Samad (a member of the Central Committee) identified three main points:

1. An unequivocal position against imperialism, especially American, and against Arab reaction, its allies, and its agents.

2. A clear position on the Soviet Union, identified as the vanguard of friendly forces.

3. An unequivocal position of support for the unity of Arab national and progressive forces.[32]

One of the final acts of the congress was to issue an appeal for commencement of an all-Arab conference of progressive and patriotic forces.[33] The appeal found broad support from many other Arab political parties and

organizations and symbolized the main ideas and spirit of the congress. The congress nevertheless drew sharp rebukes from a number of Arab sources, particularly the Libyans, who asserted that it was directed against the Libyan revolution as a model and inspiration of the Third World's conscience. The Libyans also polemically asserted that the congress had capitulated to the forces of imperialism and Zionism by tacitly acknowledging the right to existence of the state of Israel; that it had subverted the Tripartite Federation plan; and that it had gratuitously mobilized Arab public opinion against China and in favor of the Soviet Union. [34] An unidentified Arab political commentator observed tartly that Arab communist parties always intrigued against *progressive* regimes, never against the thoroughgoing reactionaries.

Program of the LCP

Pursuing the objectives of the third congress, in January 1974, after two years of meetings with farmers and agricultural workers throughout Lebanon, the LCP issued a blueprint of its proposals for agrarian reform. The party identified the main tendency in the development of Lebanese agriculture under capitalism to be the centralization of power in the hands of big landowners, local *comprador* capitalists and foreign monopolies. Centralization occurred at the expense of small peasants and destitute agricultural workers, whose numbers rose from 20,000 in 1950 to more than 60,000 in 1970. Their already precarious existence was being ruthlessly and inexorably squeezed. While small peasants possessed some land, the proposal argued that it was not enough to ensure their livelihood; they were compelled to work seasonally on the large semi-feudal holdings to eke out their existence. The middle-class peasants, a fairly numerous group, produced enough on their land to sustain themselves and their families and even to market some of their excess produce in the towns and villages. The proposal maintained that this group felt the pressure of the international monopolies distributing fertilizer, agricultural machinery, and transportation and marketing services in Lebanon through the local *comprador* class. The big landowners "constitute the most reactionary and parasitic group among the groups exploiting the countryside and are a major reactionary force in Lebanon cooperating with imperialists and Arab reactionaries against the national movement, progressive forces and every democratic development."[35] Within this constellation of forces, the party envisaged the end of alienated agricultural labor as the only lasting solution to the agrarian problem in Lebanon. This required the mobilization of all the social classes having an interest in overthrowing the rule of the financial clique

and the feudal landowners, i.e., the agricultural workers, who should form the nucleus of the movement, and the small and middle peasantry. The land-reform proposal endorsed a limitation on the maximum allowable private holding, the expropriation of foreign or bank-held lands, free redistribution of land through peasant committees to the workers and marginal peasants; the organization of the largest feudal holdings into state farms; provision of state loans to land recipients; and encouragement of the formation of collectives and cooperative societies among the peasants. The party announced that it would guide its day-to-day activities with a view to advancing the political aims expressed in the land-reform proposal.

The LCP and the Arab World

The third congress of the LCP had announced that "the solid nucleus of all the national and progressive forces in the Arab countries is the unity of operations and coordination of the communist parties in the Arab countries." [36] One consequence of the congress was the concerted effort by Arab communist parties to consult each other regularly on local, regional, and pan-Arab political questions, which they never did before on their own initiative.[37] Continuous contacts were initiated at the cadre level among the Lebanese, Jordanian, Sudanese, Syrian, Iraqi, and Moroccan communist parties as well as with the Algerian Socialist Vanguard Party. Leadership summits were to be held when the need arose and the opportunity presented itself. The first such summit took place in Beirut in April 1975. The main issues discussed there were the definition of the legitimate role of the private sector within the economies of progressive Arab states, reiteration of support for the Palestinian resistance movement, emphatic rejection of "capitulatory" solutions, and elucidation of the manifold consequences of the October 1973 Arab-Israeli War. The parties extended their concept of the progressive front in the Arab countries to include the Iraqi and Syrian Baath Parties, the National Front in South Yemen, and national liberation groups in the Arab Gulf and Oman.[38]

The political resolution and the other major statements of the congress were dominated by an optimistic expectation that "objective conditions are favourable for the communist parties to play an increasing role in the Arab liberation movement."[39] However, one year later, Karim Mroué, a member of the LCP Politburo and secretary of the Central Committee, was much more pessimistic. He characterized the situation as "alarming" because of the "strengthening of right-wing views at home, in foreign policy and ideology."[40] The Arab regimes which came to power in the aftermath of 1948

and the rise of the state of Israel "were as a rule, a reflection of the ideology and aspirations of the petty bourgeoisie." [41] Because of the poverty and critical social situation of the petty bourgeoisie in Arab society, they supported progressive social, economic and political steps which were objectively in the interest of workers and peasants. According to Mroué, however, later on "the regimes encountered internal difficulties, which had a far-reaching effect on their policy."[42]

The petty bourgeois leaders feared the role of the masses. In an effort to retain their total control on power, they suppressed the class struggle and resorted to brutal repression of the working class and its political organizations and unions. Despite the extension of the state sector, they were also apparently unable to restrict the economic growth of the local and especially the middle bourgeoisie with its numerous social and political implications. Probably their most important failure, however, was the fact that at least in "some countries nothing has been done to eliminate the old state machine (civil as well as military) that was built by the bourgeoisie— inimical to the masses and devoid of patriotism."[43] The old bureaucratic elements whose interests conflicted with the needs and interests of society as a whole, had not only retained their position but even expanded it, now being able "to promote anti-democratic tendencies in the state, to discredit the earlier socio-economic changes, and, particularly, to obstruct the activity of the state sector."[44]

All in all, according to Mroué, "the socio-political elements that headed the national liberation movement and eventually came to power, have proved incapable of coping with the complex interrelated tasks of the revolution." More radical forces with a homogeneous and consistent outlook were needed to deal with "the present and future objectives of the national liberation struggle."[45] Maintaining some hope, Mroué argued that "at present . . . a battle is raging between the left and right wings in the progressive regimes and the political organizations backing them." Quoting Karl Marx's words, he maintained that "world history would indeed be very easy to make if the struggle were taken up only on condition of infallibly favourable chances."[46] In addition to the problems of the progressive regimes and at least partly as a result of them, however, the issue of Arab unity and other major national issues, particularly the Palestinian problem, became manipulated by the right-wing forces in order to divert the working class and masses from the fight for social change and to promote anti-communist and anti-Soviet sentiments.

In order to better understand Mroué's criticism and ideological view on these matters, one needs to take a look at the evolution of the party, which

had already in the past taken various positions on three of the major issues facing the Arab world—namely Arab unity, Palestine, and social progress (or the building of socialism). The remaining discussion centers on the evolution of the positions of the Lebanese Communist Party on these three salient issues, which illustrate its growing independence and solidarity with the Arab liberation movement on the eve of the outbreak of the Lebanese civil war.

Arab Unity

The Lebanese Communist Party was slow to address the issue of Arab unity, a potent emotional force among the masses. Progressive movements in Egypt and Syria during the early 1950s added impetus to the idea of Arab unity. While slogans of Arab unity struck a responsive chord among the Arab public, they elicited a counter-reaction from the colonialist powers in the form of the Tripartite aggression against Egypt in October 1956. The aggressors drew a very hostile reaction from the Arab masses and nationalist forces. Abetted by assistance from the Soviet Union and the socialist bloc, the Arabs successfully countered the colonialist military challenge, furthered the cause of the Algerian revolution, aided the popular uprising in Lebanon, and laid the groundwork for the Iraqi revolution of 1958 and the union between Egypt and Syria.

The UAR was a concrete expression of the idea of unity. The communists maintained that the basis of the Egyptian-Syrian union was too frail to contain reactionary pressures from within and imperialist pressures from without. Mere willingness and good intentions were not enough to establish a firm union among the Arabs. Economic, political, and social incompatibilities between Egypt and Syria should also have been taken into account by the leadership. The UAR, moreover, was the product of diverse and ultimately conflicting class motives. True, there was the progressive desire for unity among the masses, who saw it as a means of social and economic advancement. However, the Egyptian big bourgeoisie hoped to use the new state to protect its own economic interests against further erosion, while the Syrian bourgeoisie hoped it would help contain the rising popular democratic forces in that country. The extensive nationalization program upon which the regime embarked in 1960–61 thoroughly alienated the crucial support of the bourgeoisie of both nations. [47]

By the mid-1960s, the Lebanese communists concluded that no Arab unitary state could long endure without an underlying unity among progressive forces. However, both the path to that conclusion and its subse-

quent theoretical and practical implications were neither straightforward nor free from subjective and objective internal tensions and contradictions. In August 1967, in the aftermath of the June 1967 Arab-Israeli War and in the climate of the intense nationalist emotions in Lebanon, the secretary general of the LCP, Nikola Shawi, published an article on the "New Significance of the Arab Liberation Movement and the Question of Arab Unity." [48] The article, although apparently well grounded in the political tradition of the Arab communist parties, was nevertheless new, both in its analysis and assessment of Arab unity and in its revisionist approach to previously held communist positions on the nature and development of Arab nationalism. Shawi did not think it necessary to provide "political, theoretical or ideological justifications to confirm the inevitability of Arab unity." The struggle, he wrote, united "progressive and revolutionary forces together with national movements and parties." Rather than questioning the ontology of Arab unity, he raised the question of why had Arab unity still not been achieved. According to Shawi, the main reasons for the failure, in addition to the imperialist powers' interventions, were the unequal levels of economic development and distribution of natural resources among the Arab countries and the "economic and political weakness of the Arab bourgeoisie in general." Another important reason was that, since Arab unity movements had been directed by the bourgeois class for its own selfish ends, the Arab masses had neither the interest in nor the intention of participating in the struggle for unity. After World War II, however, the concept of Arab unity started to acquire both new progressive meanings and much broader popular support. Although the "imperialists and their allies have succeeded in their efforts to separate Egypt from its unity with Syria, . . . the emergence of progressive Arab states, namely the United Arab Republic, Syria and Algeria, and the increasing struggle against imperialism have by all means created a favourable situation for the establishment of Arab Unity."[49] In the new situation, "the question of Arab unity has achieved a higher standard [expressing] the ambitions of all national forces in respect to social and economic progress and socialism," and the Arab national liberation movement changed its character from "an aggressive movement against feudalism and colonization to an aggressive movement against capitalism and imperialism."[50] In this article Shawi presented, as a reality, an old communist dictum about the transition from "a national revolution to a social revolution" and argued that "Arab unity has gained a new . . . socialist signification."[51] At the same time, however, he was nevertheless cautious enough to stress that in the current situation "there could be no real socialist platform for the Arab liberation movement due to . . . the

conflicting missions of the movement." [52] In his opinion, ambitious demands and expectations "could not be the proper attitude."[53] He called for the unity of revolutionary forces "on the basis of friendship and fraternity."[54] The first step toward Arab unity, he argued, was the unity of all progressive states and other forces in the Arab world including communists, but without any necessity for their hegemony or direct leadership.

Shawi's point of departure from traditional communist opinion was not only his clear support for the UAR, but also his support for the Egyptian-Syrian unity experiment in the 1958–61 period. He wrote that this unity was destroyed by "conspiracy [and] its destruction has taught the Arab countries a very important lesson: . . . that without the unity of revolutionary and progressive forces there could be no permanent and stable Arab unity."[55] In marked contrast to many previous communist voices, Shawi stressed the necessity for reconciliation among the various progressive Arab forces. He assumed that because of old and new problems and misunderstandings, the task would not be easy. Yet he hoped that "the mutual struggle for certain specific goals would gradually end the conflicts among these forces no matter how complicated that might be."[56]

Reflecting Shawi's ideas, the LCP made a thorough critique of its previous stands on Arab unity at the second congress in 1968. Before the congress, the positions of the party on Arab unity were obscure; after, the position became explicit. The party confronted its early tendency to belittle, neglect, distort, and misconstrue various Arab national issues. This tendency grew out of the party's "obsession with ready-made formulae," which caused it to draw "an incorrect and unscientific analogy" between the emergence of nationalism in Europe and in the Arab world. While nationalism in Europe was a manifestation of the rising bourgeois class, Arab nationalism was an anti-bourgeois response to foreign domination. Thus, while European nationalism was inspired and cultivated by the bourgeoisie, Arab nationalism opposed the national and international bourgeoisie and supported the emancipation of oppressed classes in Arab society. Earlier communist policies "failed to recognize the deep popular current which was strongly motivated by national incentives, and which evinced its progressive character by liquidating in one way or another the ruling lackeys of imperialism in the Arab world." This obtuseness on the part of the LCP was compounded by the charismatic anticommunist appeal made by nationalist spokesmen and organizations in the area.[57]

The communist anti-nationalist line proved to be counterproductive, merely isolating the party from the mass support it had gained as a result of its struggle against the American intervention in 1958. In retrospect, the

report of the Central Committee of the LCP to the second congress in 1968 evaluated this period as follows:

> The party's isolation from the masses recurred, though in a more serious manner than was the case in 1948. The popularity of the party all through the previous era was destroyed because of the party's extreme leftist line. The party's popularity in 1959 as well as all the alliances it succeeded in building during the period 1954–1958 were again undermined because of its immature leftist line. The only basic difference in the two experiences lay in the fact that our enemy in 1948 was the traitorous reactionary [elite], while in the battle of 1959 our opponent was a national anti-colonial faction. [58]

The report ascribed the fatal mistake to three factors:

1. The party had been unable to understand the progressive content of the national question.

2. It had failed to understand the nature of changes within the Arab national liberation movement, characterized by the transfer of power in some Arab countries to anti-colonialist elements of the petty bourgeoisie.

3. It had failed to establish an independent policy to deal with the problems of Lebanese society, instead adopting a plan formulated by the Syrian Communist Party, even though the two organizations had become separated more than a decade earlier.

The report assessed the period critically: "The clash between nationalists and progressive forces, whether on the Arab or Lebanese fronts, was received with great pleasure and encouragement from the reactionaries and agents in Lebanon . . . we even began repeating the slogans of these reactionary forces . . . by creating 'fear' for the 'Lebanese entity' from the new aggressor. We arbitrarily placed an important segment of the Arab revolutionary movement on the side of the enemies of the revolution. We accused them of being imperialist agents . . . based on the same irrational positions, we did not even objectively analyze the historic measures taken by the UAR in 1960 when they nationalized the banks, and in 1961 when the major nationalizations of the big bourgeois institutions of Syria and Egypt [took place]. We considered those measures as capitalist state monopoly. . . . In accordance with this false logic, we supported the criminal separation of Syria from the UAR which took place on 20 September 1961."[59]

The party reaffirmed its stand on Arab unity at its third congress, again stating that the struggle for unity "was conceived at the dawn of the move-

ment against foreign domination" and "is prompted by objective reality." The party also noted that the content of Arab unity "has evolved in step with its development." At present, "the trend toward unity links up increasingly with the aspirations of large social sectors looking more and more to socialism" and that "the use of progressive Arab states . . . provides a more solid and favourable condition for its achievement on a sound basis." [60]

In their support for the goal of Arab unity, the Lebanese communists wanted to distance themselves from right-wing national chauvinism and were quite alarmed by the strength of its influence within alienated Arab circles. They blamed chauvinism for "attempts to exploit the situation, to divert the working class and the masses from the struggle to attain their economic demands, social change and socialism, and to channel their energy into the labyrinth of complicated and muddled national problems."[61] In their opinion, "over-emphasis on [slogans of] the national question . . . and . . . Arab unity had weakened the class struggle [which] . . . has not developed in a way that could be expected in conditions of constantly deepening social differentiation."[62] The party considered Arab unity "the legitimate demand of the people, and not merely a goal which at one time accorded with the interests of the developing bourgeoisie," but it did not see "justification for the persistent attempts to make independence of the [national] movement the dominant idea and to contrast it with the objective need for closer internationalist ties with the world revolutionary movement."[63] On the eve of the outbreak of the civil war in the country, the Lebanese communists wanted to strike a balance between national and international objectives and to join the other progressive national forces in their daily struggles and aspirations.

The Palestinian Issue

Due to its inherent complexity, the original stands of the Arab communist parties on Palestine, and the somersaults in Soviet policy on the issue, from the beginning the Palestine issue emerged as one of the most formidable problems facing Arab communists. In the period before 1947, the Arab communist parties had assumed a strictly anti-Zionist position. This was consistent with the policy of the Comintern in the period before World War II. As late as January 1948, Khalid Bakdash, at that time leader of the unified CPSL, declared, "The Syrian people know that the Syrian communists and all the Arab communists are the enemies of colonialism and Zionism. They have continuously and tirelessly resisted the partition proposal in their

own countries and in front of international public opinion (in London, Paris and all the Western capitals). They demanded evacuation, an end to the mandate, and independence for Palestine in a unified democratic state." [64]

Similarly, the Lebanese communists called for the cessation of Jewish immigration to Palestine and the establishment there of a unitary, democratic state in which both Jews and Arabs would have the same rights and obligations. The Soviet reversal, in regard to the partition of Palestine and the establishment of the Jewish state there, put the Arab communist parties in a very difficult position. Following the official Soviet line, the Arab communists, including the CPSL, supported partition. The outcomes of that decision were to handicap them for many years to come. Between 1948 and 1967, the party adhered to the principle of "implementation of UN resolutions," which included Resolutions 181 and 194 and implied the right of the Palestinians to return to their homeland or to be compensated together with a call for the establishment of a Palestinian Arab state in the region assigned to them in the UN partition plan.[65] However, those resolutions were never implemented. The 1967 Arab-Israeli War and the Soviet condemnation of Israeli aggression provided the Arab communist parties with the opportunity to revise their previous policies and to articulate a new policy, one more congruent with the interests and aspirations of the Arab people. The LCP took the initiative in the forefront of the Arab communist parties, both in its open criticism of past positions and in its increasing support of the reemerging Palestinian movement.

As early as 15 October 1967, the LCP weekly newspaper *al-Akhbar* carried an article by Nikola Shawi that went beyond the Soviet acceptance of Resolution 242 and the "liquidation of the consequences of the aggression." The LCP called for a solution to the Palestinian problem "in accordance with the interests of the Palestinian people and their incontestable right to their soil and homeland."[66] Although the article did not mention the Palestinian resistance movement, which was at that time still in the initial stage of its development, it nevertheless contained a critical analysis of the nature of the state of Israel and its links with imperialism, which was previously generally avoided by the communist parties of the region. However, the real breakthrough in the party's approach to the Palestinian issue and a critical revision of the party's entire policy since its first congress (December 1943–January 1944) took place at its second congress (July 1968).

The report of the Central Committee submitted to the congress deplored the party's "incapacity to evaluate the concrete political and national dimensions, which in the long run were to result in the success of the con-

spiracy against Palestine [and] the erection of an artificial structure on its soil." [67] The crucial mistake was a result of the "party's narrow view of the Palestinian cause." This was itself a product of the party's disregard for national problems that were considered "to be only the concern of the bourgeoisie, as if the workers, the peasants and the popular masses . . . [had] no national sentiments and . . . [were] untouched by national questions." Even if the Soviet Union in 1947 had certain legitimate global political interests in supporting the partition and the establishment of Israel: "We, the Lebanese communists, were not obliged by any tactical or practical considerations to accept the position imposed on us by the Soviet Union. This is because our land was subject to a process of usurpation. The only right stand we should have adhered to was that earlier stand which we adopted on the basis of our principles and which rejected the partition [of Palestine]."[68]

Consequently, the program adopted by the congress rejected the 1947 partition (Resolution 181) and stated, "The complete solution of the Palestine problem must be based on principled positions and must begin with the recognition of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian Arabs to their soil and their homeland; hence the recognition of their right to return to that homeland and their right to self-determination. One cannot justify anything founded upon violence and robbery; and the presence today of Jews in Palestine cannot prejudice the historical and natural right of the Palestinian Arabs to their land."[69]

The party still considered the progressive Arab regimes as a significant force in solving the Palestinian problem, but at the same time recognized the Palestinian resistance movement, including its military component, as the "revolutionary movement of a people robbed of their land and all their rights . . . [who] receive the backing and support of all the forces of progress around the world."[70]

The third congress added no fundamentally new ideas to the party's position on Palestine. It did, however, put additional stress on some aspects:

1. That the Palestinians were forcibly excluded from their lands over a generation ago did not extinguish their legitimate right to their own land and to self-determination.

2. The national movement of the Palestinian Arab people was a part of both the Arab national liberation movement and the world revolutionary movement as a whole.[71] The Lebanese communists would therefore consider it their duty to "do all in their power to develop and intensify work for the support of the resistance by all political,

moral, material and human means, including participation in armed struggle."[72] In spite of all its shortcomings and mistakes, Lebanese communists nevertheless wanted to defend the resistance movement "against the conspiracies and attempts at liquidation to which it has been exposed."[73]

3. Palestinian resistance was an integral part of the Arab liberation movement and needed to "align its strategy and tactics with the strategic aims and tactical methods of the movement as a whole."[74] The party rejected as erroneous the idea that the Palestinian movement was the vanguard of the progressive forces in the Arab world or even the sole expression of Arab progressivism.

4. The party endorsed UN Security Council Resolution 242 (November 1967), arguing that "in view of the equivalence of forces [in the region], its effectuation is consonant with the interests of the Arab liberation movement."[75] Its acceptance of the possibility of a political approach to the conflict did not mean, however, its denial of the Palestinian right to use various forms of struggle, including armed struggle, in order to recover their national rights and homeland:

> Acceptance of the political solution does not at all mean relinquishing the right to recover the usurped territories by any other means, not only when the Zionist enemy clings tenaciously to what he calls "regional gains" but also whenever there are reasons warranting that he can be driven back by force. The position of the party on Palestine resistance was and shall remain a firm, fundamental position unaffected by the vicissitudes and ebb and flow movement around them. Just as our party refused to drift behind those who tried to ride the crest of the wave when the resistance was at floodtide, it now refuses to drift with those who are announcing the death of the movement and proclaiming its mistakes. The Palestinian resistance . . . is in our view a movement here to stay until the Palestinian people have recovered their national rights, until the Arab liberation movement fully attains its goals of freedom, democracy and progress.[76]

As a practical outcome, the Lebanese communists, together with the Syrian, Iraqi, and Jordanian communist parties, in the period from 1970 to 1972, established and supported their own guerilla organization, Quwat al-Ansar (The Partisan Forces), which was supposed to "participate together with other groups in the struggle against Israeli occupation."[77] Because of the communist acceptance of Resolution 242 and the reluctance of the ma-

jor Palestinian organizations to cooperate with the communist-led guerillas, the experiment proved to be rather unsuccessful and was gradually abandoned. However, the precedent of communist participation in armed struggle for the Palestinian cause and Arab national liberation was established.

The party was by no means uncritical with regard to the structural defects of the resistance and some of its political and moral shortcomings. It continued to characterize the leadership of the movement as "basically petit-bourgeois" in its class structure and openly criticized "the anti-communism which was widespread in some of its groups and among many of its leading elements and . . . the fact that it succumbed to the material enticements of Arab reactionaries and became materially dependent on them." [78] Nor was it silent about "mistakes resulting from a series of wrong strategic and tactical practices" and false theory.[79] The Lebanese communists were particularly critical toward the views of Fatah theoreticians who considered the Palestinian refugees a class apart.[80] However, the party was also aware of the difficult and complicated conditions which confronted "the Palestinian people and the resistance groups and which . . . [were] the objective cause of many mistakes, in the practice, of the resistance"; it "has always stressed that these shortcomings and mistakes should not detract from the progressive and anti-imperialist content embodied in the resistance movement."[81]

Socialism in the Arab World

The ideology of social progress advanced by Arab communists underwent a gradual metamorphosis from a rigid and orthodox brand of Soviet Marxism to a more flexible variety that took into account the specificities of Arab social reality. On the eve of the outbreak of the Lebanese civil war, the vital Marxist doctrine of class struggle was still the cornerstone of Arab communist social thought. The accession to power of the radical petite bourgeoisie in Egypt, Syria, and similar regimes in the Arab world was considered a transformation within the framework of national liberation and democratic revolution. Since diverse class elements were part of this transformation, this phase was consequently not coterminous with socialism, despite the claims of its proponents, but was merely a preparatory stage in the transition to socialism. The second key doctrinal element—and in this respect Arab communist parties still sounded very orthodox compared to their West European counterparts—was the notion that substantive socialism could only be established under the dictatorship of the proletariat as

interpreted and led by the communist party. In the early 1970s, Arab communists began to argue that the Arab petite bourgeoisie had already exhausted its revolutionary potential and that the time was ripe for the working class itself to bear the responsibility of leading the national democratic revolution. As the third congress of the Lebanese Communist Party declared, " Events of the last year prove beyond a doubt the correctness of the party's political program and its path to achieve progressive development. The monopoly of power by the petite bourgeoisie contradicts the interests of the Arab liberation movement. It is now essential to include the representatives of toiling masses . . . in the political life of the country. . . . Denying the right of the working class to organize and politically act . . . and banning the peasants from political organization . . . will isolate the political system from the masses." [82]

Arab communist parties tended to eschew military coups both in principle and practice as an unreliable means of attaining and an inefficient means of wielding political power. Social changes wrought by the military, they claimed, were changes from above and therefore had little impact on the actions and beliefs of the broad masses, assuming they may have no special moral value for the masses.

Only the Lebanese Communist Party operated in a capitalistic economic milieu and regarded the process of building socialism quite differently from other Arab communist parties.[83] Like other Arab communist parties, however, the Lebanese party was skeptical of the ability of the petite bourgeoisie and its parties to conduct the national democratic struggle, let alone construct socialism. The party did not exclude collaboration with other political forces, but insisted on maintaining its independent identity.[84] Declarations such as these were ubiquitous in Arab communist literature. Most also referred disparagingly to the various splinter communist groups that developed especially after 1967. Like its Arab brethren, the Lebanese Communist Party believed:

> The communist party will struggle for the victory of the socialist revolution in Lebanon. With its adherence to the scientific base of socialism as articulated by Marxism-Leninism, and its benefit from the experiences of socialist nations, it gives its attention to the particular objective conditions and historic tradition of Lebanon. . . . The party does not consider it imperative to build socialism under the rule of one party. The party will work toward active participation of all political parties and forces representing the working class, peasants, revolutionary intellectuals and all petit-bourgeois forces and democratic

groups. This is not only a struggle for active democratic transformation and the creation of a national democratic system; but also to achieve the transformation to socialism in Lebanon on the basis of a national front alliance in accordance with an agreed upon program. [85]

Epilogue

The June 1967 Arab-Israeli War brought the third stage in the movement's evolution to a dramatic conclusion. The LCP emerged out of the ideological rubble of the war to reconstitute itself via a democratic praxis. Through two major party congresses, in 1968 and 1972, the LCP undertook to revamp itself ideologically, organizationally, and pragmatically to address the concrete realities of Lebanese society and Arab politics. The dynamic of political crisis in Arab politics generated by Israeli militarism and PLO guerrilla operations propelled the region on the road to the 1973 Arab-Israeli War on the one hand and to Lebanon's civil disintegration on the other. In an international environment of deepening crisis, the LCP struggled with the dialectics of the Arab liberation movement and with the challenge to develop a meaningful praxis in the context of its contradictions.

Chapter 5—
The Lebanese Civil War

From an analysis of the civil war in Lebanon, the Lebanese Communist Party concluded that the outbreak of war was an inevitable outcome, not of domestic political, economic, and social contradictions but of larger international and regional conflicts—particularly the Palestinian question. Local, regional, and international forces were identified as inextricably interwoven, making Lebanon a battleground between progressive and reactionary forces in the Arab World. In April 1975, the secretary of the Central Committee of the LCP, George Hawi, noted that "Lebanon is today experiencing a deep, all-embracing crisis, which necessitates reconsideration of all previous and current principles and criteria of economic, social and political relations in the country." [1] He concluded, "Changes are seen as not only possible and necessary, but compulsory and inevitable . . . the present administration in every sphere—economic, social and political—can no longer be maintained."[2] The goal of change must be the transformation of the country from one of the "weakest links of the world capitalist system"[3] under the rule of a semi-feudal confessional political system into a modern, democratic, and secular state which would be able to provide strong leadership to solve the country's complex problems of social and economic development.

Hawi stressed that "a broad alliance or national front . . . is the basic condition for solving all the sensitive and dangerous questions posed by the present crisis."[4] He was willing to cooperate fully with the progressive and reform-minded segment of the Lebanese bourgeoisie, which "has realized that tribalistic administration and a tribalistic mentality are contrary to its interests."[5] The progressive forces, he argued, had taken "into account the positions of the others, what is acceptable to them and what can be accepted only on certain conditions,"[6] and did not ask for more than "the role of 'assistant' in implementing reforms, . . . or the role of a participant in the process of change, a participant in the full sense of the word."[7] Both at

that time and at later stages in the civil war, the communists maintained that the program of the progressive front was "not a revolutionary program, but a program of democratic reform under the bourgeois system, of constitutional reform aimed at democratizing the country and eliminating the domination of a kind of religious autocracy." [8]

The Lebanese National Movement (LNM) (al-Harakah al-Wataniyah al-Lubnaniyah) formed in August 1975 was an umbrella organization for a number of progressive personalities and political groupings under the leadership of Kamal Jumblat, head of the Progressive Socialist Party. The LNM included the Baath Party, the Lebanese Communist Party, the Organization of Communist Action, the Union of Lebanese Communists, the Syrian Socialist Nationalist Party, the Arab Socialist Union, the Nasserite Organization, the Union of Working People's Forces, the Movement of Shi'ite Democrats, and representatives of unions. It called for democratic reform in every respect of Lebanese life and the rejection of sectarian politics.[9] Indeed, the LNM program of political reform was characterized by Ziad Hafez, one of the leaders of the Independent Nasserite Movement, as "not outdated, but antiquated if you compare it to political platforms that were fashionable in the 19th century in Europe or even in the U.S."[10] The U.S. special envoy, Dean Brown, allegedly said to his Lebanese hosts that "you didn't need to start the civil war just for that kind of program. This is something we had a hundred years ago."[11]

The chances of its implementation, however, were slim given not only the peculiarities of Lebanese society but also the conjuncture of inter-Arab, regional, and global forces. According to the LCP's assessment after the shift of Egypt's policy, represented in the 1975 Egyptian-Israeli Disengagement Agreement, the powerful alliance of the U.S., Israel, and Arab reactionary regimes wanted to "weaken the Palestinian resistance movement as a prelude to its complete liquidation."[12] Nadim Abd al-Samad, a member of the Central Committee of the LCP, argued, "The Lebanese crisis resulted from the increasing pressure to impose solutions in the area to the benefit of the U.S. and Israel . . . it was necessary for the advocates of the U.S. settlement to use Lebanese reactionaries as a tool to crush the Palestinian movement."[13]

Their efforts "coincided with the isolationist and sectarian conspiracy of the right aimed at separating Lebanon from its Arab neighbours . . . and at suppressing the growing struggle of the workers and popular masses, with recourse to violence and repressions under the wing of the backward regime."[14] According to Khalil Dibs, a Central Committee member and editor of the communist daily *al-Nida',* the "parasitic bourgeoisie" of Lebanon

was not disposed to make concessions and the seriousness of the constitutionally endemic Lebanese crisis was "affecting fundamental problems with the decisive support of forces that have every interest in radicalizing the clash and distorting its social and class character." [15] In April 1975, the LCP condemned the right-wing Christian Phalangist Party as a fascist group. During the following spring and summer months, the communists mobilized large-scale demonstrations protesting the government's reactionary response to the emerging crisis.

The LCP played "an indispensable part in the progressive patriotic front."[16] When the civil war intensified, the communists took part in the battle alongside the other parties of the LNM. They participated in the joint command[17] and represented a significant fighting force. The party had at least a thousand armed fighters, and in the 1975–76 period about two hundred of them were killed.[18] In defending the party's military actions, George Hawi argued that the communists fought "in solidarity with the Palestinian resistance, . . . in response to aggression . . . [and] in self-defence."[19] He also noted that the LCP would be the first to support a cease-fire to initiate political negotiations.[20] Syrian military intervention on behalf of the Phalangists in the fall of 1976 confronted the party with a serious dilemma. The Lebanese communists believed that "the strength of U.S., Israeli and Saudi pressures forced Syria to abandon its role as mediator and pushed Syria into confrontation with the LNM and the Palestinian movement."[21] They condemned the Syrian intervention but still believed that "an understanding between Syria, the LNM and the Palestinian Resistance could constitute one of the solutions to the situation."[22]

At the end of 1976, after the Riyadh and Cairo agreements transformed the Syrian forces in Lebanon into an Arab force (thus giving legitimacy to the Syrian intervention), major clashes stopped, at least temporarily. Nevertheless, the LCP retained its active participation in the LNM and its close cooperation with its other members. The new secretary general of the party, George Hawi, became vice president of the LNM's central political council. The LCP operated in the framework of the broader alliance of national progressive forces. In a June 1977 Moscow meeting, the LCP delegation expressed its support "for efforts of the legitimate authorities of Lebanon who were seeking to ensure Lebanese national independence, sovereignty and territorial unity."[23] Based on their ongoing analysis of the Lebanese crisis, the Lebanese communists concluded that "the protracted Lebanese crisis is . . . a foreign inspired conflict which is not a civil war in its wellknown classical sense, not a war resulting from the internal contradictions of Lebanese society."[24] According to Hassan Rifa'i, a member of the LCP

Politburo, "the class antagonisms in Lebanon have not yet reached the point where they could prompt revolutionary or reactionary forces to use arms . . . [and] the crisis was primarily the product of a vast imperialist conspiracy, whose objectives were not limited to our country and in which our internal contradictions played a purely technical role." [25] Its essential goals were to destroy the Palestinian resistance movement, to weaken the Arab national liberation movement, and to force "complete surrender of the Arab peoples."[26] The traditional Marxist analysis with its main focus on domestic contradictions and class struggle was now replaced by a more global vision of the confrontation between Western imperialists in compliance with their local and regional accomplices and the national liberation struggle of the Third World peoples.

Fourth Congress of the Lebanese Communist Party

The fourth congress of the LCP convened in early July 1979 against the background of a grave crisis considered the deepest in the contemporary history of Lebanon. At the time of the congress, four years had lapsed since the outbreak of the Lebanese civil war. Political polarization within Lebanon had reached its full momentum and a rift appeared within the LNM. The issues of unity, independence, Arabism, and democracy represented the basis of conflict within the LNM, and two distinct factions emerged. One, known as the National Forces, was spearheaded by the Communist Party. It emphasized alliance with the forces of the Palestinian revolution and their right to engage in political and military activities from within Lebanon. The opposing faction, known as the Lebanese Front, emphasized a distinct Lebanese identity separate from the Arab context.

On the stage of Arab politics, Egypt was considered the largest and most influential actor. However, this position was displaced with Sadat's signing of the Camp David Accords in 1979. The dramatic pace towards peace with Israel that Sadat initiated with the first disengagement agreement immediately after the October 1973 war, and his subsequent visit to Jerusalem in 1977, which culminated in the Camp David Accords, had a drastic impact on Arab solidarity. On the eve of the congress, Arab solidarity was at its strongest, but it rapidly deteriorated after Sadat's visit to Jerusalem. On the international level, the Cold War and its repercussions reflected on Lebanese internal politics, as Lebanon became an arena of confrontation by proxy. Indeed, American and French intervention in the civil war played a role in further polarizing the conflict.

The agenda and the preoccupations of the fourth congress of the LCP concentrated on the atmosphere of the civil war and risks to independence, sovereignty, and the unity of Lebanon. Accordingly, party organizations and committees engaged in extensive discussions and preparations for the congress. In recognition of this, the Central Committee noted that "the party has never witnessed in its long history such a detailed and deep discussion as those carried on in preparation for the fourth congress." [27] Six regional conferences were held in preparation for the congress, culminating in a central meeting of regional representatives and the Central Committee. The Central Committee report noted that "hundreds of suggestions and recommendations were raised from the preparatory conferences and meetings of the representatives of the 4th congress."[28] In light of these, the Central Committee prepared the report which was presented to and approved by the congress. Therefore, the document represented a comprehensive formal reassessment of party activities since the third congress of 1972. It also examined the intellectual and political guidelines for party policies.

Central Committee Report

The report of the Central Committee was organized into six sections. The first section examined the international situation by focusing on (a) successes of the socialist countries; (b) the general crisis of capitalism; and (c) national liberation movements. The second section was devoted to the discussion of the Lebanese crisis, while the third identified the first four years of Lebanon's civil war as an imperialist-Zionist-isolationist plot. The fourth section discussed the nature of the Camp David Accords and their implications for Lebanon as well as the means of confronting normalization forces on the Arab front. The fifth section focused on the role of the party in the conflict in Lebanon. The last section dealt with internal organizational issues of the party.

The two themes of the report that highlighted and influenced the activities of the party were the Lebanese issue and the Middle East crisis. The LCP placed the Lebanese civil war within the context of the Middle East crisis. Further, it explained the evolution of events from the June 1967 war to the Palestinian-Jordanian clash in 1970 and, finally, the aftermath of the October 1973 war as part of an imperialist, Zionist, and reactionary assault aimed at curbing the national liberation movement.[29] The report criticized the two faces of defeatism: the first was the position that reduced the sig-

nificance of the imperialist, Zionist, and reactionary assault. The second underestimated the potential for resistance and endurance in order to challenge the assault.

The late 1970s was considered a period of budding aspirations for a political solution to the Middle East problem. The basic document of the congress raised the question of a political solution for discussion. The document transcended the ongoing polemic of the time around UN Resolution 242 and criticized positions that considered it on the one hand as a ceiling for Arab demands and on the other as a basis for battle. Given the internal, regional, and international imbalance of power, the report presented another view:

1. Any imposed solution will fail to produce a just peace.

2. A just solution requires change in the existing balance of power in favor of the Arabs.

3. The essence of the problem is the Palestinian cause, justifying the call for an independent Palestinian state.

4. Palestinian self-determination is important as a guarantee against manipulation by reactionary Arab regimes. [30]

The report characterized the Camp David Accords as a product of the imperialist-Zionist scheme that was activated in Egypt immediately after the death of Nasser in 1970. The October 1973 war was assessed as a maneuver that was based on advice from Kissinger to Sadat for "precipitating the [peace] question."[31] Since the Lebanese arena constituted the second main obstacle, after Egypt, against this plot, a conspiracy was transmitted to precipitate crisis in Lebanon.

The Lebanese arena drew its importance from several factors:

1. The Palestinian presence in Lebanon.

2. The ascendance of armed struggle in the Lebanese national movement.

3. The alliance between the Lebanese national movement and the Palestinian revolution.

4. The influence of Lebanon on the Syrian role.

5. The relatively liberal situation of civil liberties in Lebanon, which allowed open challenge to imperialism, Zionism, and reactionism.[32]

Therefore, according to the report, the Lebanese civil war and the internal dynamics of the conflict were the outcome of an outside conspiracy that aimed at disposing of Lebanon after Egypt from the arena of regional conflict.

The document viewed the question of Lebanon's national affiliation with Arabism as a pivotal issue of conflict in the civil war. A number of factors were identified as the basis of this dimension of conflict:

1. The deep historical roots of sectarianism in Lebanon and their association with the issue of religious minorities and with colonial interests.

2. The sectarian strike of the 1860s.

3. The role played by the French mandate in enhancing sectarian privileges and the submission of the higher strata of the bourgeoisie to the Christian sectarian dominance that was associated with imperialism.

4. The rift that developed in the struggle for independence between those who advocated an Arab identity for Lebanon and those who advocated mandate rule and feared the absorption of Lebanon into the Arab world.

5. The emergence of the state of Israel and the tilt in the balance of power to the disadvantage of the Arabs, which encouraged isolationist tendencies in Lebanon.

6. The achievements of the Arab liberation movement in the fifties (such as the Egyptian Revolution, the Algerian Revolution, and Syrian-Egyptian union) supported Arab nationalist forces in Lebanon. This led to Lebanon's 1958 civil conflict, which resulted in a stalemate between Arab nationalist and Lebanese localist forces.

7. The boost given to isolationism in Lebanon by the 1967 defeat and the entry of the Palestinian factor in support of progressive Arab nationalists in Lebanon.

8. Tension in the Lebanese political environment in the early 1970s and the efforts of the isolationists to eliminate the Palestinian presence in Lebanon and retreat from the compromise reached in the Cairo Accord of 1969.

To confront the imperialist project to isolate Lebanon, the document called for a multifaceted strategy: (a) establishment of a broad national alliance combining all forces and personalities opposing the deconstruction of Lebanese unity, independence, and Arab identity; (b) development of a democratic national Christian current that constitutes the alternative to isolationism. [33] Then, the enhancement and consolidation of the unity of the Lebanese movement, particularly with the Communist Action Organization (CAO), which was formed in 1971.[34] The party posed the following basic elements as essential to a program for national action:

1. The unity of the Lebanese people, territory, and homeland.

2. National independence.

3. The Arab identity of Lebanon.

4. The democratic evolution of Lebanon. [35]

The report delineated the situation of the Arab national liberation movement as "entering a new era that is characterized by the intensification of conflict among social classes and within social classes among the groups that compose class alliances."[36] The liberation movement evolved as a reaction to "the inability of the feudal-bourgeoisie alliance to realize political independence."[37] Therefore, it expanded to include many social groups such as the revolutionary petite bourgeoisie that ascended to power with military coup d'etat (namely the Nasser regime). However, "the working class parties did not perform their historical role in the radical revolutionary process. Thus, the path of national democratic revolution did not evolve and lead to socialism. Based on its social position, petite bourgeoisie forces were characterized by selective experimental thought that reflected hesitation, idealism and parochial thinking, and failed to achieve main transformations that change . . . the relations of production which continued to be capitalist, and did not sever economic dependency ties with the international capitalist market."[38]

The report examined the causes of weakness and crisis in the Arab liberation movement since the third congress and determined the core of the problem to be "a crisis of class leadership."[39] In contrast with other Marxist forces and groups that pursued alliance to the limits of dissolving their parties, the LCP maintained the special role of the Communist Party even in "a framework of revolutionary class alliance."[40] The document went on to determine that the achievement of the tasks of national and social liberation were possible only under the leadership of the working class (the Communist Party). The document also cited the economic and social features of general retreat within the liberation movement such as the retreat of the state public sector and the expansion of the capitalist private sector. Moreover, it identified an acceleration of the processes of wealth polarization, an increase in the political marginalization of the masses, the restriction of civil liberties, the growth of localist tendencies, and the compromise with imperialism.

The report proposed that an alternative to the current crisis of the party should be based on an alliance of the working class, peasants, petite bourgeoisie, and national intellectuals. This alternative transcended the local context and addressed the wider Arab context. This was considered to be a prerequisite for the success of the national liberation movement.[41] How-

ever, the document admitted that the party of the working class, the Communist Party, had failed to take up its role in formulating a program that could pull the liberation movement out from its crisis and tackle economic backwardness and the dependency on imperialism. An examination of this failure in terms of the party's theoretical tenets and paradigms was not taken up until the sixth congress convened. [42]

From the beginning of Lebanon's civil war in March 1973, the Central Committee had attempted to establish a fighting arm. The Central Committee twice delayed the convening of the congress in 1978 due to the war.[43] It resorted to article 21 in the party bylaws, which gives the Central Committee the right to use extraordinary powers in undertaking organizational measures that ensure the safety of the party.[44] The party attempted to establish new organizational forms to suit wartime conditions. The issue of the centralization of the military machine was also settled, as grassroots organizations were demanding the distribution of weapons to villages and rural districts.

The document also raised several conditions deemed crucial for building a popular and militant communist party:[45]

1. Consolidation of ties with the masses, particularly with toilers. Special attention should be paid to the organization of rural toilers and occupational and professional associations.

2. Efforts should be exerted to improve the work and the recruitment of party allies.

3. Training of cadre both qualitatively and quantitatively according to a long-term plan.

4. Special consideration of grassroots party organizations.

5. The conversion of district committees to leadership committees on intellectual, political, organizational, and military matters.

6. The establishment of intermediate leadership forums.

7. Evolution of the popular mass media and its commitment to values of honesty and truth.

8. Compensation to the families of martyrs of the party and the national movement.

9. Enhancement of alliances with the national front and cooperation with the Palestinian revolutionary forces.

10. Commitment and adherence to the Leninist traditions of organization.

11. Expansion of the party's relations with Arab communist parties, liberation movements, and the socialist bloc.

12. Strengthening of linkages with expatriate members.

In its final resolutions, the party's fourth congress called once again for the creation and/or strengthening of a broad national alliance of all the forces which wanted to maintain Lebanon as a "united, independent, sovereign, free, Arab democratic country, regardless of their class origins, ideological differences, religious or sectarian affiliations, positions inside or outside authority, and differences in political views on other issues." [46] Applying the same approach at the regional level, the congress called for the development of fronts to unite the national and progressive elements in every Arab country and at the non-Arab level.[47] Secretary general Nikola Shawi wrote, "Proceeding from the successful experience of setting up a national front in this country, our party has always urged the formation of such fronts in every Arab country and the creation of a general progressive Arab front that would rely on the masses and mobilize them for struggle."[48]

His belief was that "the greatest danger threatening the Arab national liberation movement is internal discord . . . [which] might paralyze the movement, with the result that it would bog down in conflicts of secondary importance [thereby] demoralizing the masses and giving free rein to reaction."[49]

The fourth congress of the LCP noted "the painful fact that the Arab national liberation movement continues to mark time, if not to regress and [thereby] suffer defeats."[50] It put the responsibility for that on a "leadership crisis due to the class nature—petite bourgeoisie—of the leadership forces in most so-called progressive Arab regimes."[51] The consequences of this were hesitant, indecisive policy and a lack of any "single, progressive, unified and radical course that can oppose imperialism, Zionism and [Arab] reactionaries."[52]

In order to find a solution to the existing predicaments and to ensure a political future for their own party, LCP leaders recommended concentrating upon three main political priorities.

1. In accordance with their already long and well-established historical tradition, they strongly advocated further development of relations and alliance with the Soviet Union and other socialist countries which were led by it. This, the LCP maintained, was both an outcome of ideological internationalism and a political necessity to counterbalance imperialist forces and to find a source of material and military support.

2. Perceiving the domestic social conflicts as relatively unimportant or at the most secondary, the LCP wanted to look for new ways of compromise and find accommodation with virtually all Lebanese

political forces. In June 1981, George Hawi stated that the LCP and LNM were ready to begin a dialogue with the Phalangist leader Bashir al-Jumayyil as soon as he would stop his cooperation with Israel. [53] In fact, this was not a new suggestion. In October 1978, a Politburo member of the LCP, George Batal, noted the similarities of the left and right political projects and stated, "The national movement has put forth a program of reforms and forcefully announced that it is ready to discuss any other proposition. Bashir Jumayyil has affirmed that the program borrowed much from that of the Phalangists. If such is the case, why not put it into effect?"[54]

In addition to the fact that such a compromising attitude was a logical outcome of their analysis of the Lebanese crisis as a primarily foreign instigated confrontation without sufficient domestic foundation, the Lebanese communists were encouraged in their peaceful overtures by the Soviet leaders who at that time also supported the efforts being made to achieve reconciliation among the Lebanese themselves and between the Lebanese and the Palestinians and Syrians.[55] The Soviets wanted to protect their allies, Syria and the PLO, from the negative impact of the protracted Lebanese struggle and were concerned about the possibility of an Israeli invasion of southern Lebanon.[56] The Lebanese communists rejected outright the proposal of the Christian right, which called for the partitioning of the country according to the lines of sectarian divisions and for its isolation from the Arab world as a whole. The communist position was expressed by George Hawi: "support [for] an objective and serious discussion on all the possible guarantees to deal with the fears of the Christians on the one hand and with all forms of sectarian privilege on the other." The Lebanese communists believed that "neither the Christians nor any other sect can have such a guarantee without the abolition of sectarianism and the establishment of democracy as the basis of the political system and of the public administration."[57] The report defined the role of the LCP as an "essential driving force in the struggle against the isolationists' plan"[58] and considered Syria as, at present, "playing a positive role in defending Lebanon's unity, independence and territorial integrity."[59]

3. The Lebanese communists wanted to reorganize themselves in order to turn their party into a "mass fighting party."[60] Rafic Samhoun, a member of the Politburo, stressed, "The entire party is . . . engaged in military action, which is growing more effective as the imperial-

ists intensify their attacks on our people." [61] In those zones of the country which were controlled by left-wing national forces, the party wanted to "combine its military activity with work in other areas of social life, in diverse sectors."[62] The Lebanese communists considered themselves to be "part and parcel [of] and the main contingent of the Lebanese national-patriotic movement,"[63] and together with many other parties, organizations, and personalities who were fighting the same battle wanted to "organize a united struggle."[64] They approached "the national question as one of great importance to the working class and its vanguard" and stressed the "dialectical link between global and local aspects of the Middle East problem."[65] Their national struggle was viewed as a "continuous . . . multifaceted struggle of the communists against imperialism, against the plots and subversion orchestrated by it inside and outside the country."[66]

Nevertheless, neither the LCP nor its allies were able to prevent the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in June 1982 and the subsequent destruction of the Palestinian resistance movement in the country. The Lebanese left-wing national forces were routed and the country subdued and divided.

The 1982 Israeli Invasion

In August 1982, the Central Committee of the LCP, which was gathered in the besieged city of Beirut, launched an ardent appeal for help to the Arab peoples and the world community at large. The report of the Central Committee, published on 5 August 1982, condemned U.S. political and military support of Israeli operations in Lebanon. The invasion reflected the "degree of fascist racial hate" that the Israelis and the Americans "hold against everything that the Lebanon represents as an independent and sovereign country . . . the vanguard of the Arab national movement."[67] It hailed the "popular and united" struggle of the Palestinians and Lebanese against the invasion and confirmed the earlier analyses of the LCP, which predicted that the Israeli invasion of Lebanon, supported by the U.S., would be aimed at the political and physical liquidation of the Palestinian resistance, the imposition of an American-Israeli peace on the Arab countries, and the transformation of the whole Arab world into an American dependency both politically and economically.

The report unequivocally criticized "the blatant inconsistency of the official Arab position" and the complicity of the reactionary Arab regimes. It

was particularly critical of the stance taken by the Lebanese president, Elias Sirkis, and some other Lebanese officials, whom, it warned, "history will never forget." [68] Furthermore, the report warned against the prospect of the candidature of Bashir Jumayyil for the presidency of the republic and the subsequent imposition of partisan fascist hegemony on the country. It appealed for patriotic cooperation between the different political forces of all confessions, social classes, and intellectual tendencies to oppose the planned separation and disintegration of the country. Enormous stress was put on the point that although the current Israeli invasion was focused on the Lebanese and Palestinian people, it also threatened "the whole Arab world" and put "the Arab nation in danger of being left with states which have been scattered and disintegrated through direct subjection to the Israeli-American will and its regional hegemony." [69]

In the face of the Israeli invasion, George Hawi called upon all Lebanese "to unite regardless of ideological, religious and other differences in order to give a determined rebuff to the Israeli aggression." [70] However, in August 1982 in an interview with the Japanese paper *Akahata,* he admitted that "the Arab national liberation movement has plunged into a crisis and, in its present state, cannot defeat imperialism, Zionism and reaction." [71] Addressing the serious problems facing communist parties in the Arab world, he stated, "Differences of view have become wider than ever before [that are based on] differences between those parties that attach importance to facts and set forth policies suited to national circumstances and the other parties that keep advocating the same formulas and doctrines irrespective of realities. Without overcoming the latter's opposition, the communist parties in the Arab states cannot extricate themselves from playing a secondary political role." [72]

Speaking with the correspondent of the French daily *Le Monde,* Hawi willingly recognized that the Lebanese communists made many mistakes in the past. His main self-criticism was directed at the communists' failure to establish closer contacts with the Lebanese masses and their failure to condemn "the excesses of the Palestinians and other armed groups or of those perpetrated by the Syrian forces in the Arab Deterrence Force." [73] The party, he charged, "failed to exploit the Lebanese aspect of our struggle" and was not open and flexible enough in its relations with the "Amal movement, the Islamic groupings and the democratic Christian forces whose interests are objectively opposed to the interests of reaction." [74] Although the Lebanese communists recognized that their current struggle was "linked to the struggle of the Palestinians and also to the Arab peoples," [75]

they nevertheless wanted to stress that the resistance in their country was "now waged above all by the Lebanese patriots" and mentioned that only "certain Palestinian fighters . . . are participating in our struggle." [76]

The party now wanted to distance itself from the Palestinian resistance, and to put all of the stress on the "Lebanese problem," which, as Hawi admitted, "will not end with the Palestinian departure."[77] Concerned that the Israelis wanted to "maintain Lebanon in a permanent state of [civil] war in order to place it totally and lastingly under control,"[78] the Lebanese communists believed that "today, the main task of the patriotic struggle is to reestablish the independence, unity and sovereignty of Lebanon."[79] In their national struggle they wanted to contribute to the creation of a broad political alliance, and were even willing to cooperate with their traditional enemies on the right. In August 1982, Hawi suggested Camille Chamoun as a worthy presidential candidate to represent Lebanese national unity and stressed the necessity for the formation of a national unity government which would include both Bashir Jumayyil and Walid Jumblat.[80] Two months later, in October 1982, he again spoke about the rise of "a patriotic feeling, an awareness of the need to unite to prevent both a constitutional vacuum and a relapse once again into civil war."[81] He also expressed his support of Amin Jumayyil's presidency (Amin Jumayyil succeeded his assassinated brother, Bashir), saying that the consensus surrounding him "represents a facet of that patriotic feeling founded on the independence, freedom and democratic development of our country."[82] He considered it "at least the wish of our people and the true significance of the new balance of forces resulting from the occupation, independently of the new president's intentions and, above all, of his possibilities."[83] He also noted that "there has been no progress along the road to reconciliation by the formation of a parallel government of national entente which . . . could eliminate the residue of civil war . . . mobilize the country within a single rank behind the demand that the Israeli occupation withdraw from all the territory of Lebanon without restriction or condition . . . and that the country's independence, unity and freedom . . . be fully realized."[84]

The Lebanese communists staunchly opposed "the attempts of the Kataeb Party (Phalangists) to seize state power in order to establish a repressive dictatorship"[85] and its dominance of the territories which remained under the control of the LNM. In addition, they opposed Israeli domination of the country and its surrender to U.S. influence and hegemony. It was their opinion that there was "no essential difference between the U.S. and Israeli drafts for a Middle East settlement," and occasional disagreements between the drafts were "exclusively tactical ones caused by the demands

of the global strategy of the U.S., which is trying to link its steps in one place with the measures planned in different corners of the extremely complex and contradictory Arab world." [86]

On 16 September 1982, the day Beirut fell to Israeli occupation, the Lebanese Communist Party issued an appeal with the Organization of Communist Action and the Arab Socialist Action Party, calling for the formation of the Lebanese Patriotic Resistance Front (LPRF). After its formation, the LPRF was in the forefront of the battle against Israeli occupation and subsequent American interventions. It joined forces with the Front for National Salvation, which included Walid Jumblat's Progressive Socialist Party and the Amal Movement, and was supported by Syria in their common struggle against Amin Jumayyil's administration and the separatist peace treaty with Israel which that administration signed.

However, the Lebanese Communist Party at the same time wanted to preserve its "independence as the vanguard of the working class" and believed that "a sincere and consistent desire for unity with allies should not develop into dependence on them."[87] Their goal was to "direct the actions of this alliance against the main enemy without infringing on the role of the other partners, but also without harbouring any groundless illusions in relation to them."[88] In the context of the crisis and setbacks of the Arab national liberation movement and its international repercussions,[89] the LCP maintained that "the task of the new stage of this movement's development . . . [could] be realized through the efforts of a progressive front type of class alliance built on truly democratic principles and relying on the broad masses."[90] According to the Central Committee of the LCP's document issued on 29 February 1984, "the country's supreme national interests can only be met by fundamental democratic reform aimed completely at removing confessional hegemony rather than at securing the redistribution of wealth and privileges at the top between representatives of the various communities or the replacement of one hegemony by another that differs neither in character nor essence from [the] present hegemony."[91]

In order to implement democratic reform and to restore Lebanon's international status as an independent Arab country, the party argued that the proposed reforms must be based on "six interconnected and complementary principles":

1. The . . . unequivocal affirmation of Lebanon's Arab character and the practical realization of this in the political, cultural, educational, legal, and constitutional spheres.

2. The complete removal of confessionalism from the Lebanese politi-

cal system and guarantee of the equality of the country's citizens in terms of their rights and duties; cancellation of religious, communal, and any other privileges. . . .

3. Radical reform of the parliamentary system on the basis of the proportional representation, with the country being regarded as a unitary constituency. . . .

4. Constitutional reform to redistribute authority and improve relations within the executive, legislative and legal branches of government, and within the apparatus of executive power itself. The government and its head must be given real power; at the same time be more subject to the people's control and be accountable to parliament.

5. The bodies of executive power, the civilian and military bodies, including the army, must have democratic rather than confessional bases and be oriented towards carrying out the national tasks in close cooperation with the other Arab countries, fraternal Syria first and foremost. . . .

6. Radical socio-economic transformation as the firm basis for restructuring the wrecked economy while favouring the productive sectors, lessening dependence on international monopolies. . . . serious measures to improve the critical social situation, and to prevent the ruin of the working class, rural workers and persons with limited incomes. [92]

The proposed six principles obviously did not imply any ambitions to initiate socialist transformation. In accordance with the LCP's long-upheld program of national democratic transformation and broad social coalition, the six principles were considered "the touchstone that tests not only the will to implement the basic democratic reforms but also the sincerity of the desire to take the country along the road to end the crisis."[93]

However, by 1985, George Hawi had to admit that in spite of "attaining significant gains in the struggle against external and internal enemies . . . so far it proved impossible to arrive at an alignment of forces that would secure the implementation of the democratic solution proposed by the LC."[94] Hawi identified two major causes for this failure. The first and probably the most basic cause was that while all Lebanese patriots had been united in their national liberation struggle against Israeli and U.S. military encroachment, their views regarding the reform of Lebanese society varied widely. In the aftermath of the successes of the national struggle

following the abrogation of the Israeli-Lebanese agreement of 17 May 1983, the national-patriotic movement had to face an uneasy dilemma, "either to distance itself resolutely from denominationalism . . . or to remain its captive and so find itself at an impasse." [95] The "swelling religious and communal trends" which at a previous stage had been "an important element in the patriotic upsurge" now acquired a different political meaning, "offering increasing resistance to radical democratic reforms."[96] Even the confessionalist nature of the mainly Druze Progressive Socialist Party, the main ally of the LCP, became more noticeable, and the communists appealed to the other national progressive forces to join ranks in order to allay its possible negative outcomes and to "help overcome the consequences of the upswing of religious and communal trends and prompt a rise in the national democratic struggle."[97]

They warned their closest allies at the time, Amal and the Progressive Socialist Party, that "they could not continue to cooperate if they confined themselves to representing the Shi'ite and Druze communities, and that their relations would inevitably become antagonistic."[98] All of their efforts, however, proved to be unsuccessful at the time, opening the stage for the renewal of inter-religious and inter-communal conflict.

The second major cause of the aggravated political crisis was the international context, dominated by relentless U.S. pressure for the imposition of a Camp David–kind of settlement for the region (an effort which was accepted by the PLO leadership, including its chairman, Yasser Arafat).[99] Hawi observed that "right wing policy within the PLO dealt a blow [to the] hopes [of an international conference under a UN aegis] and helped to rekindle harmful illusions in the region."[100] According to him, "this created what can be described as a material basis underlying the Arab reactionaries' search for 'peacemaking' with Washington's help and consolidating their local positions with U.S. support."[101]

In the mid-1980s, the Lebanese Communist Party "firmly and openly" stated its "conviction that there is yet a long way to go before we arrive at a solution which would enable the country to overcome its several crises."[102] As at present, it was "unrealistic to speak of immediate victory in a decisive battle"; they were consequently not "against a search for compromise or palliative solutions."[103] However, they wanted to "entertain no illusion about compromising moves,"[104] and they looked for hope in both pan-Arab solidarity and the struggle waged by the world communist movement. As Hawi wrote, internationalism was "the bridge linking the problem of Lebanon, the problem of [the] Arab national liberation movement with the policy of the Soviet Union and the entire socialist community."[105]

Deeply concerned as they were by the outbreak of fighting between the Progressive Socialist Party and Amal in November 1985, which they considered to be "a disaster for the population and the Lebanese patriotic forces," [106] the Lebanese communists reasserted the "need to repudiate the denominational trends and to unite within a democratic front."[107] Admitting that "the gulf between our allies and the population of Beirut is immense,"[108] they nevertheless believed that "there are still ways of pulling out of the crisis," even though "the struggle will be severe, long and hard."[109]

The Challenge of National Reconstruction

In December 1985, the Central Committee outlined the main tasks facing the LCP in 1986:

1. To complete the country's liberation by unconditionally banishing Israeli occupation forces from its soil.

2. To carry on the fight for national democratic settlement of the Lebanese crisis, which requires a resolve to end denominational and communal control over the government apparatus, eradicate denominationalism and establish instead a national democratic political system.

3. To concentrate on promoting mass struggle against rising prices, against the activities of the monopolies, against systematic plunder by the authorities and their representatives, against foreign currency speculators and people growing rich from trafficking in vital necessities and robbing the broad masses of their daily bread. This struggle should simultaneously help expose the responsibility of the present social and political system for the economic crisis.[110]

In February 1986, Karim Mroué, a member of the Politburo of the LCP, published an article in which he outlined three ideological and political currents that the communists should continue to fight against in the coming years:[111]

> The first current sprang from the concept of isolationism which divorces Lebanon from Arab history and restricts the Lebanese national identity to the characteristics of only one of the country's communities. Advocates of this concept claim that the farther Lebanon distances itself from the Arab countries and acquires foreign protection, the more secure it will be. The isolationists began to solicit Israeli

protection and literally invited Israel to enter Lebanon. Their aim was to seize power with the invaders' help and to decide the outcome of the civil war they themselves launched.

The second current proceeded from an erroneous interpretation of the call for Arab unity. Holding a broader, pan-Arab view that individual states are to dissolve, as it were, even before objective and subjective conditions for the attainment of all-Arab national unity appear, its adherents do not regard or recognize Lebanon as an independent entity. This approach manifests itself in the virtual refusal to recognize the Lebanese national problem with its distinctive features. Exponents of this view are convinced that the struggle for the solution of the Palestinian problem is the crux of the pan-Arab issue and, therefore, has priority. Having joined the Palestinian revolution, they dismissed Lebanon's cares and concerns as a "luxury one can be without." This course helped the isolationists to entrench themselves more firmly and to defend their positions with increasing vigor.

The third current is based on Islamic slogans, whether age-old or modernized. In their interpretation of the national question, its exponents transcended even the boundaries of the Arab world and not only individual countries, claiming that neither national nor pan-Arab problems have any meaning unless viewed as an integral part of what they believe is a greater and more comprehensive entity—that is, Islam and Muslim unity. This approach reduces the concept of "nation" and "people" to the framework of a "Muslim community."

According to Mroué, these currents hampered the formation of a "genuine patriotism" and the development of the democratic resistance movement. [112] He anticipated that these currents and the issues related to them were going to be the major problems LCP would have to tackle in the latter half of the 1980s.

Mroué also outlined LCP's basic stands on the solution of the Lebanese internal crisis. He argued that the solution should be based on three fundamental principles, namely restoration of Lebanon's Arab identity, elimination of confessionalism, and democratic reform in the political, economic, and social spheres after the liberation of the country from Israeli occupation. According to Mroué, these were the only way to put an end to the civil war.[113]

The conflict within the Lebanese resistance force and between the Palestinian and Lebanese resistance forces continued to plague the country

throughout 1986. According to the 8 November 1986 statement of the Central Committee of the LCP, "a large share of the responsibility for destructive clashes . . . falls on Yasser Arafat and the right-wing leadership of the Palestine Liberation Organization." However, serious responsibility for what is happening

> falls on Lebanese national patriotic forces. There is no democratic patriotic plan for administering the regions outside the control of the isolationists. Communalism and cliquishness reign everywhere. The illusion of a rapid settlement of the crisis and acceptance of the logic of giving Israel security guarantees tend to inflate hostility toward the Palestinian people, the fighters of the Palestinian revolution, the progressive and patriotic parties and forces, and especially the patriotic resistance front, and create an atmosphere of wild permissiveness, neglect of human dignity, property and life itself. [114]

The statement further pointed out, "Such clashes are doing Israel a great service as it tries to entrench itself on Lebanese lands and widen the scale of occupation. They play into the hands of the isolationists, who are linked to Israel and are trying to use the conflict . . . to surmount the crisis which has gripped isolationist circles."[115]

The statement also declared that it was time for the progressive and patriotic parties and forces of Lebanon, and also the Amal movement, to fulfill the agreement they reached at the house of Nabib Berri, Amal's leader, on 29 October 1986 to bring to an end the Amal assaults on the Palestinian camps in Lebanon, particularly Rashida Camp.[116] According to the statement, there was an urgent need to search for ways of restructuring relations between Lebanese national and patriotic forces in accordance with a democratic and patriotic plan free from denominationalism. It was necessary as well to restructure ties with the masses and with the forces of the Palestinian revolution and to arrange relations with the Palestinian National Salvation Front to help it establish its political and military control over the camps.[117]

Besides the "war of camps" there was a series of attacks on the communists. In five months, three LCP leaders were killed. According to George Hawi, these attacks were launched by "Islamic alignments" and the right-wing policy pursued by the Lebanese president, Amin Jumayyil.[118] He also attributed the hostility toward communists to the failure of Syria to fulfill the 1985 Damascus agreement. This agreement was reached under the aegis of Syria and brought Syrian forces into Beirut.[119] Hawi further argued that the LCP was facing a four-pronged struggle: the struggle against Is-

raeli occupation, against the president of the republic, against extremists, and against mounting Islamic and Christian extremism. [120]

The LCP's rejection of confessional divisions and sectarianism in solving the internal crisis was reflected in a September 1986 interview given by Hawi in which he cast some doubts on the forthcoming meeting of the Lebanese council of ministers: "It is not the first time that the Council of Ministers is getting together. The same people . . . already met on many occasions . . . but failed to come up with a solution. At present the problem is far more formidable while they have grown much weaker. The prospects are thus not bright. We, however, are not against such discussions. We have always backed them and hope they could at least help build up security. But we have no illusions. The Lebanese problem cannot be solved within the framework of interreligious communities and seeking anew to redivide the cake between them."[121]

However, in spite of their generally strong secular ideological orientation, the LCP in the 1980s gave increasing recognition to the role of the religious factor—especially Islam—in the sociopolitical life of the Middle East in general and Lebanon in particular. The victory of the Islamic revolution in Iran in 1979, the subsequent rise of Islamic political activism all over the area, and the importance of the religious Muslim communities and organizations in the struggle against Israeli occupation and Lebanese reaction contributed to a major shift in the LCP's attitude toward the role of religion and the traditions of Islam. Thus, it began to put stress on the distinction between religious dogmas, which the LCP did not want to attack at all, and the sociopolitical orientation of the religious movements.[122] The LCP considered a "revolutionary Islamic alternative" (which equated socialism with imperialism and claimed to offer a "third road") impossible in practice and even dangerous to the struggle for the national democratic program of a radical and revolutionary transformation of the society. Nevertheless, it did not deny that the project advanced by the radical Islamic movement "also features anti-imperialist objectives of liberation."[123] Also, although the party became the main target for the hostility of the Islamic alignment, just as it had been in the past and still remained the chief object of right-wing Christian assaults,[124] it nevertheless continued to work "sincerely and vigorously for our relations with them, as well as with nonreligious movements and organizations, to be invariably based on democratic principles in the broadest sense of the term."[125]

February 1987 saw an escalation of the hostility toward the LCP in West Beirut. The 1 March statement of the Politburo of the LCP pointed out, "The LCP was the target of a premeditated armed provocation by known ele-

ments from the Amal movement. On scores of earlier occasions, too, the party had to deal with similar provocations, and not by this group alone, in areas controlled by the national patriotic forces. LCP regional branches in Beirut and its southern environs have often been seized. Many activists, the cream of the party, have been abducted or arrested, tortured or murdered (including Central Committee members Khalil Na'ous and Suhail Tawilah)." [126] The statement further declared that "we much deplore the fact that all our efforts (to prevent the provocations) were unsuccessful," and that the LCP was prepared for "self defence."[127]

On the other hand, the LCP welcomed the 1985 Damascus agreement, but argued that the accord "needs to be supplemented by a national democratic project to serve as a democratic organizational platform to rally all national forces."[128] The LCP also hoped that "the security plan might help formulate a policy on the Palestinian camps issue to bring it to a correct resolution. This would mean an end to the already more than two years of bloodshed, together with a normalization of Lebanese-Palestinian relations to guarantee the continuation of the Palestinian revolution and Palestinian political and armed struggle."[129]

LCP Central Committee Report of 1986

In early 1986, the Central Committee of the LCP initiated extensive deliberations on basic issues facing the party. Based on these deliberations the committee submitted a report that reviewed the outcome of the deliberations the party had within its ranks and with friends, allies, and other communist parties on (a) the Lebanese situation; (b) the national democratic solution and its relation to the national democratic revolution; (c) liberation and resistance; (d) the vision of the party on the unity of Lebanon; (e) the relationship of the party to the masses; (f) the crisis of the Arab bourgeoisie and the Arab liberation movement; (g) the prospects of a revolutionary alternative; and (h) the national and Palestinian questions.

The bloody Lebanese civil war, the intensity of the fight among the warring factions, and the explosion of conflicts within the national alliance were the main factors that placed internal Lebanese issues in the center of the discussions. The most important questions raised by the deliberations were: If the party considered the current period as an advanced stage of the national democratic revolution in Lebanon, then what is the role of the party regarding this revolution? Is it a direct and immediate task?[130]

The Central Committee answered the above questions by relating the party's understanding of national democratic revolution to the classical

Marxist definition of "a transitional historical period, new and complicated, which separates two contradictory and competitive social systems: capitalism . . . and socialism." [131]

The Central Committee report alluded to the collapse of the Lebanese bourgeoisie in its current sectarian, economic, and social form. The report asserted that the national democratic revolution was advancing to a new stage, to encounter the tasks of democratic change within the social, economic, and political structure of the capitalist system. The discussion also raised basic questions about the role of the bourgeoisie in the national democratic solution of the Lebanese crisis. Had the sectarian schemes truly disintegrated and what was the position of the working class in this solution? According to the party report, the bourgeoisie failed to provide for a viable solution to the crisis. Tranquilizing solutions that coexisted with the problem rather than settled it was the utmost contribution that the bourgeoisie could offer. The sectarian schemes were only recurrent symptoms of the aggravation of the crisis. The document went on to discuss the alliances of the party and the policy of the party toward alliances since the second congress in 1968, and how the main position of the working class pushed the formation of alliances. The report argued that the Arab bourgeoisie had absolutely failed to solve its crisis. This crisis stemmed from "the accumulation of the contradictions of capitalist growth within the framework of complete dependency on imperialism and its international dominant system. . . . It is a chronic and a comprehensive crisis."[132]

The report concluded that the Arab national liberation movement was encountering a crisis of bourgeois class leadership. Some of the discussants, especially from other Arab and communist parties attending the deliberations, rebuffed the acceptance of a crisis within the Arab liberation movement. They argued that "the mere suggestion of a crisis in an anti-imperialist movement is contradictory to Marxism."[133] The LCP, however, strongly defended its position that there was a serious crisis. Moreover, it introduced the idea of building a new liberation movement.[134] The report specified the content of Arab national liberation as the "liberation of the Arab countries from the domination of the international system and imperialist dependency relations; liberation of the Arab occupied territories in Palestine and the removal of all forms of direct imperialist presence; liberation of national wealth; realization of development . . . occurrence of revolutionary change in Arab society and the realization of Arab unity."[135]

Some of the members of Arab and foreign parties attending the deliberations disputed the above delineation, arguing that the national question did not necessarily mean "the Palestinian question and Arab unity." Others

viewed the slogan of "Arab unity" as unrealistic. Some of the foreign participants argued that the intensification of concern about the national question might lead to a rise in fanaticism, while others said that viewing the national question as the core of class struggle would obscure the socioeconomic dimensions of the conflict. [136] Because the conflict stemmed from Lebanon's Arab character, the political divide into two contradictory camps on this issue, and the tendency toward anti-Arabism among some segments of the local bourgeoisie, Lebanese communists generalized the specificities of the national question to the entire Arab world. This analysis exposed a sensitive issue among Arab communist parties. Most considered Arab nationalism a regressive chauvinist force.[137] Thus, the question of nationalism raised wide discussions within the party and stirred heated debate among the Arab communist parties in the 1990s (see chapter 6).[138]

Relations with Syria were also a focus of the discussion. Some argued that Syria had encouraged "the circumstances that may lead to the total collapse of Lebanon in order to control Lebanon."[139] Some of the Lebanese political forces backed this position, since the Syrian influence in Lebanon had multiplied and become decisive in Lebanese politics. The LCP defended its independence and its relations with Syria. The party claimed that Syria "is ruled by a [political] regime, [which is] led by a nationalist party . . . and it is concerned with the evolution of the Arab countries."[140] But it criticized the Syrian intervention in Lebanon, which led to the weakening of both the Lebanese and Syrian roles in the Arab national movement.

Fifth Congress of the LCP

In spite of the unstable and even dangerous political situation in the country, which since the outbreak of the civil war in 1973 had resulted in the deaths of over a thousand party members, including 275 delegates to the fourth and fifth congresses,[141] the fifth national congress of the LCP was held in February 1987 in the Shouf mountain town of Baaklin. Of the 383 delegates who were elected to the congress, 350 were able to attend. The congress proposed to undertake an in-depth, multidimensional analysis of developments on both the domestic and regional-international levels and make crucial decisions concerning the party's leadership and its future policy.[142] Despite early rumors to the contrary, the congress reelected George Hawi as general secretary and unanimously adopted a resolution urging an immediate cessation of the war against the Palestinian camps.[143] The congress addressed the "overall breakdown of various areas of the

country's life, the visible erosion of the foundation of the country and society, the deepening crisis of productive forces in all sectors of the economy, the nation's widening split along confessional, religious-ideological and regional lines, the structural changes within and between classes and social strata, and the general impoverishment—absolute and relative—of all strata of society." [144] Its view of the general Arab situation was also predominantly pessimistic. The crisis of the Arab national liberation movement was seen as a "crisis of the movement's bourgeois class leadership"[145] and the suggested solution was formation of "a new type of Arab revolutionary movement that could head the revolutionary national struggle of the Arab people."[146]

The fifth congress examined the question of relations between the Lebanese national patriotic forces and the Palestinian revolution. The basic stand assumed by the congress was that the Palestinian struggle was also the cause of Lebanese patriots.[147] Palestinians were entitled to use Lebanese territory for carrying on their national struggle. However, their struggle on Lebanese territory should be tied to the task of Lebanese national democratic transformation and should not contradict this task. The requirements of the Lebanese struggle and the coordination of forces on the Lebanese scene should be addressed in the Palestinian struggle.[148]

According to George Hawi, one of the main causes of the continuing armed conflict was, in addition to the fiasco of Lebanon's political and economic system, the growth "within the patriotic opposition of contending denomination-community trends which had become dominant from 1984 until the beginning of 1987."[149] The situation was further aggravated by the hostile attitude of the Amal movement toward the Palestinian people's national struggle, the intrigues of the agents of Israel, and the rich real estate traders who were also involved in an anti-Palestinian conspiracy. Lebanese authorities hoped futilely that it would be possible to isolate the Lebanese crisis from the Middle East crisis by striking out at the Palestinian presence.[150] Another factor which contributed to the outbreak of fighting was the right-wing policy then being pursued by the leadership of the PLO—a policy that was not contained either by Lebanese national patriotic forces or by left-wing circles among the Palestinians.[151]

The fifth congress consequently issued a resolution challenging the denominational and communal establishment and calling for an internal settlement of the crisis on a national democratic basis.[152] The LCP's stand against a solution of the internal crisis based on religious lines was founded on the fact that the Phalangist Party and President Amin Jumayyil were setting up a scheme of dismemberment under the banner of Christianity.

This scheme "to form de facto" a mini-state would signify a dismemberment of Lebanon and its conversion into Israel's appendage. [153] On the other hand, calls for the establishment of an Islamic republic were a reaction to the Phalange scheme of setting up a Christian republic. But in the view of the LCP, both slogans—the Islamic and the Christian—"ultimately serve the objectives of the U.S.-Israeli alliance, not only because they now help to fuel strife and discord, but also because these slogans impel the establishment on our soil of several state entities on the denominational principle, and provoke divisions in other Arab countries, thereby providing justification for the establishment of the state of Israel on [a] religious basis."[154]

The fifth congress issued a call for the convocation of a national conference of all the Lebanese patriots in order to put an end to the civil war. The call was based on the proposition that this would not require the realization of the working-class program (a national democratic revolution), or even a full-scale democratic reform. The conditions for ending the war were "liberating the country, avoiding the danger of its dismemberment, clearing the way for transformations . . . and democratic guarantees of continued political struggle for reforms in various areas."[155] The report declared that "first and foremost, we need a guarantee of democracy"[156] which, excluding the use of armed force as a means of solving internal problems, "will make it possible to continue the political struggle and advance a feasible program for the settlement of the Lebanese crisis."[157]

After the fifth congress, the LCP initiated a campaign calling for the creation of a front for the unification and liberation of Lebanon, a patriotic front "similar to the 1982 Front for National Salvation."[158] The front sponsored by the LCP was then established; according to Rafic Samhoun, a member of the Politburo of the LCP, it included the LCP, the Progressive Socialist Party, the Baath Party, the Nasserites, the Syrian Socialist Party, and the Amal Movement.[159] As George Hawi noted, however, "a mere declaration of the front's establishment is not enough to attain the desired results."[160] In the Lebanese situation, the only way out of the crisis was a compromise between both the Lebanese and the Palestinians and among the Lebanese themselves. Hawi stressed that the Lebanese revolutionary process "is in itself essential for the victory of the Palestinian people; it is a principal mainstay of the Palestinian revolution."[161] At the same time, however, he also urged the Palestinian resistance to adopt "a serious attitude . . . [in regard] to the national will of the Lebanese people. Developments in Lebanon should be regarded as a Lebanese national affair, as a problem of a sister nation."[162] He asked, "Must Lebanon be a garden in which the Palestinian forces are free to pick any fruits they can reach, using methods that

harm the tree itself instead of taking care to preserve the garden and make it more fruitful?"[163]

Plenary Meeting of 1988

A plenary meeting of the LCP Central Committee convened in January 1988 to consider a program for resolving the Lebanese crisis on a national basis. The major principles of this program were:

1. Struggle for the complete withdrawal of all Israeli occupation troops from Lebanese territory, and implementation of the relevant resolutions of the UN Security Council.

2. Concrete affirmation of Lebanon's affinity with the Arab world through normalization of Lebanese-Palestinian relations and establishment of special relations with fraternal Syria based on mutual respect for sovereignty and independence.

3. Reestablishment of Lebanon's unity and abandonment of schemes for its dismemberment, or for the creation of cantons of inhabitants based on a religious community principle.

4. Formulation of the basic principles for reform of the political structure with the ultimate aim of re-establishing the country's unity, and with the immediate aim—as a minimum program—of eliminating political confessionalism. This should be a phased program carried out with coordination and consistency in accordance with the principle of equal participation by all sides in the work of the organs of power throughout the entire transitional period preceding the final abolition of confessionalism. In the course of this period, democratic principles must be laid down for participation by various confessional, political and social forces in the work of all state institutions, including the organs of legislative, executive, judicial, military and administrative power, and the security organs.

5. Conclude an agreement on measures to combat the economic and social crisis, the first of which should be fulfillment of the demands of the General Union of Workers and the popular movement. This would make it possible to go on to serious reforms in the economic and social spheres, with a request to Arab countries and the international community for assistance not only in the matter of a political settlement, but also in the rehabilitation of the country's economy.[164]

The plenary meeting continued to call for a "comprehensive nationwide dialogue" for precisely determining the elements of a settlement. However, three basic conditions were required for a successful settlement: "First, a stronger role for the moderate Christian current; second, cohesion of the ranks of the patriotic and progressive movement on a non-confessional basis, support of the movement's initiatives and their further development; and third, the holding of a dialogue with assistance and under the auspices of fraternal Syria [to be sustained] until such time as the dialogue yields the desired results." [165]

The plenary meeting also emphasized that "whether Lebanon survives or not depends on whether the country's unity can be preserved." According to the LCP, "Lebanon's unity is determined by the fact that it belongs to the Arab world. . . . Both the country's unity and its Arab affinity depend on the democratic reform of its political structure."[166] The plenary meeting also analyzed the international situation and Gorbachev's reforms in the Soviet Union. It greatly praised Perestroika and Glasnost "as a new 'revolution within the revolution' . . . a creative development of Marxism-Leninism at that stage that set in after the victory of the October Revolution and the emergence of the socialist camp . . . the 'Leninism of the nuclear epoch.'"[167]

The 15 June 1988 statement of the Politburo welcomed the outcome of the Arab summit held in Algiers. According to the statement, the positive results of the summit were reflected in its decisions to reaffirm the commitment by the Arab states to support the Palestinian people's uprising in the occupied territories, and the Palestine Liberation Organization. The summit also reaffirmed support for Lebanese national resistance to Israeli occupation in the south of Lebanon.[168] Finally, the Politburo expressed concern over the worsening socioeconomic situation in the country and warned that "apart from the calamities which spring from impoverishment, hunger and expatriation, there is an ever greater problem of environmental pollution, whose devastating consequences pose a threat to Lebanon's present and future, to its people and its very existence."[169]

The Aoun Crisis

The announcement on 22 September 1988 by outgoing president Amin Jumayyil that commander of the Lebanese army Michel Aoun would be entrusted with the power of the presidency of the republic created a new political crisis. This crisis incurred the LCP's strong criticism of President Jumayyil and of Aoun. According to the deputy general secretary of the

LCP, Nadim Abd al-Samad, "The proclamation by President Amin Jumayyil, in the final minutes of his term in office as the head of state, of a denominational military power headed by the commander of the Lebanese army, Michel Aoun, is nothing but a military coup aimed at entrenching a situation in which the constitution and democratic institutions do not operate. . . . This act is aimed at undermining the legitimacy of the government of [Prime Minister] Salim al-Hoss." He also pointed out that this event "tends to deepen the communal divisions, returns the country to an atmosphere of civil war and threatens to produce a major explosion that would have dangerous consequences for the future of Lebanon and for the future of the Christians who live here and in other countries of the Arab East." [170]

Abd al-Samad also pointed out, "It is to be regretted that Iraq, which has yet to recover fully from the state of its devastating war with Iran, has become involved in the Lebanese crisis. It has sided with the fascist forces, giving them financial and military aid. . . . Lebanese patriots . . . note with a sense of censure the fact that some Palestinian leaders have decided to collaborate with the pro-Israeli fascist forces in Lebanon."[171] He further elaborated on where the communists and other national patriotic forces of the country stood on the governmental crisis:

1. They are committed to Lebanon's unity and want the election of a new president on the basis of a program to meet the demands of the National Pact and the equality of all Lebanese citizens, abolition of confessionalism and reform of the political and economic system.

2. They condemn the fascist methods of the commander of the army and the Lebanese Forces, who used force to frustrate the convocation of a session of the chamber of representatives and prevented the election of a new head of state, thereby preparing the conditions for the establishment of a divisionist power on a part of Lebanese territory by means of an armed coup, so deepening the state of division and dismemberment.

3. They reject all plans for internationalization of the Lebanese crisis, including the French project for international forces to be invited to help in organizing the election of a president of the republic, and believe that such projects do nothing to eliminate the crisis; on the contrary, they entrench the country's division, because the holding of presidential elections is, to a greater extent, hampered by political disagreements than by the problems of ensuring security of such elections.

4. All the forces committed to Lebanon's unity and sovereignty call for assistance in order to ensure the success of the efforts being made by the national patriotic forces, the legitimate government led by Dr. Salim al-Hoss and by Syria, and to frustrate the schismatic and separatist line being conducted by the fascist forces with the support of Israel, some Arab countries, the United States and a number of Western countries.

5. Lebanon's national patriotic forces warn that the deepening of tensions by the actions of the fascist forces threatens to produce a mighty military explosion whose negative consequences would go well beyond the borders of Lebanon and would frustrate any international efforts for a political settlement of the Middle East crisis.

Arab Summit of 1989

The summit meeting of the Arab states held in May 1989 approved the decisions of the Council of Foreign Ministers of the Arab states. In an article published in August 1989, George Hawi expressed his support for these decisions because they "reaffirmed the internal nature of the conflict; and they stress the need for a political settlement through constitutional changes which would be based on national principle and assert Arab identity; thirdly, these decisions point to the paramount importance of the problem of Israeli occupation and demand sustained struggle for the fulfillment of UN Security Council Resolution 425, which calls for the withdrawal of Israeli troops from the south of Lebanon; fourthly, the decisions are directed against attempts to internationalize the conflict being made by the forces supporting General Aoun, and also—under pressure from the right—by France. These decisions also recognize the inevitability of reform in Lebanon, the vital importance of ending Israeli occupation, and the correct determination of the line along which international intervention is required." [172]

Hawi's article was conspicuous because of the frankness, previously unknown, of the discussion of the socialist problem of capitalist development. He admitted, "Instead of slowing down scientific and technical progress, as the old dogmas envisaged, capitalism has developed it to such an extent that it has forged far ahead in the competition with socialism."[173] This capitalist victory made "the main postulates which we studied in our student days, and by means of which we tried to convince others that our doctrine was right . . . to be invalid."[174] In fact, as a result of a dogmatic

approach and resistance on the part of their bureaucratic leadership, many socialist countries declined. Because of that, they were unable to provide enough economic and social assistance to Third World peoples. They even became "hostages of the world market in terms of credit, technology, and the prices of raw materials and finished products." [175] Communism was unable to achieve its basic social goal to overcome human alienation, either from the means of production or from the state. As Hawi put it, "Although the working class and its party are in power, people do not feel that it is they who are running the country."[176]

The crisis of socialism notwithstanding, Hawi also warned against the temptation of "taking the line of least resistance and attempting to resolve the crisis by importing ready made prescriptions from the West, whether in economics, social policy, democracy or forms of social administration."[177] He believed that "genuine democracy for the people differs both from that which existed in the socialist countries, and from that which exists in the West."[178] He perceived a grave threat from the forces of counterrevolution, "once they have access to property and the right to set up political forces . . . especially if the working class party were to lose its militancy and capacity to mobilize the masses and fail to head the initiatives in the economic, social, political and ideological spheres."[179] Although he acknowledged "peace to be of utmost importance for mankind as a whole," he also wanted to remind people of the other grave problems facing most inhabitants of the planet, such as "hunger, grinding debts, social backwardness, and humiliating dependence." He stressed that "as long as there is hunger, discrimination, and the suppression of the national aspirations of the people . . . world peace will always be in jeopardy."[180] In an obvious reference to the advent of Perestroika and Glasnost, which confronted the Lebanese communists with new challenges, he commented, "The main thing . . . is the ability to keep old friends while acquiring new ones, and not to sacrifice traditional friendship for the sake of the illusion of winning new political space."[181] In these new and demanding circumstances, Hawi maintained that "dialectical materialism helps us to see a world in flux, a world evolving beyond that described by Marx, Engels and even Lenin,"[182] and that "we can claim to be communists only when we are the most resolute champions of democracy and humanism."[183]

Chapter 6—
Postwar Reconstruction

In June 1986, Karim Mroué, deputy secretary general of LCP, published a series of essays on nationalism, democracy, socialism, religion, and revolution in *al-Ahram* (Cairo). They were republished in *al-Safir* (Beirut) in July 1986. These essays stirred heated debates throughout Lebanon and the Arab world. In 1990, Al-Farabi Publishing House published the essays and the commentaries raised in response to them in a book entitled *Hewarat: Mufakrun 'Arab Yonaqishoun Karim Mroué fi al-Qawmiyya wa al-Ishtirakyya wa al-Democratiyya wa al-deen wa al-Thawrah*. [1] Within two months, the first printing was sold out.

In these essays, Karim Mroué argued that "the renewal process cannot be performed by a party only, or a specific group alone, or even a single political thinker. . . . The circle of discourse has to be stretched out to include several forces: the Marxists; the socialists with their different schools; the nationalists who strive for liberation and progress and the religious parties that struggle for revolutionary change."[2] Concurring with Mroué, Falih Abd al-Jabar (an Iraqi communist) added that the discourse must be based on political forces and currents rather than a social class.[3] The diversity of political forces invited to the discourse raised questions such as, To what extent could the discourse contribute to a positive outcome? To what extent would the turbulent, sometimes bloody, history of relations among these forces influence the discourse? To what extent do the perspectives of these forces on the socialist crisis (nationally and internationally) affect the discourse? For example, the communists conceded the existence of a crisis in the socialist experience and the Arab order. The nationalists, on the other hand, were divided between countries where they were either powerless or extremely repressive, as in Iraq and Libya, and against dialogue. The Islamists, in contrast, were confident because of their ascendance in many areas in the Arab world and believed in a bright future ahead. Furthermore, the agenda of debate, which raised issues of revolution and democracy or what

Mroué summed up as "the tasks of social and national liberation," represented the cornerstone of conflict between these political forces.

Mroué initiated the discourse with an examination of the concept of nationalism. He argued that some form of affiliation had long been a natural state for human beings. The form of social organization had evolved as history had unfolded, but this evolution took a class dimension only with the rise of capitalism. He asserted that the national question "would not find its way to solution in our age, and especially in our countries, unless the social groups and classes that have vested interests in national prosperity rally to achieve a solution. This solution should be based on a program that is representative of the nation's interests in liberation and progress." [4]

The distinctiveness of the national question in the Arab world is that it involves a group of nations that have developed independently and unevenly who nevertheless share a deep bond.[5] The modern Arab nationalist movement, which coalesced at the turn of the twentieth century, had been deterred by the intervention of the colonial powers. Later, because of internal and external events (mainly the October Revolution of 1917), Mroué held that the national question in the Arab countries had involved new content, such as the idea of self-determination as an expression of emancipation from imperialism. Economic development during the independence process is an important dimension of the national question. However, attempts to achieve economic liberation have entailed further conflict with imperialist forces. Because of this uneven development among the Arab countries, Mroué called for a new relationship whereby the struggle of the individual Arab countries for social and economic development would be organically connected to the Arab national liberation movement.[6]

Mroué also discussed the party's position on religion, heritage, and revolution. He was concerned with the following issues:

1. The position on religion should be constructed on the basis of heritage as a historical phenomenon, and as a social reality that has a significant role in informing the prevailing consciousness of the people.

2. An understanding of religion must stem from the general context of Arab-Islamic heritage.

3. When studying religious parties, emphasis should be placed on how they relate to objective social conditions rather than to religion only.

Karim Mroué recognized only a limited role for religion in "forming the basis of the general consciousness prevailing in our societies and communities."[7] Yet from that position he called for a reconsideration and reevalu-

ation of religion. He suggested that an incorrect understanding of religion, attributable to Marxism, had influenced the relationship between communists and the vast majority of the faithful masses. He characterized this past misunderstanding of Marxism as a cause of the current predicament within the Arab revolutionary movement.[8] He further explained that religious parties in general were merely political movements that aspired to power. Their political, class, and intellectual positions varied immensely despite their common reliance on religion as an ideology. However, he perceived a potential for convergence between what he called the "tributaries of the revolutionary movement" (mainly Marxist) and anti-imperialist and anti-Zionist religious organizations.[9]

Mroué also called for a new revolutionary movement and theory. He argued that "crisis is the most distinguishing characteristic of Arab societies. It encompasses all aspects of life—political, economic, social, cultural and spiritual."[10] Breaking from this cycle required "a persistent search for a revolutionary penetration of this reality."[11] He proposed as a framework for this search a slogan: the revitalization of the Arab revolutionary movement and the renewal of its political thought.[12] Groups invited to participate in the search included Marxists, Islamists, and nationalists, hence the new political theory should "be qualitatively innovative and must depend in its formation on all other theories without any exception."[13] Democracy would stand as a basic conviction, to ensure what Mroué called peaceful competition.

The discourse was expanded to include other issues such as the predicament of Marxism in relation to democracy and socialism.[14] Ghassan al-Rifa'i, a member of the Politburo of the LCP, argued that there was a common dominator that bound most of the contributions on Mroué's ideas: the linkage between the experience of the socialist countries and Marxist theory. This connection resulted in simplistic deductions that were attributed either to anti-Marxist or Marxist positions. Despite al-Rifa'i's recognition that the tie between theory and practice was not new to Marxism, he noted that the feedback to Mroué's arguments emanated from practice, and aimed at refuting the theory in light of experience. He expressed reservations about the tendency to exaggerate the importance of either one, as theory and practice are the two indivisible dimensions of praxis. In the socialist experiment, "the production of theory" was monopolized by Soviet theoreticians. This hindered the means of verifying the validity of theoretical deductions on the yardstick of practice, as Marxism preaches. Therefore, al-Rifa'i envisioned the essence of the error as the understanding by Marxists of Marxism. He argued that "we can claim—without dropping

the reservation totally—that we are not facing a crisis of Marxism as a science, but a crisis in Marxist thought; mainly, a crisis resulting from the lack of correct scientific process . . . the need for dialectical linkage between thought and practice, and their reciprocal continuous interaction." [15] Al-Rifa'i was basically concerned with testing Marxist interpretations against reality, rather than with a re-examination of Marxist theory. Therefore, al-Rifa'i argued that a renewal of Marxism must be based on the dialectical reconciliation of theory and practice. Hence, he was worried that calls for the renewal of Marxism would be misunderstood as skepticism of the validity of Marxism. He argued, "Truly, I am concerned about the impression left in the reader's mind of the negative aspects of Marxist principles, despite the confirmations of comrade Karim Mroué that Marxism contains a scientific method. Marxist thought is based on a richness of experience . . . that might not be vivid in the reader's mind."[16]

The call for renewal of Marxism was also criticized by Samir Sa'ad, a renowned Lebanese communist.[17] He argued along lines similar to al-Rifa'i. "The obvious concern of Mroué on the necessity for the renewal of Marxism in Lebanon, and the insistence on performing this central task, lost congruence as soon as this call was approached from the position of considering Marxism as a theory among other theories or a current among other currents. Accepting this premise indicates a deliberate relinquishment of the scientific nature of Marxism. . . . This might end up with a compromise that eases the rigorous scientific basis of Marxism."[18]

Mroué reiterated that his call for a new revolutionary movement and a new revolutionary theory equated all the experiences and the intellectual currents that were called upon to participate in the endeavor.[19] He reconfirmed that socialism "has to be renewed on the basis of the specificities of our country's experiences. This is the solution . . . the new version of Marxism could be the proposed revolutionary theory. However, it must take into account the contributions and the suggestions of the different intellectual currents in solving prevalent problems."[20]

The National Question

The "national question" was a focal point of the debate. According to al-Rifa'i, "Mroué was contradicting himself; on the one hand, he was arguing as a Marxist adopting the delineations of Marx and Engels for the class content of the national question. This includes their call for the proletariat to establish its own concept of nationalism. On the other hand, Mroué argued that a solution to the national question is possible only when the

classes and the groups that are interested in change take up this challenge."[21]

Mroué argued more specifically that the national question "is the cause of the whole society in general . . . in particular, workers, peasants, groups of intellectuals, toilers and all those people whose lives and interests are linked to the destiny of the nation."[22] He was particularly interested in the special nature of the national question in the Arab world and outlined three main elements as shaping the national question:[23]

1. The multi-faceted relations, bonds, and forms (historical, cultural, social, and spiritual) that exist among these countries.

2. The objective need to develop these relationships among the Arab countries.

3. The need for each of the Arab countries, individually and collectively, to pursue a radical and comprehensive program that could realize the goals of national liberation and progress.

The national question raised the issue of change and revolution in Arab countries. What were the forces that could undertake this serious task? For example, what type of alliance could perform this revolutionary transformation, and under what leadership? Al-Rifa'i suggested reconsidering existing alliances. Most of these alliances were inefficient and neglected the role of the masses. Therefore, Mroué's call for an alliance cannot constitute a serious foundation for the rise of a new Arab revolutionary movement.[24] However, al-Rifa'i argued that class boundaries are blurred in the Arab world. Because of this, the interlocking nature of the national, nationalist, and democratic tasks necessitate conditions of radical political change. This requires the transformation of the "vanguard party" into a popular party that reflects the interests of all classes and social groups.

Interestingly, this idea was subsequently embodied in the program document for the sixth congress of the party, which proposed that Marxism is no longer the monopoly of the working class.[25] Mroué subsequently elaborated on what he called "the revolutionary class alliance." He viewed the tasks of the Arab countries as "not just the tasks of the working class, the mass toilers (in cities and rural areas) and the intellectual groups (with their different positions in the production process); but also the tasks of large segments of the bourgeoisie, especially, the middle and lower classes."[26]

A different proposal for a revolutionary alliance was presented by Samir Sa'ad,[27] who criticized the form of the revolutionary alliance envisaged by Mroué as "an ideal-type approach that does not provide for actual transcendence of obstacles. This makes it difficult to induce conscious popular

action."[28] Sa'ad considered Mroué's approach as a conglomeration of different currents and forces that were drawn together on a par with Marxist forces. That, of course, differed from the call for collective action based on an alliance of revolutionary forces.

Discussions of the national question centered around the Marxist thesis of "no revolutionary movement without revolutionary theory." In fact, there was almost unanimity among the participants on the necessity of theoretical renewal in spite of their different approaches to the national question. The documents of the sixth congress reconfirmed the need for renewal, in effect reflecting the impact of these discussions.

Mroué assumed that the different currents (ideological and practical) could contribute equally to the renewal process at both theoretical and organizational levels. On this basis, he argued that the renewal process he advocated was fundamentally a Marxist process undertaken to achieve a Marxist theory renewed through the process of dialectical interaction with the intellectual environment. Sa'ad assumed an egalitarian relationship between Marxist theory and other currents. Other participants, such as al-Rifa'i, clearly suspected the creation of an intellectual form that was not the result of renewal but a consequence of compromise between conflicting intellectual perspectives.[29]

The debate also addressed the possibility of cooperation with religious forces, in particular Islamic activists. There was general unanimity among the participants on the necessity of reconsidering the party's position on religion. The proposed alliance with religious currents raised controversial debates. Mroué asserted that dialogue with religious groups could propel them to adopt more progressive positions. He wrote, "We have to consider that if the revolutionary Islamic movements are the most salient in our countries, then we have to exert more efforts for the sake of disseminating the effect that the liberation theology movement has imbued in Latin America."[30]

Despite al-Rifa'i's approval of the idea of an alliance between the nationalists, Islamists, and communists, he remained cautious. He contended that an alliance was possible but "not within the present context of their organization, competition of political and intellectual trends prevalent among them, and the many factions that they encompass."[31] Hence, a process of evaluation was needed before any of the religious currents could join the proposed alliance. Al-Rifa'i did not consider the religious activist trends as cohesive groupings; rather, he took into account the disparities and variations among the different factions within each current.

The debate, though not new to the LCP, helped the LCP overcome its chronic intellectual crisis. The party held two congresses during the 1990s

(the sixth and seventh), which represented the crystallization of the debates. Moreover, the 1990s witnessed the evolution of a decidedly open attitude toward Arab intellectuals, spurring them to participate in the discussion. Furthermore, the Lebanese communists followed up the debates on renewal at the international level by translating new Marxist literature on the subject. They also published the documents of non-Arab communist parties and work on pioneering Arab socialist intellectuals such as Salamah Mousa, Farah Antoun, Nikola Hadad, and others. The trend toward reconsideration of the heritage of the socialist pioneers was part of the process of official reconsideration of critical thought. These included Mahdi 'Amel, Samir Amin, Ahmed Sadiq Sa'ad, and others. *Al-Tareik,* an LCP journal, also paid special attention to what were called "the independent Marxists," Marxists who did not affiliate with a communist party, such as Sadiq Jalal al-'Azm and Ilias Murqus.

The issues of nationalism and the renewal of the Arab revolutionary movement were raised for discussion within the progressive Lebanese front. Namely, a project was proposed by Samir Amin calling for a "national popular alliance as a substitute for liberation fronts and other forms of revolutionary affiliation." This project was discussed by many Moroccan, Sudanese, and Egyptian intellectuals. Moreover, the Trotskyite current contributed to the discussion, but maintained its utopian ideas. Nazeh Sh'aban, a Trotskyite, argued for the establishment of a new revolutionary movement: "none of the revolutions that are created by humanity are radical enough . . . the current strife is evolutionary and reformist, and only outstrips reform if it manages to exceed the limited national boundaries." [32]

Despite the commitment of Lebanese communists to their party as evinced in the sixth and seventh congresses, this did not close debate on the party's future. For example, by the end of 1994, George al-Batal called for the establishment of a popular party. He argued, "There is a need for the establishment of a radical leftist democratic party . . . capable of incorporation of tens of thousands of Lebanese, and the communist party should be the nucleus."[33] Frequent calls for a change in the party's name and widespread skepticism about the project of renewal of the revolutionary movement echoed the threat of what some called the prelude to the final abandonment of Marxist-Leninism.[34]

The Position on Perestroika

The position of the Lebanese communists on the Soviet Perestroika was no different from that of their Arab counterparts. They praised it as a neces-

sary process and a new intellectual thrust that could salvage socialism from its crisis. In 1989, the communist historian Mas'oud Dhahir argued, "the Perestroika which was undertaken to refurbish the socialist community in all socialist states, including the Soviet Union, is also an Arab necessity on the theoretical and practical level." [35] There was no doubt that Perestroika was a renewal of the socialist experience. It was viewed as an important catalyst for the internal renewal of Marxist-Leninism. "It posed a total re-consideration of several concepts and theses including the re-evaluation of the Soviet experiment itself."[36]

However, the debates about and reactions to Perestroika demonstrated a replication of the old pattern of dependency on the Soviet Union. In December 1988, the journal issued by the Center for Socialist Research and Studies in the Arab World held a conference in Damascus on Perestroika in the Arab world. Representatives from all Arab communist parties as well as independent Marxists attended. Commenting on the conference, Mohammed Dakroub, editor in chief of *al-Tareik,* noted:

> the first working paper, entitled "Peristroika and the Arab World," concentrated mainly, if not entirely, on the dimensions of Perestroika, its meaning, direction and future, in the Soviet Union. Hidden in a small corner was its Arab dimension. The same old disease: as if Perestroika in the Arab world is Arab praise for the achievements of Perestroika and its reforms [in the Soviet Union] . . . what's more important to consider in this respect is that the conference host was forced to append a second working paper, in effect replacing the first one. In essence, it concentrated on the problems of the Arab national liberation movement in the time of Perestroika. In the discussions and papers presented, there clearly emerged two main trends . . . in political and intellectual conflict. In the conference, some papers and critical comments were presented which were very courageous as they called for the Arab communist parties to practice genuine self-criticism, and called for Arab Marxists to undertake a genuine renewal in the production of genuine scientific knowledge related to our Arab societies. The other trend was very clever in the usage of old slogans and new concepts in the defense of old positions.[37]

The significance of Dakroub's observation stemmed from the fact that this was the largest assembly of Arab communists and Marxists to study Perestroika and that the sponsoring agency, *al-Nahj,* was the official organ of the Arab communist parties. However, the acceleration of change in the Soviet Union and the socialist countries precipitated increasing skepticism

among Lebanese communists. The renowned Lebanese communist Adeeb Ni'ama viewed Perestroika as "a global response on the level of consciousness and practice in response to the accumulated problems we have in our contemporary world." [38] He also responded to some of the arguments of Soviet theoreticians who cautiously criticized Perestroika. He argued that the description by the theorists of Perestroika of the problems of the Middle East as "regional problems" was only correct from "a centrist point of view." However, that analysis ignored the political, social, and class content of the conflict. He also expressed his resentment of the description of conflicts in Third World countries as "disputes" and not "liberation movements."[39]

Regarding the position of some Arab communist parties toward Pere-stroika, several criticisms were also raised. Ahmed al-B'albaki bitterly criticized the parties that instantly approved Perestroika. He believed that this reflected a pattern of client-patron relations with the Soviet Union. He did not see any benefit deriving from Perestroika except perhaps an opportunity for democratic trends within the Arab communist parties "to exploit after the exposure of the conservatism of both center and peripheries."[40] Al-B'albaki's criticism was limited; it did not call for total renewal but just "the return to Leninism."[41] The approach to peristroika, represented by al-B'albaki and *al-Nahj,* suggested that there was no crisis, only a glorious past that had been usurped; now was the opportunity to seize it back. This position was quite similar to that of Haitham Jaber, one of the representatives of Trotskyism in Lebanon, who believed that Arab communist parties were established during the "era of Stalinist dominance and the decline of the Third International."[42] He agreed with al-B'albaki that overcoming the current crisis depended on prevailing over Stalinism as a theory and as practice. Consequently, this included the correction of mistakes and the recognition of other Marxist currents, especially the Fourth International current.[43]

As a matter of fact, no radical critical position toward Perestroika crystallized until after the collapse of the Soviet Union. George al-Batal, a leading figure in the LCP in the sixties, argued that the Soviet Union and other socialist states were not genuine socialist systems or Marxist adherents in the first place. "It never occurred to me before the 'Glasnost' and the great collapse that it would be possible to raise these questions."[44] He drew a distinction between Marxism and the defunct socialist regimes: "I am totally distinguishing between the regimes that collapsed, and the Marxist project . . . I also believe that most of Marx's ideas and his holistic approach of interpretation has been proven valid."[45]

It is worth noting the admission of Mohammed Dakroub. He reported that while he was working in *al-Nida',* the official party organ of the LCP, he picked up a news item from Moscow radio and asked one of the leading journalists in the newspaper where and how they would place this news item in the paper. The leading editor answered, "You have to wait until we consult Moscow's opinion, since they know better the secrets of the event; and they understand the historical and political meaning related to it." [46] He recalled also that he was prevented from critically reviewing a low-quality Soviet movie "in order not to defame the friendly Soviet cinema and realist socialism." [47] These positions cited by Dakroub illustrate how detrimental the total dependency of the Arab communist parties on the Soviet center was. Therefore, this environment not only hampered the participation of party members in a free discussion of Perestroika, it also impeded party efforts at renewal that were ushered in with the second congress of the LCP (1968). [48] The discussions waged after the collapse therefore represented a significant shift in the discussions of the Lebanese communists, regardless of substance.

In conclusion, three schools of thought were identifiable among communists in the debates of the nineties sparked by the publication of Mroué's treatise. The first school maintained that the crisis of communism, culminating in the collapse of the Soviet Union, was caused by the character of Marxists, not their theories, and their manipulation and exploitation of Marxism. The second school maintained that Marxist theory had become stultified under the Soviet Union and required a dialectical process of renewal. The third school advocated renewal to such an extent that in effect it called for dissociation with classical Marxist theory. The three schools were not distinct orientations, but were closely related overlapping currents in the shockwaves reverberating through communist circles.

There was agreement within the circles of the LCP regarding the causes of the deviation of the socialist experience. Most opinions agreed that the setback started with Stalinism. George al-Batal argued, "Despite its deviations from Marxism, Lenin's project would not have transformed the Soviet Union into a tyrannical state as happened under Stalin and his allies. This would not have happened if Lenin did not die in the early years of the Soviet state." [49] This kind of argument reflected the rigidity and text worshipping that was criticized as part of the problem of Marxism. Jad al-Karim al-Jiba'ai, a Syrian Marxist, criticized the phenomenon of text-worshipping among Arab communists when he wrote, "The [interpretation] of Marxist-Stalinism in general, and in the Arab world in particular, is closer to the ideas of Hegel than Marx. Their belief is that ideas create the reality

and not vice versa. The Arab communists always lay reality on the surface of their ideas and reduce and pattern it to suit their premises." [50]

Mohammed Dakroub, impatient with the inaction of text worshippers, expressed his resentment of the repeated arguments for renewal. He argued, " Marxism is a historical and a relative theory; parts of it become outdated and other parts accommodate change. . . . Marxism is not a rigid ideology but a guideline for action."[51] Indeed, this is the problem of textuality; it only produces slogans that match the situation and its antithesis. Of course, that does not imply that all the discussions were useless. The debate raised some significant issues and challenges for the Lebanese, the Arabs, and international communism, but it was intertwined with dogmatism and textuality.

The Islamic-Progressive Dialogue

Mroué and his sympathizers advocated dialogue with Islamists. A number of nationalists and leftists also contributed to the discussion on the subject. Among Islamist groups, too, there was support for dialogue. The debate of the Lebanese communists on the issue of dialogue with the Islamists and Islamic heritage lingered as a one-sided attempt until some responses appeared from the side of the Islamists. One of the Lebanese Shi'a leaders admitted the lack of a "unified Islamic position" regarding dialogue.[52] He did not rule out the possibility of joining the debate by some of the Islamic currents that maintained "a relatively high level of political awareness."[53] Another opinion was posed by the well-known Islamic intellectual Radwan al-Sayyed, who, despite his belief in the necessity of dialogue, argued that "the rejection of Marxism, for principled reasons by faithful Muslims, resulted in the likelihood of rebuffing any calls for dialogue with communists."[54]

However, Sheikh Mohammed Hassan al-Ameen, a formidable opponent of dialogue, described Mroué's call for dialogue, published in the newspapers and media, as mere propaganda rather than a call for a serious debate. The Sheikh argued, "is it possible for an Islamist and a Marxist . . . to decide to refer to dialogue and reason; to subdue each other, merely because the other has strong evidence and convincing argument?" He responded to this question by saying, "the personality of the human being is too complicated to forgo beliefs and convictions easily. The strength of the argument and the clarity of the evidence are not solely what determines the human being's choices and positions."[55]

He set forth two conditions as prerequisites for dialogue with Marxists:

(1) Marxists had to reject their position on Islam; (2) they had to undertake a re-evaluation of Marxism in order to establish a firsthand relation with Islamic thought, without utilizing the medium of Marxist analysis. [56] Therefore, the Sheikh urged Marxists to abandon their Marxist methodology before entering the dialogue. He cited the relationship between ancient Greek philosophy and Islamic thought and argued that the pull-push relation between Marxist and Islamic currents "had made both Arab-Islamic and Marxist thought miss great opportunities for creative and lively innovations that the classical Muslim and Arab philosophers had made use of, especially regarding Greek thought during the third and fourth centuries of al-Hijra."[57]

The Sixth Congress

The Lebanese party held its sixth congress on 9–12 January 1992, amidst a turbulent political environment. At the international level, this was characterized by the collapse of the socialist countries. This constituted a serious challenge to most communist parties, including those in the Arab world, as they derived their legitimacy from the Soviet model which presumed universal relevance. The collapse of the socialist bloc resulted in a rapid retreat from Marxist ideology and its variants internationally. Marxist and socialist concepts were considered invalid, leaving capitalism as the unchallenged paradigm of development.

At the regional level, the Arab political environment was fragmented by the Gulf War. The system of Arab politics that had evolved over the post–World War II era was in disarray, with the balance of power fundamentally altered by the consolidation of the Gulf-American coalition. Indicative of the transformation in inter-Arab politics was the rush toward bilateral agreements with Israel. The decay in the Arab system in effect discredited the national and secular project that was its justification. At the same time, Islamic fundamentalism was rising as a serious challenge to the degenerating Arab regimes. Moreover, the depression of oil prices in the international market negatively influenced the labor market in poor Arab countries.

On the Lebanese front, a fragile civil peace was achieved on the basis of the 1989 al-Taif Accord. The political framework that resulted was not fully accepted by all Lebanese factions, particularly some of the Maronite factions, and sectarianism remained an important feature of Lebanese politics. Overall, the main facets of the Lebanese internal arena included: (a) a government that was formed to offset certain sectarian interests; (b) Maronite abstinence from full political and social participation and an overwhelm-

ing feeling of frustration expressed by some Maronite intellectuals and leaders; (c) the ascendance of Islamists and their role as sole resistance to Israeli occupation in south Lebanon; (d) the collapse of the national alliance, or what the LCP described as the "lake of national ambition and the crisis of national action in the current period"; [58] (e) the rise of localist coalitions in Lebanese politics that further fragmented the national project; and (f) Lebanon's special relationship with Syria.

Against the background of this political environment, manifested within the party in the political debates sparked by Mroué, the sixth congress of the LCP was held. Considered the most important congress since the second congress in 1968, it was billed as an extraordinary session because of the nature of the issues that it tackled.[59] Three hundred and twenty-nine delegates out of 397 attended. Their selection was based on a procedure that guaranteed a wide range of representation.[60]

The importance of the congress stemmed from the context within which it was convened and the questions that were posed before it. What was needed was not merely an ordinary assessment of positions and policies or even organizational and theoretical reform, but rather a reconstruction of the theoretical and intellectual basis of the party. In other words, the whole structure of the party needed to be reevaluated. One newspaper reported that an in-camera meeting was held prior to the congress for the purpose of committing everyone to a ceiling of decisions and policies that should not be transcended, therefore maintaining the unity of the party.[61] The decisions at this meeting included the approval of a draft program, continuation of the discussion of theoretical issues, and a commitment to scientific socialism, reconsidered in the light of Lebanese realities. In a news conference three days prior to the convening of the sixth congress, George Hawi, general secretary of the LCP, stated:

> This congress is taking place after intense debate over a full year. Thousands of communists from the grassroots, and hundreds in leadership organizations, discussed the preparatory documents. As a result, conflicting, contrasting and contradictory opinions emerged on intellectual, organizational and political issues. We lived through a unique experiment which may initiate a new school in Lebanese political life with complete full democratic participation. What made our task more difficult is the enormity of the issues being discussed on the international, Arab and local levels. We have to define our position toward the model of socialism which was practiced and failed in the Soviet Union. We have to rebuild our party and reconstruct its identity, clearly define its strategic aims and approve its public policy. We

still adhere to Marxism as a science and approach to delineate reality. We reaffirm our rejection of capitalism as a world order. We do not see in capitalism [the possibility] of just and lasting solutions to the human problems of Lebanon. We affirm our confidence in socialism as a more just system, emphasizing our distinctiveness from the failed experiment and our rejection of its basic tenets. [62]

The sixth congress was successful in preparing the stage for a new era and in rescuing the party from collapse. Following the congress, flagging party membership increased by 800. Requests for discussion and membership extended outside Lebanon.[63] But the congress was not a model of consensus, as it split around issues such as the name of the party and its organizational structure. These two issues were postponed and redirected to an organizational congress to be convened a year later.

The draft program of the sixth congress emphasized the importance of building on indigenous reality and acknowledged the relativism and historicity of Marxism. Approaching Marxism as a theory for social change adaptable to indigenous milieus, the program stressed a reconsideration of Marxism as scientific socialism, not as sacred text (as had been the practice). According to the final program document approved by the congress, the reconceptualization of Marxism needed to be carried out "upon a background of commitment to the scientific analysis of Lebanese society, and reliance on the elaborate methodology of scientific socialism . . . inspired by the progressive traditions of humanity encompassed in the traditions of both great revolutionary movements and religion."[64] In other words, the LCP should not consider Marxism as the sole theoretical source. Moreover, the draft program stated the position that "Marxism is no longer the ideology of the working class exclusively."[65] It argued that as the theoretical framework for the revolutionary process expands, the social basis also does. The exclusive role of the communist party as the center of the revolutionary process was also negated.

In reconsidering the role of spiritual factors and religions in history, the draft program criticized (a) the distorted understanding of "the relation between materialism and consciousness"; (b) the simplicity of economic analysis that reduced the process of socialist transformation to a chain of economic procedures, disregarding the role of consciousness and the embodiment of the human dimension; and (c) analysis that ignores "the prevailing forms of consciousness including the religious form."[66] After reviewing the positions that the LCP had developed since the second congress, the draft program concluded, "we are basically posing a new concept according to our own vision of Marxism; more specifically, accord-

ing to the relationship between the material and spiritual dimensions, including, of course, religion."[67]

The draft program delineated the difference between the party's traditional understanding of socialism and the new one, as demonstrated in five main themes: (a) socioeconomic relations; (b) the lack of democracy in society and in the party; (c) imbalance in the attention given to national and international factors in party formulation; (d) the denial of the role of spiritual factors; and (e) the rigid and centralized nature of the party's structure. The draft program proposed that the crisis in socialist thought in general and in the LCP in particular could be understood in terms of these five themes.[68] These points reflected the trend toward renewal that was the main concern of the sixth congress. It emphasized these issues when it examined problems in applied socialism.[69] In explaining the issue of renewal, the program referred to the process initiated after the second congress of examining the theoretical heritage of the party.[70]

The program addressed the issue of democracy as "a central matter in the great changes that are occurring in our world."[71] The LCP emphasized its commitment to pluralism and democratization of the party. However, it rejected the bourgeois-liberal model of democracy as a reaction to undemocratic practices in the implementation of socialism.[72] The program called for a search for a democratic form in socialist society that will permit a high proportion of popular participation in governance. However, the program did not propose a framework for pursuing this search. On the level of democracy within the party, the program recognized the right of members to participate fully in discussions and decision making concerning the party's political program, in addition to the right to express opinions and objections within the party and the right to disseminate opposing viewpoints. The program condemned Stalinism and the practices it produced and suggested that the key to promoting healthy relations within the party lay in a "reconsideration of the relationship between party organizations and decision-making bodies. That has to lead to change from a hierarchical form to a circular one with regard to the democratic process inside the party."[73] The program suggested that the party congress should be a permanent organization that convened annually. Representatives to the congress would be elected every three years. It also called for the election of a secretariat of three or four members to conduct party business between the regular meetings of the congress. It was proposed that the congress elect the general secretary and that the Central Committee be replaced by a council that performed the duties of representation, supervision, and monitoring.[74]

In regard to civil society, the draft program raised a number of concerns: (a) the autonomy of popular organizations; (b) the right of the party to direct its membership inside these organizations through persuasion; (c) the call for genuine democratic practice; (d) the call for comprehensive reform in trade unions, federations, and popular organizations; and (e) reconsideration of the party's participation in international organizations; a preference for joining Arab and regional organizations was clearly asserted. [75] The program also discussed making a change in the name of the party, though this was tabled.[76]

The sixth congress of the LCP also reviewed the concept of internationalism that had prevailed up to that time in socialist thought. The draft program maintained that the existence of a political center for internationalism, the USSR, led to a distortion in the meaning and the relationships of international solidarity.[77] The program therefore called for a new international alliance that revolved around three issues: (a) international peace and problems of the environment; (b) parity in social development; and (c) parity in the distribution of material resources in the world. The alliance needed to take many forms, and those would vary at different stages.

The Third World in particular was urged to participate in collective action to overcome the constraints of dependency and underdevelopment. Third World countries were urged to seek alliances with their natural allies, who were among the following: (a) all countries that undertook the socialist alternative to development; (b) all countries that challenged imperialism; (c) the revolutionary democratic movements in the advanced capitalist centers; and (d) peace-loving and democratic movements.[78] The program emphasized that the new internationalism was characterized by a humanist tradition; class as a determinant factor was deemphasized.[79] The program noted that the confrontation with imperialism had retreated from the agenda of the international alliance, although it was identified as one of the serious challenges facing the Arab world.

With regard to the national question, the draft program reaffirmed the previous positions of the party. It declared that the national cause is the main arena for unfolding the class conflict in countries that had not yet achieved national liberation. Consequently, the party defended the notion of an Arab nation and linked the struggle for Arab unity to a progressive context. However, the main challenge to the Arab nation remained imperialism and Zionist occupation.[80] The program identified the following objectives vis-à-vis national issues:[81]

1. Confrontation of the American presence in the region.

2. Solidarity of the Palestinian factions.

3. Struggle for the liberation of the occupied territories in southern Lebanon, Golan Heights, West Bank and Gaza Strip.

4. Formulation of a plan to sustain national resources and to achieve Arab economic integration and development.

5. Commitment to the struggle for Arab unity.

6. Struggle for fundamental democratic change in the Arab world.

7. Broaden the base of the party program to encompass all social forces in the Arab nation.

8. Consideration of spiritual factors, especially religion, and dialogue with religious movements.

9. Call for an extended Arab alliance on both official and popular levels.

According to the draft program, the Palestinian issue and the national unity issue were considered the main problems facing the Arab people. The party asserted the necessity of seeking resolution of the Palestinian problem in phases or stages, i.e., first the creation of a Palestinian state in the 1967 occupied territories. However, this needed to be done without forfeiting historical rights in Palestine. [82]

To sum up, the party called for a multifaceted pattern of internationalism loosely determined by an ideological center but unified by humanism. Moreover, it called for an Arab revolutionary movement that was bound by national interests as well as class affiliation. The LCP also posed a program that could be adopted by "different political and popular forces, both secular and religious."[83] This reflected the party's response to calls from leftist quarters (Marxist and national) that advocated solidarity with political Islam to confront imperialism. But there was a paradox in the fact that this call was raised at a time when communist parties were retreating, abandoning most of their dogmas in favor of a more liberal reform, while the forces of political Islam were taking more inflexible positions. This crucial topic was obviously far too important to be discussed in one line in the LCP document, especially with the rise of Islamists as one of the main challenges facing secular political forces in the region.

On the domestic (Lebanese) level, the program emphasized the commitment to democracy as discussed earlier. Regarding socioeconomic relations within the socialist experience, the party reconfirmed the rejection of the "non-capitalist path of development" and instead called for wide-based alliance with disadvantaged groups in the "laissez faire" economy to

achieve what the program called "the stage of general democratic struggle," which would precede the "national democratic stage." [84] The LCP also designated the form of socialism compatible with Lebanese realities as being something close to nationalization. However, the public sector would only permeate the basic sectors of the economy that the private sector failed to run. The party also recognized the importance of "the liberalization of the economy; the encouragement of individual initiative and consideration for free market mechanisms."[85] The role of the state was minimized to the following: (a) supervision and coordination; (b) encouragement and regulation of public services; (c) enforcement of social laws; (d) administration of the public sector; (e) protection of the national economy in the conduct of foreign affairs.[86] The sweeping liberal tendency was even more emphasized with the following five pillars that the party identified as the main characteristics of socialism:[87]

1. Qualitative and quantitative increases in production and in the national income.

2. A symmetrical increase in the social nature of ownership.

3. The implementation of a progressive system of taxation.

4. An equitable policy of wages linked to social security.

5. A system of modern social services.

Considering the national question, the draft program reviewed the national struggle of the LCP and identified the following main themes:

1. The struggle for national identity (independence, sovereignty and Arabism of Lebanon).

2. The struggle for democracy (freedom and democratization of the political system).

3. The struggle for social equality (the demands of the toilers and the development of the national economy).

A linkage between national identity and democratic reform was staunchly asserted by the program. The current tasks of the party lay mainly in (a) resistance to Israeli occupation and (b) confrontation with sectarianism, which might conspire against a strong role for the central state in the field of maintaining law and order. Despite support of the party for the al-Taif Accord of 1989, the program noted that the accord minimally satisfied national and democratic demands. After the seventh congress, the party also declared its determination to form a democratic opposition to set forth its objectives clearly and to respond to the demands of the grass-

roots. [88] The document also challenged the party's alliance policy in the national arena, outlining the following strategy in alliance building: (a) on the basis of a specific task, limited by time and subject; (b) coordination on long-term tasks; and (c) on the basis of a conclusive program that might lead to a long-term strategic alliance without precluding the possibility of developing the alliance into an organizational affiliation. [89]

Apparently, the autonomy of the party was no longer a sacred slogan. The possibility of the dissolution, or even the amalgamation of the party with other political forces, was open. Karim Mroué identified the forces that could bring about change, given the nature of the national tasks. He argued, "these tasks expand in our current circumstances to include other forces beyond the working class. . . . This alliance might lead to the convergence of interests without necessarily meaning the denial of the particularity of the other or the abrogation of the inherent contradiction between each other . . . social and class conflicts take so many forms, according to time, position and the relative historical conditions." [90] Consequently, the change in concepts extended even to the concept of revolution, which became change, since "revolution means an overall process of change of a reality . . . while revolutionary change is an objective evolution emancipated from determinism." [91]

To conclude, the draft program of the party came out with a model that was based on a liberal reform orientation. This outcome contradicted the party's claim of representing the working class. However, it provided the party with the theoretical appeal to attract a wide sector of Lebanese society. Despite the generalizations and vagueness permeating the program, it alluded to a change in the structure of the party so that it would resemble, more or less, the democratic socialist parties of Western Europe. The positions of the LCP with regard to the changes included (a) conceptualizing revolution as simply long-term change; (b) rejecting the dominance of the working class over other segments of the population; (c) recognizing the role of market mechanisms; and (d) giving the state a role based on a Keynesian concept of the magnitude and nature of state intervention in the economy.

The seventh congress was convened in June 1993 and replaced the Central Committee with a national council that elected a president, secretary general, and board. The board was responsible for nominating the secretary general and the Politburo, [92] which acted as the party executive.

In the January 1995 issue of *al-Tareik,* Karim Mroué attempted to analyze the crisis in Arab society and thought "as being a crisis of consciousness." [93] According to Mroué, the rise of religious fundamentalism was a symptom

of a crisis in Arab political thought. He analyzed the Arab situation, attributing the crisis predominantly to the following:

1. In the process of nation building the ethnic and religious divisions which had historically evolved were ignored.

2. After independence, the Arab states neglected issues stemming from ethnic and religious divisions.

3. Political systems in the Arab world prevented the growth of a civil society and democratic institutions in any real sense.

4. The Arab-Israeli conflict was not dealt with sufficiently and was addressed only on the political level and not in terms of the underlying social components of the conflict.

5. Development policies of the Arab states were at best confused and led inevitably to the failure of these policies and to the control of national economies by multinational corporations.

6. The failure of Arab political parties and movements resulted in the growth of fundamentalist forces.

He concluded that all political forces, particularly Marxist and communist groups, needed to admit their responsibility for the crisis and search vigorously for a resolution. To Mroué all of these political forces were called upon to deal critically and rationally with the issue at hand rather than criticize past experiences. He further called for the reshaping of political thought and programs on "a realistic and more cautious foundation" and encouraged Marxists to be the vanguard of this move by rejecting Marxist fundamentalism. He argued that there had to be a reassessment of the socialist experiment in regard both to its successes and its failures and an identification of the structural fallacies that were clearly revealed by the collapse of the Soviet Union and the socialist camp. He also called for a reassessment of the Marxist approach to capitalism in a more realistic and less ideologically rigid framework. Mroué felt that the liberation from fanaticism in practice and theory had to be based on democratic principles. His solution to the crisis was to call upon all political forces, including Marxist and religious parties, to recognize each other's contribution to the understanding of Arab political problems and to seek accommodation with each other. [94]

In the same issue of the journal *al-Tareik,* another member of the Politburo of the Lebanese Communist Party, George al-Batal, offered much

more explicit suggestions for the transformation of the party into a mass-based democratic political organization. He called upon the leadership of the party to put into action the basic resolutions of the party's sixth and seventh congresses, saying, "I believe that the Lebanese Communist Party is the only organization that is qualified for this task . . . I hope that the leadership of the party will offer the general guidelines of such a program which should be discussed openly . . . which becomes the political and intellectual foundation of the party and that the forthcoming eighth congress will be transformed into a founding congress for the new political party." [95]

By July 1995, news journals reported that al-Batal, Mroué, and George Hawi held a number of meetings with progressive leftist groups, including Fawaz Trabulsi and Muhsin Ibrahim, two leading intellectuals of the Communist Action Organization, in order to discuss the possibility of amalgamation.[96] However, Mroué dismissed these reports as false.[97] Whether substantive or not, the rumors reflected the party's transformation from a communist to a social democratic ontology. By mid-1995, there was even serious consideration given to changing the party's name to eliminate its identification as a communist party. The old guard of the party, however, stifled attempts to change the name at the sixth and seventh congresses.

**PART THREE—
THE SYRIAN COMMUNIST MOVEMENT**

Chapter 7—
The Syrian Communist Party in Crisis

The Syrian Communist Party came into being as an independent party upon the division of the Communist Party of Syria and Lebanon in 1958. With the separation, the Syrian party in effect was rendered more dependent on and vulnerable to Syrian political dynamics. External influences on party dynamics, in other words, became less diverse and more concentrated. This occurred as regional political dynamics became more volatile in the wake of the 1967 Arab-Israeli War. The impact on the development of the Syrian Communist Party was singular, for it was isolated from regional political dynamics and gradually absorbed into an increasingly totalitarian state apparatus.

The transition of the Syrian state from a dictatorial to totalitarian nature is marked by the coup d'état of 23 February 1966, which overthrew the Baathist government of General Amin al-Hafez and Baath party ideologues Michel Aflaq and Salah Bitar. The coup, a manifestation of an internal rift between military and civil wings of the Baath Party, reflected a widening ideological polarization within Baathism. For the Syrian Communist Party, the coup marked the initiation of a new stage in its development. This stage was characterized by two events:

1. The return of Khalid Bakdash to Damascus following the coup, after eight years of self-imposed exile, but with severe restrictions on his participation in politics. [1]

2. The third congress of the Syrian Communist Party in June 1969.

Shortly after the coup, a member of the Syrian Communist Party, Samih 'Attiyah, became a cabinet minister. Hafez al-Assad, then minister of defense, insisted that the appointment was based on personal, not party representation.[2] Although the party was still officially illegal, it nevertheless became tolerated and resumed its activities. Despite occasional repression, seventeen months after the February 1966 coup Maurice Salibi, a member

of the Central Committee of the SCP, expressed general communist satisfaction with the new alliance and rather optimistic expectations for the future. As he believed, "the general trend has been a positive one—both in terms of domestic development and in some aspects of foreign policy." [3] According to Salibi, "Syria has succeeded in pulling down the wall of isolation erected by the Baath right," [4] and the communists were willing "to work hand-in-hand with all other progressive forces for the solution of all the problems facing the country." [5]

Third Congress of the SCP

The second congress of the Lebanese Communist Party, held in 1968, critically evaluated the performance of both the Lebanese and Syrian communist parties and placed the blame for their failures solely on the Stalinist leadership of Khalid Bakdash. This had a direct impact on the deliberations and results of the third Syrian congress. The congress was held in Damascus in early June 1969 and was attended by 101 representatives of party organizations. Only 25 percent of the participants of the congress were workers and 13 percent peasants, yet workers and peasants constituted 62 percent of party membership. At the congress, professionals and intellectuals from the middle class made up 68 percent of the delegates.[6] It was the first congress to be held for a quarter of a century and was two years in preparation. Prior to the congress, trouble was already brewing between Khalid Bakdash and his Politburo regarding some central issues, particularly the Palestinian issue, relations with the Soviet Union, the party's position vis-à-vis Arab unity, and the general secretary's style of leadership.

The theme of the third congress of the SCP—the struggle to eradicate the consequences of imperialist Israeli aggression and to strengthen the progressive nationalist regime in Syria for the purpose of socialism and Arab unity—reflected the confrontation brewing between Bakdash and the Politburo. Bakdash attempted to avoid debate of contentious political issues. He did not present a political program, only economic and agricultural programs. Party policy in these areas was essentially non-contentious. The economic program declared that "the main aim of the Syrian Communist Party is to create socialism in Syria."[7] It applauded the improvement of Syrian economic conditions after the Baath takeover and acknowledged that the Syrian economy was still agricultural. Agricultural products made up from 33 to 50 percent of industrial productivity in Syria. The program praised the nationalization and agrarian reform measures of 1965 and came to the conclusion that Syria had entered the stage of building socialism.

> We can say that Syria entered the stage of national democratic revolution and the stage of socialist revolution. We can describe [the Syrian state measures] as far-reaching progressive measures that can be considered an attack on the centers of major capitalist power and the dominance of feudalism. These can form the initiation of the march toward building socialism if they are coupled with other socio-economic and political measures.
>
> The working class and the toiling masses of peasants and all other progressive, anti-imperialist, anti-feudalist and anti-capitalist forces shoulder the duty of protecting these transformations, and developing them so as to reach the next step of transformation to socialism. [8]

In the social sphere, the program invoked the leadership of the working class, guided by Marxist-Leninist theory. It cautioned, however, that Marxist-Leninism must adapt to the psychological and historic conditions of Syria. This required the creation of a progressive nationalist front that would include all the friendly forces that accepted socialism, with democratic freedom guaranteed for all members of the front. This should become the center of politics in Syria. Furthermore, the program advanced the idea of encouraging the creation of popular organizations and their participation in solving the problems of workers and peasants and increasing health and housing services for them.[9] Because of rural-urban migration, the program especially noted housing and called for better and cheaper housing for the poor, more state involvement in building public housing, and better transportation between towns and rural areas.[10]

The agricultural program took off from the economic program and emphasized the conditions in Syria, where 68.8 percent of the population was engaged in agriculture. The lowest percentage was found in Damascus, which had 50 percent of the population so engaged. Agriculture contributed 37 percent of the national income, with agricultural products providing the major raw material for the country's industrial output. Agriculture also comprised the most important exports of the country. Thus agriculture had to be given special attention.[11] The program suggested the following measures to prepare the transformation of the country for fundamental agrarian reform:

1. Completion of the nationalization and redistribution of land more speedily and the forfeiture of compensation to the landowners.

2. Confiscation and redistribution of farm machinery and buildings owned by the large feudal landowners.

3. Creation of model state farms that could be emulated by other agricultural cooperatives.

4. Encouragement of democratic, cooperative and popular movements that will play a role in influencing government policies related to agriculture.

5. The granting of civil freedoms such as speech, meeting, demonstration and the press for all.

6. Improvement of working conditions for poor peasants through lower lending rates, provision of machinery, attention to the improvement of farm stock and an increase in agricultural research.

7. Improvement of cultural and health conditions in the rural areas with an emphasis on free medicine, clean drinking water, cheaper electricity, the building of more schools, elimination of all illiteracy and the settlement of Bedouins. [12]

During the congress, serious rifts began to appear between the secretary general, the Politburo, and the membership, which resulted in the polarization of the party grassroots into two camps. The issues that divided the party centered around three basic concerns:

1. The position of the party vis-à-vis Arab unity and its approach to the Palestinian issue.

2. The relationship of the party and the Soviet Union on the one hand, and international communism and the Soviet Union on the other, more precisely on the issue of the independence of the party.

3. Issues regarding the internal organizational structure of the party, focusing on the history of the party, its previous mistakes and the absence of democratic practices within the party. This resulted in a rift between Khalid Bakdash and his Politburo.

Bakdash attempted to keep a lid on the rift by paying lip service to the concerns of his critics within the Politburo and the party. In the Central Committee report, Bakdash cautiously hinted at the existence of the rift but minimized the problem by focusing on the need for party unity, stating:

> We are exerting every effort to strengthen our party and safeguard its unity. It is very important that no division seeps into any movement or any national progressive party which struggles against imperialism and hopes for socialism. And when the crisis occurred within the Baath Party . . . we did our best to support all the efforts exerted to keep this party united . . . the unity of the Baath Party is today not only a party issue but a national issue which concerns every progressive

person. For that reason, the unity of our Communist Party is close to every communist heart . . . not only every communist heart but every conscious worker, aware peasant and revolutionary intellectual. Thus, every progressive person should realize this fact. Our unified party became one of the best guarantees to support the progressive national regime in Arab Syria. [13]

While cautiously acknowledging the existence of the grievances, he accepted only partial responsibility for the problems and placed responsibility on the Central Committee. The grievances were soft-pedaled to the degree that they appeared insignificant and indeed dangerous to the unity and effectiveness of the party, and he declared in the Central Committee report:

Our Party has a solid cadre which grows continuously in numerical, intellectual and political terms. . . . No doubt these successes are less than the desired level and no doubt our performance could have been better . . . [but] our party has the possibilities in its collective efforts from the grass roots to the leadership to improve continuously. What are the obstacles that hindered our party from becoming more solid and stronger? These are political and organizational. . . . Among these reasons are the following:

1. adopting some wrong theoretical and political positions during certain periods, such as its positions on nationalization during the days of unity [with Egypt] and during the split [with the same];

2. not holding a congress for 25 years which resulted, in practical terms, in the violation of collective action and the principles of democratic centralism, and in the disrespecting of party organizations. This also led to the decline of the role of the Central Committee, particularly when the majority of its members were not elected but appointed by the Politburo. This resulted in a semi-guardianship of the Central Committee by the Politburo which allowed personal and arbitrary administrative action to take place rather than collective and organizational action. No doubt, not holding the congress was not simply an accident. Rather, it was a great mistake which marked the party for a long period of time. The main reasons for not holding a congress were not appreciating the importance of criticism and self-criticism enough, even fearing them, and an exaggerated self-confidence . . . the responsibility in general, thus rests upon the Central Committee and in reality, on

the Politburo and on me, the secretary general, in particular;

3. not enough concern was given to the workers and peasant cadres. . . . There was no focus directing the intellectuals and the elements of the petit bourgeoisie to work among the masses of workers in towns and the toiling peasants and poor in the countryside. There was a great deal of talk on the necessity of working among the workers and peasants [to recruit them] but this talk did not translate into action and the party leadership did not set an example in this regard either. [14]

The most important document resulting from the third congress was the report of the Central Committee prepared by the secretary general and adopted unanimously by the congress. The report was described by one critic as:

Unfortunately, and perhaps strangely . . . not a study of the previous quarter century of experience, despite the richness of that period of Arab history in general and party history in particular. . . . Repetition of the eternal general pronouncements, the usual rhetoric, and the continual glorification of well-intentioned party personalities, with five or ten sentences of self-criticism tacked on, does not make a serious study of the party's previous experience; and without studying the experience of the party, there will be no guidance for the party.[15]

Immediately after the congress, the Central Committee reelected Khalid Bakdash as general secretary; Ibrahim Bakri, Daniel Neimah, Riyadh al-Turk, Dhuhair Abd al-Samad, 'Umar Qishash, and Yusuf Faisal as members of the Politburo; Daniel Neimah, Dhuhair Abd al-Samad, and Yusuf Faisal as secretaries in addition to Murad Yusuf (a Central Committee member).[16]

While the report attempted to soft-pedal conflicts brought into the open by the congress, the minutes of the Politburo made apparent that the most important discussions at the congress centered around the following issues:

1. The internal life of the party. The central issue discussed here was the failure to hold a congress for twenty-six years, the violation of party bylaws, the decline of party organizations, and the ascendance of the party leadership to a point of absolute control, coupled with the growth of a personality cult around Khalid Bakdash.

2. Internal and Syrian political positions. The party was seen to have made a number of errors, one of which was that it exaggerated the

role of the national bourgeoisie as a progressive force and did not give adequate theoretical attention to the reactionary nature of this national bourgeoisie. This resulted in incorrect political positions, especially during the UAR period, such as the party's position vis-à-vis the nationalization measures taken during the union with Egypt and its subsequent position following the breakdown of the union, both of which resulted in the party's decline in mass popularity, particularly among the poor and working class.

The discussions identified the causes to be the party's lack of a comprehensive strategic understanding of the basic issues affecting Syria and the Arab world resulting from a lack of serious analysis or studies of the class conditions. Special attention was given to the Palestinian problem and the basic issue of Arab unity. Discussion also centered around the call for more cooperation between and among Arab communist parties and a greater coordination in their positions vis-à-vis basic Arab issues.

3. The issue of internationalism and the party's position toward the Soviet Union. While party discussions criticized the lack of attention given to Arab and Syrian internal issues, the congress also suggested that the party was excessively dependent on the Soviet Union, thereby sacrificing its own independence, although it acknowledged the party's debt to the Soviet Union.

4. The party and the Baath. The party cadre representatives supported the efforts of the party leadership for the creation of a national progressive front which would be the umbrella for all national and progressive groups in Syria, but it implied that in doing this the leadership had surrendered its role as a vanguard party in the defense of the masses.

5. In regard to the 1967 Israeli aggression and occupation of Arab lands, the cadres raised the issue of going beyond the party's support of the Soviet position, which was limited to support for UN Resolution 242 of 22 November 1967, and called for an armed struggle to liberate the occupied territories if peaceful means failed.

6. The absence of a cogent political program. This was seen as one of the most serious weaknesses of the party. The floor of the congress reprimanded the leadership for not making available a draft program for the congress to discuss and approve. "Despite the positive aspects that were included in the report of the Central Committee,

[there were] a great number of critical comments about the report for being incomprehensive in dealing with the basic issues facing the party now." [17]

The party congress charged the Central Committee with drafting a political program, which was to be discussed by the entire party and approved at an extraordinary conference to be held within a year.[18] Although the conference was not held until November 1971, the draft was completed by June 1970 and circulated to all party organizations for discussion. The program draft committee, composed of Khalid Bakdash, Daniel Neimah, Murad Yusuf, Badr al-Tawil, and Maurice Salibi, submitted the draft to the Politburo, which referred it to the Central Committee after studying it. The Central Committee discussed it for a number of days, modified it, and approved it unanimously with the exception of one paragraph that was related to the idea of a unified Arab communist party. Khalid Bakdash objected to its inclusion in the introduction and suggested that it be included in the section related to unity. "This was the only paragraph which was voted on and passed by majority vote."[19]

Draft Political Program of 1970

The Central Committee produced a detailed draft program composed of eleven separate sections:

1. Introduction.

2. The international situation and the nature of the era.

3. Basic features of the Arab national liberation movement.

4. Arab unity.

5. The Palestine issue.

6. Syria from occupation to independence and 23 February 1966.

7. On the progressive socioeconomic transformations occurring in Syria.

8. Forces moving Syrian society: classes and social groups.

9. Objectives the party works to achieve in the struggle to combat Israeli imperialist aggression, liberation of the occupied land, and the strengthening of the progressive Syrian Arab nationalist regime in order to achieve liberation, popular democracy, socialism, and Arab unity.

10. For the sake of socialism.

11. On the Syrian Communist Party.

The introduction outlined the basic principles and assumptions of the draft program, stating "The Syrian Communist Party is the party of the Syrian working class and its vanguard, and is the representative of the basic interests of this class which shall struggle for the abolishment of human exploitation, the building of the socialist system, and the achievement of Arab unity." [20] In effect, Arab issues were given equality with international issues in the introduction, and were identified as a primary factor in party action. "The main enemy forces that the party will struggle vehemently against are imperialism, Zionism, reactionaries, large landowners and capitalists."[21] The introduction went on to cast the party more in an Arab vanguard role than in an internationalist role:

The Communist Party of Syria looks with favour on cooperation with all anti-imperialists, anti-Zionists, and anti-reactionary forces who aim to build socialism in Syria, and seeks unity between the Arab countries. . . . This cooperation could take place in some form of a national progressive front which is the only instrument to lead this revolutionary process. . . . The Syrian people are an integral part of the Arab nation which has common aims and common interests. The most important is eradicating imperialism and Zionism . . . solving the Palestinian issue on the principle of the return of the Arab-Palestinian nation to its land with its right to self-determination and the employment of all means of struggle which the Palestinian nation chooses to utilize to achieve both this Arab unity and the building of a socialist system.

For that reason the current revolutionary process in Syria is characterized by patriotism and social [concerns] in addition to its Arab nationalist and internationalist concern. Accordingly the Communist Party of Syria . . . seeks consensus and consultation with other Arab communist parties to form a unified Arab communist party that will participate in the achievement of the Arab people's ambitions to build both a unified Arab state and also socialism. The Syrian Communist Party also struggles alongside other Arab communist parties, other progressive forces and with the Palestinian liberation movements and the Arab people of Palestine against Israeli colonialist aggression to liberate the Israeli-occupied land in order to regain the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination on their own soil. The Communist Party of Syria, in cooperation with other communist parties and progressive movements in other Arab lands depending on the working class and the toiling masses, will work for the achievement of

the important goals of liberation, popular democracy, socialism and Arab unity. [22]

The program was explicit on the issue that Arab unity was "an achievable aim and duty" and that the party should take into account "the local dynamic circumstances" and "local conditions" in addition to local issues.[23] It called for cooperation between communist parties and nationalist progressive forces and emphasized that the road to Arab unity was very closely linked to the Palestinian struggle and that this must begin with eradicating the Israeli occupation of Arab land and should continue until Palestine was completely liberated from Zionism.[24]

Unification of the Arab communist parties was considered essential to the achievement of Arab unity. This required harmonizing the positions of the Arab communist parties vis-à-vis mutual "survival" issues. The struggle for Arab unity, according to the program, "is one of the most essential concerns for all progressive nationalist forces. . . . For that purpose we must have economic coordination and integration of the Arab countries in every field and must support the progressive Arab regimes and their accomplishments. . . . Arab unity could begin with a union between two or more Arab countries. Whatever the shape of this achieved unity among the Arab progressive countries, its content must be progressive, anti-imperialist, anti-Zionist and anti-reactionary."[25] The program emphasized that democracy and democratic freedoms must prevail in the future united Arab state, and political organizations should be allowed to flourish. Minorities in the new state should be given their full rights, including self-determination, " which is a fundamental principle that is compatible with the interests of the Arab masses."[26]

On the Palestinian issue, the program supported the right of the Palestinian people to the liberation of their land and recognized their right to use any means they chose to accomplish this goal, including armed struggle. This was in contrast with the Soviet position and a clear rejection of the Soviet line in support of UN Resolution 242. This represented a condemnation of both the Soviet policy and that of the major Arab communist parties of the area, including its own earlier policy. The program also condemned the Arab governments as only paying lip service to the Palestinian issue while in reality being in collusion with the U.S.-Israeli camp. It also called for a non-Zionist, democratic, and secular state in which Arabs and Jews could live in peace, recommended unconditional support for all Palestinian liberation movements, and called for those movements to unify themselves in a Palestinian front. This front should cooperate with the unified

Arab national front and with all the progressive forces and the socialist world yet maintain its Arab distinctiveness. [27]

On Syrian conditions, the program indirectly condemned the Syrian Communist Party's actions in 1961, when it opposed nationalization measures, by praising those 1961 measures. It also hailed the progressive steps taken by the Syrian Baath governments between 1964 and 1970 and praised the land reform policy of 1969, which was considered to be a major step away from the exploitation of the peasants and toward social justice. According to the program, Syria was passing through a stage in which feudalism and the industrial bourgeoisie were finally being defeated politically and economically. However, the Baath Party "represents, in class terms, some elements of the petite bourgeoisie,"[28] which explains the intellectual conflict within the Baath Party on the party's relationship to the Syrian Communist Party and the Soviet Union.[29]

The program identified as specific aims the "eradication of Israeli aggression, the liberation of the occupied land, and support for the progressive nationalist regime of Arab Syria for the sake of liberation and democracy."[30] A democratic constitutional system in which workers and peasants were the majority and were able to elect the head of state was advocated. The program called for improvement in the conditions of peasants and workers by an increased social program infrastructure and mobilization of peasants, workers, students, youth, and women in democratic organizations. On behalf of workers, it called for an amendment of social insurance laws to include private professions, an increase in the minimum wage, and increased representation of workers in the administration of the social insurance program by placing the program under the control of labor unions. On behalf of peasants, the program called for an improvement in their working conditions and an encouragement of mass peasant organizations to defend the rights of peasants and the rural poor. For students and youth, the program called for the unity of the student and youth movements on a democratic and progressive basis and also called for an assurance of employment for youth and students. Regarding women, the program called for equal rights, particularly for wages and child care for working women.[31]

In the economic sphere, there was a call for the improvement and modernization of nationalized factories, the reform of banks, a progressive income tax system, and a limitation on foreign investment.[32] In the agricultural sphere, the program proposed more radical agrarian reform to eradicate feudalism and large land ownership completely. Innovation in the creation of cooperative associations for peasants was advocated, along

with programs for the modernization of tools and the provision of fertilizer and financial aid. [33]

In the area of national defense, the program advised that more attention be paid to the army, especially "an improvement of its class composition," the "strengthening of socialist tendencies within it," and the "strengthening of the brotherly ties between the army and the masses, and among and between the officers and soldiers." It also called for the creation of a popular militia as a support organization for the army.[34] Regarding the state apparatus, the program demanded the removal of reactionary elements that stood inflexibly against change, progress, and democracy. It especially recommended the transformation of the security and the police, "two agencies that should respect the people."[35]

In regard to education, culture, and social services, the program called for a mass campaign to eradicate illiteracy and urged the propagation of Marxist-Leninist teachings along with an adjustment of the educational system to incorporate the ideas of socialism and the needs of the country. It also called for more attention to libraries and the encouragement of research, cultural, and sporting activities. It also recommended more government support for public transportation, the handicapped, and public housing. In the field of health, the program outlined the need for an improvement in hospitals and an increase in their number and services. It proposed the setting up of a free public health scheme, the gradual nationalization of health care, the improvement of medical colleges, and reductions in the price of medicine.[36]

Regarding the Arab world as a whole, the program identified its basic aims to be:

1. Cooperation and coordination among Arab communist parties to lead to a unified Arab communist party. Toward this end, the program advocated communist cooperation among all progressive nationalist forces. Increased communication between the communist forces and the masses would facilitate the building of a socialist society. Arab economies would then be free from monopolistic control of the multinationals, particularly as this related to the oil industry.

2. Economic, military, and political cooperation among the progressive Arab states in their conflict with Zionism, and more popular support for the Palestinian liberation movements.

3. A commitment to a progressive and democratic Arab unity as a base for the creation of a socialist society.[37]

What is significant about this program is the importance placed on national issues. Even in the international sphere, they advocated that the party should be more active in exposing Zionism and Israel to progressive forces, including communist parties, and informing international opinion on the expansionist nature of the Israeli state as a base for imperialism and a front against the Arab liberation movement. On the struggle to achieve socialism, the program called for the creation of a unified national front whose basic aim would be to concretize progressive social and economic transformations, to sharpen the struggle against imperialism, and to achieve popular democracy in order to implement the transformation to socialism.

The basic contradiction the program identified in this stage of Syria's development was the contradiction between the national liberation movement and imperialism, Zionism, and reactionaries. Large landowners and capitalists, the program maintained, rejected the social and economic transformations in progress and attempted to forestall them. Thus, it called for an economic policy based on developing the public sector, radical agrarian reform, and a limitation of the capitalist sector with the ultimate goal of its eradication. [38] "The main task of the communist party and all progressive revolutionary forces in Syria is to struggle to improve the state in its social content and political form in order to lead the participation of the working masses . . . actively in the leadership of Syrian Arab society."[39]

To encourage open debate of the draft program, the Central Committee recommended that its members not become involved in the discussions. They also recommended that the draft be circulated among party members only. However, Khalid Bakdash and Yusuf Faisal began campaigning against the proposed program, concentrating their attack on the program's concern for national issues and calling the draft chauvinist and anti-Soviet. They began campaigning against it through visits to grassroots organizations, contrary to the agreement of the drafting committee.

Khalid Bakdash's opposition to the program centered on the following issues:

1. The evaluation of Syria's internal conditions and the party's relationship with the Baath (although this was disguised in the program but nevertheless implied, particularly as it related to the civilian and military wings of the Baath Party).

2. The position vis-à-vis Arab unity, the Palestinian issue, and Palestinian liberation movements.

3. The independence of the party from Soviet domination and the place of Arab issues in the Communist Party platform.

4. Democracy in the party and, indirectly, the Politburo's condemnation of Bakdash's style of leadership.

At the same time these issues were being discussed, the problems were heightened by the popular support of Palestinian liberation movements, particularly following the Black September events of 19 September 1970 when the Jordanian government and the Palestinian liberation movements clashed.

Accommodation with the al-Assad Regime

In November 1970, Hafez al-Assad came to power in Syria by coup d'etat and initiated the so-called "corrective movement" in government (a movement which purged the civil wing of the Baath Party and stamped out opposition to the militarization of Syrian politics). The coup crystallized a power struggle for control of the Syrian Communist Party by Khalid Bakdash. Immediately after the Assad coup, the Politburo of the SCP met to discuss adoption of a position vis-à-vis the coup. Assad quite clearly represented Baathist military elements and was already well-known for his struggle against the civilian wing of the party. He was also less pro-Soviet than the ousted Baath leaders, and in October 1968 even accused Yusuf Z'ayaen (then prime minister of Syria), of "behaving like a Soviet agent." [40] Demonstrations against the coup in Aleppo and Damascus were supported by communist cadres, and the Politburo issued a communiqué supporting these demonstrations. In effect, the demonstrations expressed sympathies with the civilian wing of the Baath. Party support for the demonstrations against the Assad coup were an expression of this, and the Politburo affirmed this support in a majority vote of 5–2, with Khalid Bakdash and Yusuf Faisal opposing.[41]

The vote triggered Khalid Bakdash's struggle for control over the party apparatus. Indicating the opportunistic character of the struggle, in March 1971, Maurice Salibi, a member of the Central Committee, observed, "when the change took place in Syria, we were reluctant and cautious. We asked the question of whether this change was a victory for the reactionaries . . . Then we read the Regional Command's announcement, and we saw in it the spirit of seriousness and responsibility."[42] Reflecting on the Politburo vote in support of the demonstrations, in 1992 Bakdash noted, "I personally was not enthused about the party's participation in the demonstrations . . . My feeling was that Assad was a patriot and said we should not participate in this action."[43]

Having lost control of the Lebanese branch of the communist party,

Bakdash was wary of Politburo praxis. On the one hand, the Politburo's antipathy for the Assad regime contrasted with the Central Committee's enthusiasm to participate in state politics. On the other hand, the regime's need for Soviet assistance and Soviet interest in Syria advantaged Bakdash because of his long affiliation with the Soviet Union. These factors coalesced to give Bakdash the opportunity to broker power in the Central Committee at the expense of the Politburo. Assad, willing to accommodate the local communists to appease the Soviet Union, afforded Bakdash the opportunity to appoint two cabinet posts. One year after taking power, Assad noted, "We have not recognized any party officially, but the Communist Party exists and it is represented in the government and in the Council." [44] Two members, Yusuf Faisal, a member of the Politburo, and Omar Siba'ie, a member of the Central Committee, were chosen to represent the Syrian Communist Party in the new cabinet of al-Assad. Khalid Bakdash considered the acceptance of this offer to be significant because "it is an expansion of the party's power base."[45] He declared that this participation was basically to safeguard the progressive steps taken by the Baath since 1966, which were land reform, the nationalization of big enterprises, cooperation with the socialist camp in general and with the Soviet Union in particular, and the struggle against imperialism, Zionism, and reactionary forces. He praised the progressive nature of the new al-Assad regime.[46]

By May 1971, a serious rift appeared between Bakdash and the rest of the Politburo, with the exception of Faisal. It came to the surface while Bakdash was out of the country. The Politburo issued a statement attacking Bakdash, his record, and his style of leadership, describing it as "an unpleasant reminder of the cult of personality of the Stalinist era."[47] The statement also chastised him for supporting the maneuvers of the Damascus government, which were designed to stifle the voice of the party and to cause it to lose its leadership of the masses. The entire Politburo, supported by the rest of the party with the exception of the Aleppo and Jazirah districts and Yusuf Faisal, declared its opposition to Bakdash.[48] In order to resolve the crisis, Bakdash persuaded the Politburo to accept the mediation of the CPSU. The problem centered around the proposed program drafted by the Politburo. The CPSU struck a committee composed of Bulgarian and Soviet theoreticians to analyze the proposed program of the SCP. In general, the committee felt that the program paid too much attention to Arab issues, overemphasized Palestinian and Arab-Israeli relations, and paid too little attention to economic and Syrian conditions. They argued that the document did not give internal social and economic issues the attention they deserved and was most concerned with political issues. They also ac-

cused the draft program of ignoring class issues, which constituted the main distinction between a communist party and other political parties. Furthermore, they felt that the issue of unity had been divorced from its class content. They also complained that the program was too long and should be shorter than that of the ruling Baath Party. [49]

The Soviet political leadership explicitly criticized the idea of a unified Arab communist party and declared that "a unified communist party is an idea which is not feasible now. Even in the Arab progressive countries there exist great differences; each country has its own conditions and to eradicate the independence of local communist parties is not a progressive action."[50] Furthermore, the Soviet theoreticians suggested that the aims of the unified party could be interpreted as competing with the Baath.[51]

On the issue of Arab unity, which the theoreticians considered to be the most detailed section of the program, they rejected the notion of a unified Arab nation, criticized the idea of Arab unity as a reactionary concept, and ridiculed the objective of being a nationalist goal. The theoreticians emphasized that one of the forms of Arab unity that could be achieved was Islamic unity, which was reactionary. Support for the idea of Islamic unity, therefore, is incompatible with Marxism-Leninism. Furthermore, they asserted that a progressive form of Arab unity needed to be tied to progressive transformations within society. Because of this, the issue of Arab unity should be looked at from the point of view of Syrian social and economic development and tied to class issues. The short-range aims of the party should be to deal with the transformation of social and economic conditions as they related to peasants and workers, not to abstract issues of unity.[52] The issue of socialism and unity needed thorough analysis. Socialism should prevail first, not vice versa. The Soviet theoreticians insisted that even raising the slogan of unity at this stage was a hindrance to socialism and social transformation. Trotskyites and Chinese deviationists, they charged, were close to these negative positions. The theoreticians also pointed out that while nationalism was a concern of the Communist Party, it was not a primary one.[53] They insisted that the strategic aim of the party was socialism, not Arab unity. "There exist more nationalist [parties] than you . . . but there should not be more socialist [internationalist] parties than you . . . we should not compete with nationalist positions. . . . I do not reduce the importance of nationalist factors and I certainly do not say they are secondary but they should not be fundamental in any communist party's struggle . . . nationalism is not our slogan."[54]

Regarding the Palestinian issue and Israeli aggression, the theoreticians rejected the understanding of the issues of the Arab world from the Pales-

tinian viewpoint only. They emphasized that the Palestinian viewpoint should not be ignored and that there was a connection between Israeli aggression and the Palestine issue. However, the aim of removing Israel as a state was not tactically correct or acceptable in principle. Rather, the struggle should concentrate on changing the imperial nature of the Israeli state. [55]

In addition to these issues of fundamental principle, the CPSU committee made a comprehensive critique of the report and raised a number of concerns:

1. The portrayal of Soviet policy in the United Nations on the Palestine issue was unfair. While the Soviet Union had supported the Palestine Partition Plan in 1947, it took a firm stand against Israeli aggression in 1956 and 1967.[56]

2. On the issue of support for the Palestine liberation movement, the proletariat should not support every revolutionary Palestinian movement. While the struggle of the Palestinian people was important, the international revolutionary movement was much more important. Self-determination for the Palestinians and their return to their homeland was not a strategic aim for the Communist Party.[57] "We must look at the strategic issues from a class base. . . . Socialism is the aim.[58]

While Zionism "is a bourgeois Jewish nationalist organization which is a tool of international imperialism,"[59] Palestinian movements needed to be analyzed realistically. The existence of Israel was a fact and its destruction would not be possible given the international environment. The Palestinian issue was part of the Arab revolutionary movement, not its "axis." The strengthening and spread of democratic progressive regimes, which would be a victory for socialism, was the central goal.[60]

3. Regarding Syrian conditions, the CPSU committee agreed that the Syrian regime was progressive and that the communists should participate in it.[61] They also reprimanded the draft committee for the absence of concepts like the path to non-capitalist development. The concept of revolutionary democracy was criticized as alien to the international communist movement and the idea of creating a popular democratic system was rejected. It was cautioned that some of the phrases in the program could be misunderstood by the Baath leadership as a desire that they be replaced—for example, the state-

ment that the transformation to socialism would take place under the auspices of the working class and its party. On the other hand, it complimented Bakdash's understanding of the Progressive National Front which he propagated in the popular socialist media. [62]

4. Regarding the Syrian Communist Party, there should not be an overemphasis on the mistakes of the past. There should be more cooperation among the party leadership, who "should find the strength and power to put the party's interests and the communist movement above their personal interests, and should strengthen the party on a Marxist-Leninist basis. . . . Your differences are not a secret any more. . . . The most important thing to do is to emerge from the crisis without any further disturbance."[63]

Party Polarization and the 1971 National Conference

In late November 1971, the national conference was held to present the draft program to the party membership. All of the intellectual, political, and organizational issues that were dividing the Politburo were brought into the open. Jordanian, Iraqi, and Lebanese communist parties attended the conference and attempted to seek reconciliation between Bakdash and the Politburo. The spokesman for these parties was Fuad Nasar, first secretary of the Jordanian Communist Party, a very respected personality in Arab communist circles. At the conference, he stressed the need for unity. He emphasized that the impact of the Syrian Communist Party went beyond its local environment and affected not only Syrian progressive forces but the Arab liberation movement and the communist movement in Arab countries. He further presented the following suggestions to resolve the conflict:

1. On the political level, he argued that there were three elements to be considered:

   (a) the current draft of the political program;

   (b) the theoretical remarks by the CPSU committee; and

   (c) the views of the grassroots and party organizations.

Nasar recommended the referral of all the above to the drafting committee through the Central Committee to prepare a new draft for a forthcoming congress or conference.[64]

2. On the organizational level, Nasar called for the condemnation of all cliques and deviationist activities and for the respect of all legitimate party organizations and bylaws. He also called for a delay of the

congress until a suitable time when these suggestions had been discussed and tempers had cooled. [65]

The national conference of the party unanimously adopted the following resolutions:[66]

1. On the political level, discussions of the draft program were to continue, with attention to the "observations" of the Arab and international communist movements. Recommendations were to be referred back to the Central Committee, which was charged with revising the draft in the light of recommendations for presentation to another national conference.

2. On the organizational level, all divisionist activities and groupings were condemned. The legitimacy of party organs and bylaws was emphasized. A national conference should not be held until the environment improved and party unity prevailed.

In a speech to the conference, Khalid Bakdash declared that the most important issue "is crystal clear, that the center of discussion and analysis is the question of our position toward the Soviet Union and the great party of Lenin . . . ;this issue is the fundamental question and Syria's destiny depends on the destiny of the progressive regime in Syria (in other words, the destiny of the current road of non-capitalist development and whether it continues or stops, emptied of its content); and on the success of this destiny, the battle to eradicate Israeli aggression [of 1967], and even more the solving of the Palestinian issue. . . . It is not enough that we communists declare our friendship to the Soviet Union. We must coordinate our strategy with the general strategy of the international revolutionary movement of which the CPSU is its main vanguard. This is the main issue and this is what distinguishes us communists from other progressive groups."[67]

Bakdash went on to say that when he attended the Seventh Comintern in Moscow in 1935 as a representative of the SCP and was elected to the Presidium, the decisions of the Comintern were that "we communists must defend every action of Soviet foreign policy. . . . Is it possible, then, for any of us to condemn the Soviet position on the partition of Palestine? Is it possible for any of us now to condemn the current Soviet position relative to the Palestinian issue: . . . is it permissible, for example, on a great international issue such as the Palestinian issue to try to drive a wedge between us and the party of Lenin, not only in tactics but also in the aim, and the strategic aim at that . . . this talk is contrary to the decision of the seventh Comintern which called for identical goals; it is contrary to the interna-

tional proletariat and to the class position; and in the final analysis against the interests of the Arab people and our interests as a party. . . . I beg you to denounce every claim that we are friends of the Soviet Union but differ from it in our strategic aim." [68]

He went on to emphasize that the party should follow the Soviet position regarding Syria. The main strategic aim of the Syrian Communist Party should be to safeguard the progressive regime in its march to socialism. " We cannot expose this progressive nationalist regime to the danger, for example, of a military adventure to liberate the Golan Heights or any other Arab occupied land haphazardly without the necessary preparation . . . We communists cannot be calling for independence from the Soviet Union and the party of Lenin. We are the advocates of complete coordination with them. . . . The strategy of our party must coincide with the strategy of the international revolutionary movement whose vanguard is the Soviet Union and the party of Lenin."[69] Bakdash spoke of Soviet policy, of anti-imperialism, and the alliance with the revolutionary nationalist movement. He declared emphatically that his challengers were trying to get the party to take a position against the Syrian government and accused them of trying to push the party into a position against Hafez al-Assad and his movement of 16 November 1970. He suggested that his detractors were counting on the Politburo's refusal to support the corrective movement of al-Assad.[70]

Bakdash praised all the advice given by the CPSU theoreticians, particularly in regard to the case of Palestine. As for the unified Arab communist party, he argued, "What is this unified party which is not approved by the entire international communist movement and which is not even accepted by any other of the brotherly communist parties in any Arab country . . . ?"[71]

Regarding conditions inside the party, Bakdash insisted that the issues were political and theoretical in nature. As he saw it, the main reasons were:

> theoretically, the pressure of nationalist thought and nationalism in general; this is understandable as there is a part of the nation's land occupied by an enemy. . . . Politically, one of the reasons for the crisis, no doubt, is the new complicated and difficult task facing this party in the current stage. Under the new conditions, some of the comrades may believe that the new tasks require party reorganization, including a basic change in its structural foundations. This resulted in a shift in the understanding of the concept of democratic centralism. [As a result] they sometimes ask for more democracy and at other times they demand stronger centralism . . . as if the old Leninist teachings

and organization are no longer suitable. . . . If the conflict is not intellectual, and some claim it is not. . . . Let us [for a moment] forget the unified Arab communist party and let us forget about exaggerations and extremist slogans on the Palestinian issue and let us forget about unconditional Arab unity . . . let us admit frankly that the main foundations of our conflict are political and intellectual . . . ;democratic centralism is a part of the parcel and it is an integrated political, theoretical and organizational system which guarantees the unity of action and will, without which the sought after proletarian party cannot be achieved and cannot function as a vanguard of the working class and toiling masses. This is what Lenin taught us. It is well known that the idea of this party . . . is part of the legacy of Lenin in improving Marxism and pushing it forward. Let me repeat: democratic centralism is this unity of action and will. Democracy is a collective leadership in the internal life of the party. It is based on the principle of election and the true representation of the will of the party membership in this election. . . . It is the submission of the minority to the will of the majority; the acceptance of the lower organizations to the upper ones and the commitment of all party members to the decisions of the party congress; in other words, a respect for the internalbylaws as a unit and not a grasping at one article of these internal bylaws while ignoring other bylaws. [72]

Bakdash criticized what he called the indirect attack on the Soviet Union and called for:

1. A "unified political and intellectual Marxist-Leninist foundation."

2. Embracing the Soviet Union, the "party of Lenin," not "only as a friend but as a vanguard of the international revolutionary movement."

3. Respect for the principles of democratic centralism as a flexible concept that is practiced as conditions require.[73]

Because the issues were not solved, the party was paralyzed and the membership was immersed in internal conflict. As a result, Khalid Bakdash solicited the arbitration of the CPSU. A Soviet delegation arrived in Damascus in late 1971 to support Bakdash. This did not resolve the problem and he sought the pressure of the other Arab communist parties to further arbitrate the dispute and silence his critics. Thus, at the beginning of 1972, representatives of the Arab communist parties decided to intervene to constrain the dispute. They established a committee to re-draft a program

designed to replace the old draft, which had been identified as the cause of the crisis. In February, a new Soviet mediation effort led by Kirill Mazurov, vice president of the Soviet Council, was attempted. This too failed. [74]

The confrontation reached its peak when on 31 March 1972 the Damascus branch of the party (considered the most anti-Bakdash group, the most important center of party activity, and the backbone of the party) elected a staunch critic of Bakdash, Yusuf Nimr, as secretary of the Damascus region. The Damascus office claimed that 70 to 80 percent of the membership participated in the election. In accordance with the internal bylaws, the election was approved by the Central Committee and the Politburo. It was attended by dissident Politburo members Daniel Neimah, Dhuhair Abd al-Samad, Ibrahim Bakri, and Riyadh al-Turk.[75] Khalid Bakdash, fighting for power, issued his famous declaration on 3 March 1972. He brought the simmering conflict into the open in an attempt to rally all his support and launch an all-out attack on his opposition. The statement was signed by half of the membership of the Central Committee and all of his supporters from the branches, including five of the seven party members in Parliament. Bakdash took this to the membership and declared that there was a conspiracy engineered during the third congress by a "group of deviationist, adventurist, opportunists . . . led by Riyadh al-Turk who continued destructive activities in the intellectual and political spheres, and refused to abandon their main aim of changing party policy by changing its leadership. . . . If they did not succeed in their efforts, then they intended to destroy the party. The activities of this group created the condition of a party split."[76]

Bakdash argued that the group had attempted to undermine the party's accomplishments under his leadership and distort its history. This really meant that Bakdash considered himself the party and its history, and any attack on him was an attack on the party. He charged that the group had abandoned class struggle and the international communist position in favor of:

> chauvinist, bourgeois nationalist ideas. . . . For example, in the case of Palestine, the deviationist, adventurist group objected to the slogans of the Third Congress which were the struggle for the eradication of Israeli aggression, the liberation of the occupied land, the guarantees of the right of the Palestinian people to return to their homeland and self-determination. Instead, extremist slogans were adopted that were considered by the international communist movement and by a great number of the progressive Arab liberation movements to be

contrary to the interests of the Palestinian issue itself. . . . As regards the Palestinian issue, they also ignored the necessity and importance of coordination and compromise in the position of the brotherly communist Arab parties and the international movement led by the Soviet Communist Party, our great supporter on all issues including the Palestinian issue . . . this clique in its "verbal" analysis went further in its attempt to consider guerrilla action as if it were the main and principal factor in the struggle against occupation and Zionist aggression, as if guerrilla action were the vanguard of the Arab liberation movement. They began looking to the Palestinian issue and all Arab issues, including the local one, from the point of view of extremist Palestinian guerrilla movements. . . . Those deviationist opportunists oppose to the death any attempt to criticize the guerrilla movement's mistakes which may lead to the embarrassment of progressive regimes and the refusal of these guerrilla movements to coordinate their activities with [these regimes]. . . . In regard to Arab unity, the deviationist clique adhered to non-realistic, non-class positions which claim . . . that any form of Arab unity must be progressive . . . it is clear that the position of the clique will result in grave damage to the achievement of Arab unity itself and will end up separating the struggle for unity from that of socialism, which is the main and principal aim of all communist parties . . . thus their distance from the scientific and objective position toward Arab unity led them to other contradictions when they adopted the slogan of a unified Arab communist party and refused to abandon their assertion, despite all the evidence which was presented to them that their slogan was not practical or realistic under current historical conditions. This was a slogan which would do damage to the policy of this party and the communist parties in the other Arab countries. [77]

Bakdash attacked his opponents and presented them as being enemies of the regime, in effect guaranteeing them the wrath of the new military rulers and threatening their supporters with retaliation. His attack was based on their position on Palestine and Arab unity. He portrayed them as uncooperative with the ruling Baath. Bakdash emphasized this when he declared:

party policy was always based on active and serious cooperation with all progressive forces in the country and primarily with the Baath because it is a progressive party that represents revolutionary democracy. When the crisis occurred within the Baath in November 1970, a

great number of the Central Committee members were in favour of the position that our party should be more principled and realistic. However, when the temporary regional command promulgated the 16 November 1970 declaration which included positions and principles the communists had long struggled for, our party took a positive position and decided to cooperate with the temporary regional leadership. Later, when the party was invited to participate in the government of Hafez al-Assad, the adventurist clique tried very hard to stand against this. They voted against our participation in the Baath government and insisted on its right, as a minority, in communicating this position to the rest of the party. From that time on, the deviationist, opportunist clique has not stopped its attempt to ignore the accomplishments and the positive aspects of the current situation. They have exaggerated the negative aspects [of the Assad regime] and tried to push the party toward adventurist and isolationist positions . . . By the time the Progressive National Front was declared . . . elements of this clique still did not see anything positive in it and exaggerated the negative. . . . They described our participation in the progressive national front as surrendering the party and dismantling it. . . . The co-operation that our party embarked upon with the Baath . . . should not be limited to only verbal support but requires active participation and the protection and defense of this progressive regime in its dealings with the internal, Arab, and international issues facing our country. [78]

He also accused his opponents of withdrawing from the CPSU and distorting the Soviet position on Arab issues, especially Palestine,

the Arab masses and other progressive forces realize the close connection between success in our battle of destiny and the faithful friendship and cooperation with the Soviet Union. . . . The clique began sowing . . . the spirit of mistrust and doubt about this relationship, repeating slogans like "we understand our issues more than they" and "we could disagree with them" . . . the situation developed to the point that some leaders of the clique joyfully announced that Soviet policy had failed in the region. . . . They were rebellious when they read the comments of the brotherly parties on their political program, including those of the Soviet comrades. They united to challenge these ideas and expose them. . . . What was goading was [then] transformed into an open attack . . . Friendship with the Soviet Union, in the opinion of the communists, is not only a slogan raised or repeated and is

not an appreciation only of the valuable aid the Soviet Union offers to our countries. . . . It is more than that . . . it is a principled position whose basis is the complete confidence in and strong solidarity without reservations with the CPSU, the party of Lenin, the faithful [party] to the principles of the international proletariat and the first defender of the purity of Marxist-Leninist theory . . . our communist party always considered that the measurement of the [true] international proletariat in our age is in accordance with every communist party's position towards the Soviet Union. [79]

Bakdash called for intellectual caution with regard to the anti-Marxist-Leninist position of his opponents: "They have called their falsifications Marxist-Leninist thought. . . . They call their destructive actions . . . a [process] to build a new revolutionary party. . . . They trampled on the principles of democratic centralism and on the internal bylaws and disrespected all organizational traditions."[80]

Bakdash in effect argued that because of local political conditions and the dynamics of Syrian-Soviet politics, both the Baathist regime and international communism, led by the Soviet Union, were in need of each other's support. The Syrian regime was heavily dependent on Soviet aid, and the Soviets, in need of continuing Syrian cooperation in the region, were cautious not to endanger the Syrian-Soviet Treaty of 1970, particularly as al-Assad was known to be less inclined toward the Soviet Union than the regime he had overthrown. Because of these factors, the Soviets were unwilling to get involved in squabbles between local communist factions and national revolutionary / military regimes which could endanger their interests in the region.

Bakdash was able to position himself as a linchpin between the Assad regime and the Soviet Union. His political strategy concentrated on two fronts: on one hand he presented himself as the guardian of communism in Syria, a staunch supporter of the Soviet Union and more supportive of the Soviets than his opponents, and on the other he presented himself as completely committed to the principle of cooperation with the Baathist regime in Syria, while characterizing his opponents as antagonistic to the regime. In doing this, he located himself in line with the Soviet objective of supporting nationalist regimes regardless of their position toward local communist groups. Bakdash made himself indispensable to the Assad regime as the Soviet Union's staunchest friend, who was willing to cooperate unconditionally with the Baathists, who needed Soviet support in technical and foreign aid and in the area of international diplomacy. Hence, he portrayed

his opponents as the enemies of the Baathist regime and in conflict with the Soviet Union, thus engendering the animosity of both Soviet and Baathist governments and making himself the only acceptable alternative suitable to both regimes.

Bakdash defused the issues of his personality cult. He redefined the whole party conflict in terms of cooperation with the Soviet Union and the Baath regime. Thus, he forced his opponents to defend their position from assaults in both directions. As a result, fearing the oppression of the regime and the loss of credibility with the Soviet Union, the Politburo was forced to address Khalid Bakdash's charges.

Members of the Politburo, shaken by the vehemence of Bakdash's accusations and fearing for their safety, hurriedly responded by declaring, "our party is passing through the most dangerous stage of its entire history from its inception to now." [81] They accused Bakdash of violating the traditions and bylaws of the party, describing his actions as a "continuation of considering his personal style as the party by-law."[82] They rejected Bakdash's accusation that they opposed the Soviet relationship and his allegation that the Politburo was against the creation and participation of the party in the Progressive National Front.[83] The Politburo met on 5 April 1972 and issued two statements responding to Bakdash's charges. One was a declaration sent to Hafez al-Assad praising "the role of the Baath in the national struggle and its contribution toward establishing the [proposed] Tripartite Union [between Egypt, Syria, and Libya] and strengthening its ties with the Soviet Union."[84] The second document, entitled "Report by the Politburo on the Situation Developing within the Party," was an effort to repair damage with the Soviet Union. It declared, "The politburo . . . asks the comrades who issued the divisive statement to work once again within the framework of legitimate party organs. . . . On the basis of the principles of Marxism-Leninism and proletarian internationalism, and on the basis of firm friendship between our Syrian Communist Party and the great party of Lenin, the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, we can solve all differences in the movement, and consolidate Soviet-Arab friendship."[85] The two declarations were signed by the Politburo of the Central Committee of the Syrian Communist Party: Dhuhair Abd al-Samad, Daniel Neimah, Ibrahim Bakri, Riyadh al-Turk, and 'Umar Qishash.

Split Party

Soon thereafter, the party was licensed and became public. Parallel organizations and publications started to appear in the name of the party

throughout the country.[86] The Politburo accused Bakdash of forming a parallel party to replace their "legal" party, while Bakdash tried to regain his control of the Damascus branch of the party. There was an election for the post of secretary in the Damascus district. Bakdash, with some of his supporters from Damascus, boycotted the election, which was held on 31 March 1972. On 4 April 1972, he held a meeting and declared that the 31 March election was invalid. He then helped elect one of his protégés, Murad Yusuf, as the Damascus district secretary. The next day the Politburo declared its support of the election of 31 March, which Bakdash and Faisal had declined to attend. On behalf of the Politburo, Bakdash had previously suggested the appointment of Dhuhair Abd al-Samad and Daniel Neimah as representatives, and these two had in fact attended the meeting, in effect substantiating its legality.[87]

Bakdash, however, continued his conflict with the Politburo. On one occasion, he declared, "Everybody knows that I could have prevented Riyadh al-Turk and those who supported him from getting on the Central Committee or Politburo. . . . Their views and deviationist tendencies were well-known. It would have been easy to expose it and unmask it in the third congress. However, we preferred to leave things to take their natural course.[88]

Taking the conflict to the grassroots, he orchestrated demonstrations of personal popularity during the birthday celebrations sponsored by the Syrian-Soviet Friendship Society in the Soviet Cultural Centre in Damascus on the occasion of Lenin's 102nd birthday. These celebrations were attended by the political leadership of Syria and the Syrian Communist Party Politburo. Among the crowd, Bakdash had planted a number of his supporters with the intention of demonstrating his popularity in the party and challenging the dissident Politburo members. In response, supporters of the Politburo began chanting slogans in support of the collective leadership and the friendship between the Syrian Communist Party and the Soviet Union. This quickly degenerated into a fistfight, totally disrupting the celebration.[89]

After five weeks of internal party conflict, an enlarged meeting of the Central Committee was held on 5 May 1972 to discuss the crisis in the party.[90] This was attended by a majority of the Central Committee membership, a number of district representatives, and local party committees from different parts of the country, with the exception of Khalid Bakdash and his followers.

Dhuhair Abd al-Samad, secretary of the party and a Politburo member who was also designated acting general secretary, gave a report on the cri-

sis in the party. The report blamed Yusuf Faisal and Bakdash for the split, stating that "All indications and proofs point towards Khalid [Bakdash] and Yusuf [Faisal], and reveal that they and their followers are moving towards a split. They are creating a crisis which will lead to the formation of a parallel party by creating differences and divisions and artificial disagreements within the party. This is not new. During the National Conference of 1971, Yusuf Faisal declared on more than one occasion, 'Each one of us should take his followers and create his own party' . . . this is an old idea and was planned by Bakdash and Faisal. The declaration of April 3 is nothing more than an expression of this plan." [91]

Al-Samad went on to condemn the actions of Bakdash and delineated ten reasons for them:

1. The nature of the new international liberation movement necessitated positions that conflicted with the traditional communist perspective.

2. Because of the party's participation in the government, opportunism and personal rivalry began to appear.

3. Bourgeois elements in the party played a role in taking positions that were not progressive, particularly on issues like land reform, nationalization, and the adoption of extreme leftist, adventurist positions.

4. An increase in political consciousness among party cadres, which made them less susceptible to manipulation by the leadership.

5. The leadership's loss of respect for the grassroots, manifested in their arrogance and their contempt for nationalist and other progressive forces.

6. Avoidance of serious Arab issues under the excuse that these were nationalist and chauvinist positions.[92]

7. The impact of the Arab army's defeat on 5 June 1967, which demoralized the leadership of the Syrian Communist Party and resulted in a loss of faith in the Arab national liberation movement and the rejection of the Palestine liberation movement as more harmful to the Palestinian cause than reactionaries and oppressive regimes.[93]

8. The personality cult that had developed around Khalid Bakdash, which had concentrated all power in his hands for thirty-five years.

9. The lack of serious commitment to party principles and tenets by Bakdash and his group, who, by taking the problem directly to the membership in order to weaken the legitimately elected leadership of the party, were willing to split the party rather than deal with the issues.

10. Elements external to the party (Soviet and Baathist intrigue) played a very powerful role in exacerbating the problem. [94]

Abd al-Samad considered the attempt by Bakdash and Faisal to hinder the work of the Politburo as the event precipitating the crisis. Faisal and Bakdash sabotaged the Politburo's exercise of power by absenting them-selves from meetings, which could not take place without the secretary general. Bakdash also delegated all party responsibilities to Yusuf Faisal, who always excused himself with the claim of heavy duties in the Assad cabinet. As a result, Bakdash was not aware of the day-to-day business of the party.

> While Khalid [Bakdash] was officially secretary general, he knew nothing about party affairs. He was a front . . . while Yusuf [Faisal] and others were running the party . . . the Politburo's work and meetings were strange after the congress. The Politburo was working comparatively well and there was a conscious effort to take unanimous and semiunanimous decisions; however, when Khalid and Yusuf disagreed with an opinion, they resorted to delaying tactics and dialogue in order to hinder taking a final decision. This led some members of the Politburo to offer more concessions just to reach collective consensus. . . . The practical result was the subjugation of the majority to the minority. . . . In the meantime, Yusuf and Khalid were building an illegitimate parallel center of power behind the backs of the Politburo and Central Committee, sabotaging the legitimate decisions of the Politburo and making it appear incapable of performing its leadership role.[95]

Prior to Bakdash's 3 April declaration, Daniel Neimah and Riyadh al-Turk became the ideological articulators for the anti-Bakdash group. Faisal attempted to get Neimah to accept a compromise calling for an equal division of seats in the Politburo and Central Committee between Bakdash and his proponents and opponents. However, the Politburo rejected this proposal because it was contrary to the results of the legitimate elections of the congress. In the meantime, the Faisal-Bakdash group was attempting to build its base of support, particularly in the important Damascus district where anti-Bakdash sentiment was very strong. According to Abd al-Samad's report, the Politburo reacted strongly, informing Faisal and Bakdash that "There exists in the party organizations legitimately elected by the [third] congress, and simultaneously there exists parallel organizations led by you [Faisal and Bakdash]. If you think that you represent a bloc

in the party, we do not claim to represent one. We . . . refuse to speak in the name of a bloc. . . . We ask that all adhere to the internal by-laws and legitimate party organizations." [96]

In his report, abd al-Samad pointed out that there are two basic parts to bakdash's 3 April declaration in which he claimed the Damascus conference was illegal:

1. An open attempt to incite the regime's animosities toward one group in the party.

2. A clear attempt to incite the animosity of socialist countries in general, and the Soviet Union in particular, toward one section of the party.[97]

The 3 April declaration accused Riyadh al-Turk of leading a deviationist, adventurist clique. Abd al-Samad suggested that the attack on Riyadh al-Turk was a front to accuse the other,s a prelude to attack them, and an attempt to create division among the members of the Politburo. Abd al-Samad went on to say that the concentration on Riyadh al-Turk was because he was a new member of the Politburo and less known to the international and Arab communist movement. Also, because he was outspoken, he was an easy target.[98] Abd al-Samad also referred to the attempt of Bakdash to win Dhuhair and Neimah to his side to make them the majority of eight on the Central Committee and the Politburo. He quoted Bakdash as saying, "Come with us and we will show you what we shall do to Riyadh al-Turk and the rest of them."[99] The report claimed the 3 April declaration was an accusation without foundation, pure febrication and completely contrary to party policy and the decisions of its organizations.[100]

Abd al-Samad's report also suggested that the dissident Politburo members were in contact with Hafez al-Assad and other Baath leaders. He also charged that they had contacted the Iraqi, Lebanese, and Jordanian communist parties after the Damascus conference and requested their intervention in order to bridge the rift and to help implement the party national conference resolutions of November 1971. The resolutions had been drafted upon the suggestions of delegates from the Arab parties and approved by the Central Committee. Thus, representatives of the communist parties of Iraq and Lebanon, soon followed by the Jordanians, arrived in Damascus and attempted to mediate a resolutions to the conflict. They were invited by the Central Committee to meet with them on 5 Aprol for an enlarged Central Committee conference. The meeting was called to arbitrate the internal rift within the Syrian party. In response to the invitation, Faisal sent a communication to the Politburo delineating a number of conditions,

which included (a) self-criticism by those who had reservations about participating in government and have critical views of the Soviet Union; (b) the equal division of party organizations between the two factions; (c) Faisal's appointment as secretary general and Bakdash's as party president; (d) unequivocal and immediate acceptance of all recommendations by Soviet theoreticians on the party program; and (e) the reconvening of a new conference and elections for the entire anti-Bakdash faction, particularly in the Damascus region.

The party Politburo rejected this and responded that self-criticism for issues that were discussed was unacceptable. The Politburo was where views were aired and discussed confidentially and freely, and the Politburo members were only accountable if they subsequently deviated from the agreed decisions. [101] While some Politburo members were committed to limiting Bakdash's control of the party, they were not willing to risk the animosity of the Assad regime, which was known for its brutality, or risk isolation from other international and Arab communist movements. It appeared that Bakdash was trying to split the Politburo by overplaying the extreme anti-Bakdash faction led by Riyadh al-Turk and frightening moderates into dissociating from Riyadh al-Turk.

The Politburo argued that the proposal to divide it and the Central Committee was in conflict with the resolutions of the third congress and an attempt to transform a minority into a majority. As for the appointment of Khalid Bakdash as president and Faisal as secretary general, it was proposed that if Faisal publicly denounced the 3 April declaration and worked to dissolve the bloc he had established and further admitted responsibility for his actions, then his nomination as secretary general would be taken seriously and the election of Bakdash as party president would not be opposed.[102] The recommendations of the Soviet theoreticians on the political program would be referred to committee as authorized by the Central Committee and the national conference. Furthermore, the Politburo did not object to reelections, including in the Damascus region but with the exception of four smaller problematic districts. The Politburo also expressed its strong desire to prepare for a subsequent congress to elect a new Central Committee and secretary general.[103]

To deal with the immediate issue of the split, the Politburo decided (a) to continue its efforts to unify the party and repair the division and (b) to strengthen the party through efforts among workers, peasants, and intellectual revolutionaries aimed at regaining credibility in the country. The loss of a number of the cadre as a result of the split was deplored. Bakdash was held responsible for the crisis as he did not behave as a secretary gen-

eral but rather as the leader of a clique, and he exploited the divisions within the party by rewarding his friends and punishing his opponents. The Politburo also accused Bakdash of using his reputation and influence since the third congress to damage the reputation of the Syrian, international, and Arab communist movements. It concluded with a call for a fourth congress and warned Bakdash and his followers not to oppose this. [104]

In a meeting of 5 May, the enlarged membership of the Central Committee supported the Politburo position, deplored the declaration of 3 April, and called for the unity of the party. It appealed to Bakdash and his group to reconsider their position and called upon the international and Arab communist parties and all progressive forces to work for a reunification of the party.[105] Khalid Bakdash responded on 14 May by issuing a statement calling the meeting illegal and challenging its legitimacy. According to Bakdash, the Central Committee was the only organ that had the right to call for such a meeting. The meeting could not be held without a decision from the Central Committee, and the decision could not be made in the absence of half of the Central Committee or without the knowledge of the secretary general. In addition, he argued, the majority of the party organizational representatives were not present.[106]

In early July 1972, the Politburo responded officially and publicly to the Bakdash declaration of 3 April. It deplored the declaration, stating that the Central Committee did not respond immediately in order to give Bakdash time to reconsider. It also wanted to give mediation a chance and described the 3 April statement as an "act of aggression" against the party. The response noted that the timing of the declaration was very destructive and came when serious efforts were being made by the party to find accommodation with other progressive national forces in Syria, particularly the Palestinian movement. It also asserted that the declaration came at a time when "the assault of Zionist, imperialist and reactionary forces had increased in order to dismantle the Arab liberation movement and destroy their progressive regimes."[107] The Politburo questioned whether Bakdash "thinks that he has, in this action of his, strengthened the prestige of the party internally and on the Arab and international levels. Does he believe that this action of his strengthened the role of our party in the Progressive National Front?"[108] The Central Committee also emphasized that the conflict was deeply rooted in the experience of the party and the Bakdash style of leadership, and maintained that the declaration of 3 April falsified the causes of the conflict, particularly in regard to the position of the party vis-à-vis the progressive democratic revolutionary forces in Syria. The Politburo's response declared:

Since 1965, despite the opposition of Comrade Khalid [Bakdash] to follow a correct policy on alliances and cooperation with the Baath Arab Socialist Party and other progressive forces . . . [the dissidents in the Politburo] supported the actions taken by Egypt and other [progressive] Arab countries between 1961 and 1971 . . . Alliances with the democratic revolutionary regimes became the cornerstone of our party's strategy and tactics. Our third congress devoted its entire proceedings to this correct position . . . despite the fact that Comrade Khalid and some of his followers continued to reject the concept of non-capitalist development which created difficulties within the party in evaluating [Syrian developments] and the party's cooperation with the Baath and other progressive forces . . . from [1961 to 1971] our party emphasized continuously the points and principles of agreement with the Arab revolutionary movements rather than the points of disagreement. Our party's position towards the nationalist and progressive regimes is clearly and steadfastly delineated in both strategic and principled terms. We struggled and worked . . . to create good relations that could lead to the foundation of a [nationalist] front. Our third congress emphasized that the aim of a progressive nationalist front, socially, must be based on the working class, the masses of the peasants and all toiling people. In political terms, it should include all progressive political parties and forces that have formed in Syria historically and support the transformation [taking place] in agriculture, industry and commerce. . . . These progressive forces must cooperate and coordinate to form a nationalist progressive front in every Arab country. . . . Cooperation and coordination are a historic necessity required by the logic of the struggles against the forces of imperialism, colonialism, Zionism and reaction, in order to achieve complete national liberation, social progress, socialism and Arab unity. [109]

The Politburo response also stressed that the party had cooperated with the Baath from 23 February 1966 until Assad's corrective steps of 16 November 1971. It also pointed out that their participation in both governments and later in the Progressive National Front was part of the strategic aim of the Syrian Communist Party and proof of its commitment to the Baath regime in general and to Assad in particular. Bakdash's position on the concept of non-capitalist development was held to be incorrect in its analysis of the process of social development.

In Bakdash's analysis of the social classes of Syrian society, he neglected the destructive role of the bourgeoisie. In evaluating the role

of the different social classes, Bakdash believed that the process of social development moved gradually. Thus, in his opinion, the socialist revolution will not mature except when all national democratic conditions mature and when the productive forces develop into a capitalist society, to its highest level. . . . But reality is different in our country where the productive forces are backward. Bakdash's analysis led him to engineer party policy to allow for the emergence of capitalism in our country. . . . He went further than that and considered alliances with the bourgeoisie to be strategic alliances, not limited to the stage of national democratic revolution but able to be extended to the stage of building socialism . . . Bakdash's commitment to this policy did not allow him to realize the revolutionary possibilities within other social groups such as farmers and the petit bourgeoisie and their political representatives. For that reason he used to interpret as adventurism any actions by groups who worked to implement [progressive programs]. . . . Under the leadership of Bakdash, the party could not understand the bankruptcy of the bourgeoisie which could not achieve a national democratic revolution and could not develop the productive capitalist forces. [110]

The Politburo went on to explain that to obscure his incorrect understanding, Bakdash began questioning the intentions of the petit bourgeois reforms and exaggerated their weaknesses. They further explained that Bakdash viewed these accomplishments as capitalist achievements and reduced their importance in socialist development. This had a detrimental impact on their relationship with other Arab national democratic and progressive political forces, particularly in Syria and Egypt. They also argued that Bakdash attempted to set the regime against his opponents in the Politburo by provoking the Assad military regime to view these opponents as enemies of the state and enemies of the Soviet Union and its Communist Party.[111]

The Politburo also challenged Bakdash for his attack on their position on Arab unity and the falsification of the group's conception of the national issues, which were mainly based on the draft political program. On the same basis, they rejected Bakdash's attempt to create a contradiction between Arab unity and socialism. They declared that the issues of socialist transformation, non-capitalist development, and unity were not a monopoly of the working class and its parties alone but were within the provenance of the forces of the democratic revolutionaries, farmers, revolutionary intellectuals, the petit bourgeoisie, and their parties.[112]

The Politburo rejected the charge that there was an overemphasis in the draft program on pan-Arab issues and the Palestinian issue and declared, "We Syrian communists see that the working class and its communist party, the masses of the peasants and intellectual revolutionaries, should not neglect pan-Arab issues, because they are national issues, as some of the Marxist-Leninist pretenders would like to assert. Giving these issues the attention they deserve is a nationalist, class and internationalist responsibility. . . . The interest of communists with international liberation movements alone will not free them from their obligations to the national, patriotic and class issues of their own nation." [113]

At the conclusion of their response, the Politburo called upon the signatories of the declaration to return to the party and publicly withdraw the declaration, exercise self-criticism, accept the decisions of the third congress, accept the recommendations of the national conference that drafted the political report, dissolve their clique, agree on a date for the fourth congress to discuss and approve the political program, and elect a new party leadership.[114]

Moscow Agreement, 1972

In May 1972, a Soviet delegation visited Damascus and attempted unsuccessfully to unify the party. On 25 July 1972, seven members of the Politburo were summoned to Moscow at the instigation of Khalid Bakdash for a meeting between all of the conflicting parties and CPSU officials. An agreement was signed in Moscow which stipulated a specific time to implement a resolution of the conflict and the timing of a fourth congress by the end of 1972. On 9 August 1972, the Central Committee unanimously endorsed an information declaration which it issued to all members of the party explaining the late-July visit to Moscow by Bakdash, Faisal, Neimah, and Abd al-Samad from the Politburo; Riyadh al-Turk and Murad Yusuf, secretaries of the Central Committee; and Wasil Faisal, a Central Committee member. These were the leading opponents, and the visit resulted in a 25 July agreement known as the Moscow Agreement.

The delegation met with high officials of the CPSU Politburo and Central Committee members, as well as the International Secretariat of the CPSU. After the formality of supporting the Republic of Syria, praising its accomplishments under Hafez al-Assad, applauding Soviet-Arab friendship, and reaffirming commitment to the Arab liberation movement in general and the Palestinian struggle in particular, the seven members of the Central Committee discussed with their Soviet counterparts the difficulties

facing the Syrian Communist Party. They agreed on certain principles to reunite the party, appointing a committee of four (Bakdash, Faisal, Abd al-Samad, and Neimah) to oversee resolution of the conflict.

Soviet reluctance to ignore the Bakdash opposition's grievances signaled to Bakdash that the Soviets were not unconditionally behind him. Thus, it appeared that Bakdash and Faisal were losing the battle for control of the party. As a result, they tactfully attempted to reassert their power in the party by equalizing their numbers on the Central Committee and other party organizations. Furthermore, they claimed that the Politburo faction opposing them was not operating in good faith and that, moreover, this faction was surreptitiously preparing to ignore the Moscow Agreement in order to split the party. Thus, Bakdash and Faisal appeared as the only sincere implementers of the agreement.

In a 27 March 1973 letter addressed to Neimah and Abd al-Samad as the two representatives of the rebel faction of the Politburo, Bakdash and Faisal charged that their counterparts were insincere about implementing the Moscow Agreement because they refused, up to that point, any practical steps toward implementation of the Moscow agreement. On 22 January 1973, a delegation from Bakdash offered eight recommendations to strengthen Bakdash's position while appearing to satisfy the Moscow Agreement. The first required the formation of a committee of four, representing two from each faction—Bakdash and Faisal from one and Abd al-Samad and Neimah from the other. This gave each faction equal weight regardless of the degree of cadre support. To implement the Moscow agreement as quickly as possible, the committee had to be endorsed in the first meeting of the Central Committee and, according to the Bakdash view, should then put into motion a mechanism to unify the party. Further, the committee should create an environment conducive to normalization of party operations and prepare for the fourth party congress. The committee of four was expected to present its report to the Central Committee within three months and initiate a process for unifying the party through the creation of committees of four in all party organizations, thus paralleling the main committee of four and representing equally both factions. It also called for an equal membership in the Politburo. If this were rejected, then all Politburo decisions had to be unanimous, which would paralyze the Politburo and Central Committee on any action contrary to Bakdash's view. [115]

In July 1973, another Soviet delegation arrived and pressured the Politburo to seek accommodation with Bakdash. Soon after, al-Samad, Neimah, and Bakri were designated by the Central Committee to deal with Bakdash

in order to implement the Moscow Agreement, though originally there had been a committee composed of Bakdash, Faisal, Neimah, and Dhuhair charged to work out these details. On 30 November 1973, Neimah, Dhuhair, and Bakri signed an agreement with Bakdash and Faisal, without the knowledge of the Politburo, to unify the party. On 3 December, the majority of the Politburo announced that it had not been consulted and therefore the agreement was null and void as it only reflected the opinion of the signatories. A few days later, Bakdash issued a declaration expelling Riyadh al-Turk and his main opponent, Yusuf Nimr, from the party. At the end of December 1973, the Politburo constituted the fourth congress and elected a new Central Committee, which included all of the staunch anti-Bakdash faction, including Nimr and Riyadh al-Turk, and installing Riyadh al-Turk secretary general. [116] This initiated two different communist parties in Syria, each carrying the same name, with the dissidents calling themselves the Syrian Communist Party, known popularly as the Politburo group. The other party, also calling itself the Syrian Communist Party, was popularly known as the Khalid Bakdash party.

Thus, by the middle of 1973, the party was split into two parallel organizations, each claiming to be the legitimate party. The Politburo group based its claim on the third congress, which elected its Central Committee and Politburo. A secretary general was elected by the Politburo. Thus, to this group, legitimacy was vested in the Politburo and not in the office of secretary general. This being so, the secretary general's selection by the Politburo could be (and was) nullified when the secretary general (Khalid Bakdash) rebelled against the Politburo, the only legitimate body elected by the third congress.

On 28 November 1973, an agreement was announced by the Bakdash group, two representatives of the rebel group (Neimah and Abd al-Samad), and Ibrahim Bakri, a member both of the Central Committee and the Politburo who had long been a spokesperson for the anti-Bakdash faction. Considering their long opposition to Bakdash, this caused tremors in the ranks of the Politburo group as, in effect, it shifted the balance of power in both the Central Committee and Politburo toward Bakdash's faction and reduced the opposition from a majority to a minority, inevitably leading to the defeat of dissident forces. The announcement claimed to put into effect all previous efforts to unify the party in accordance with the Moscow agreement. Bakdash was able to achieve this because of a fear of reprisal by the Assad regime. This resulted from the extreme positions of Riyadh al-Turk, who did not want to be used by the Assad regime, which he considered to be militaristic and undemocratic. Also, according to Faisal, a gentleman's

agreement had been reached that Bakdash would step down in a year or two and become a figurehead president of the party, allowing somebody else to become secretary general. [117]

Also, pressure had been exerted by the CPSU through the continuous visits to Damascus of important CPSU personalities, the last of whom, representing Brezhnev, was Kerlinko of the CPSU Politburo on 8 July 1973. Kerlinko reprimanded the entire party leadership, urging them to settle their affairs and implement the Moscow agreement. He was especially critical of Bakdash and indirectly indicated that the CPSU would not mind the selection of a new secretary general if that would solve the problem, as the Soviets wanted a cordial relationship between the party and the regime.[118]

Now Bakdash had a majority in the Politburo and the Central Committee. On 30 November, he convened a meeting of the Central Committee, an organization that he had boycotted since his 3 April 1973 declaration and to which the remaining rebel faction members were not even invited. The meeting of the Central Committee emphasized the agreement of 28 November signed by the committee of four and Bakri, without the endorsement of the rebel faction they were supposed to have represented. The commitment to implement the Moscow agreement was affirmed, the work of the main committee of four was endorsed, and another member of the Central Committee, Ibrahim Bakri, was added; the congress was delayed for a period not to extend beyond June 1974. The meeting also encouraged the committees in all parallel party organizations to work for the unification of the party under the direction of the main committee of four and the formation of equal member committees from both factions to supervise the important publications of the party. The draft political program would be determined by a national conference. It also stipulated an agreement on the selection of candidates for the new political leadership that would result from the nomination of officers in the fourth congress. It was agreed that the fourth congress would be held the following year, 1974.[119]

On 2 December 1973, the Politburo group held a meeting calling the 30 November Central Committee meeting illegal and invalid. It claimed that the November meeting was only a meeting of the Bakdash faction that had been attended by the defectors Neimah, Bakri, and Abd al-Samad, all of whom had broken ranks with the legitimate Central Committee. Further, as a result of Bakdash's earlier boycotting of the Central Committee after his 3 April declaration, the legitimate Central Committee, by majority vote, composed mainly of anti-Bakdash members, had appointed new members to the Central Committee and the Politburo to replace Bakdash and Faisal

in accordance with internal bylaws. This Central Committee, in December 1973, had decided to prepare for the forthcoming fourth congress, scheduled to be held in early January 1974, in accordance with the Moscow Agreement. [120]

On 20 December 1973, the Bakdash faction issued a letter to the members of this new Politburo, reprimanding their questioning of the Central Committee's meeting of 30 November, calling their membership in the parallel Central Committee illegal and contrary to party bylaws. Bakdash went on to advise them to denounce that action and accept the Central Committee legitimately elected by the third congress.[121] When they received no response to this, the Bakdash Central Committee expelled the anti-Bakdash group on 23 December.[122]

In a letter to the membership, the anti-Bakdash Central Committee explained that the acceptance of the Moscow Agreement had been an unfortunate compromise because it gave the minority Bakdash faction equal power in the committee of four to prepare for the upcoming congress and did not condemn the Bakdash declaration of 3 April. The Moscow Agreement had been reached, however, basically for the sake of reunifying the party and restoring power to the Central Committee so as to leave, ultimately, final decision-making power to the forthcoming congress, which was to have been held within five months of the date of the agreement. However, five months following the signing of the agreement, because of stalling by the Bakdash group, no serious steps had been taken to convene the congress. It further appeared that the Bakdash group manipulated the spirit and letter of the Moscow Agreement to give the committee of four absolute authority as the only policy-making organ in the party. According to this faction, unity for Khalid Bakdash meant the subjugation of the majority to the will of the minority (the Bakdash faction). The anti-Bakdash group charged that Bakdash had all along been preparing to regain control and that Bakdash considered the committee of four to be the legitimate authority in the party rather than the Central Committee.[123]

The anti-Bakdash faction, now known as the Politburo-Syrian Communist Party, in an attempt to assert the ultimate legitimacy of the Politburo over the secretary general, held its fourth congress in late December 1973. The congress was attended by 112 delegates representing all party districts. Fifty-five percent were of working-class background and ten percent were women. The most important document was the Central Committee's report, which was incorporated into the party's draft program. The program described the transformation of Syria to socialism through non-capitalist development as a gradual march to socialism in its final stage. This draft

program publicly committed the Politburo faction to the Assad regime and his Progressive National Front. The program emphasized the creation of a unified Arab communist party as a means to achieve a unified Arab state. It also emphasized the role of the Arab liberation movement as a distinct force in the international liberation movement. Accordingly, it stressed the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination in the creation of a democratic non-Zionist state. The document further maintained that the Arab liberation movement had a responsibility to support the Palestinian people's aspirations. [124] The congress subsequently elected a Central Committee in secret ballot. One of the most important decisions of the congress was the condemnation of the party split, the responsibility for which, the congress asserted, rested with Khalid Bakdash, whose administration of the party was described as a personality cult.[125]

In early January 1974, the anti-Bakdash Central Committee met and elected Riyadh al-Turk as secretary general and Politburo member. The Politburo was composed of Ahmad Fayez al-Fawaz, Badr al-Tawil, Riyadh al-Turk, 'Umar Qishash, Mohammed Wasil Faisal, Michel Jirges, Nuri Hajo al-Rifa'i, and Yusuf Nimr.[126]

On 19 April 1974, Khalid Bakdash and his group, completely ignoring the activities and the congress of the Politburo-Syrian Communist Party, announced that the fourth SCP congress would be held in early June 1974. As soon as his June 1974 congress was completed, Bakdash returned to his old oligarchic methods. According to Yusuf Faisal:

> Through the efforts of the international communist movement to reunify the party, . . . an agreement was reached . . . that Bakdash would become the president of the party for the period of a year or two at most. [Bakdash] made a clear commitment to do that. However, this commitment [to relinquish his post] was never fulfilled and from that time on he began creating a climate in the party that made the fulfillment of the agreement [to withdraw] difficult to accomplish. This left the door open for a further crisis and resulted in the formation of factions within the party. Even during the fourth congress, some symptoms [of a division] began to appear. Rumors began circulating about a "conspiracy" being hatched against the secretary general by comrades Yusuf Faisal and three other comrades, Ibrahim Bakri, Dhuhair Abd al-Samad, and Daniel Neimah; of a mobilization [by Bakdash] against a number of high ranking comrades and a rejection of the unity agreement [of 28 November 1973] which was finalized prior to the holding of the fourth congress. . . . After the fourth con-

gress, the tone of conspiracy against the secretary general resurfaced. [127]

Retrospective on the SCP Crisis

Using his communication network within the international communist movement, his status among Arab communist parties, his contacts with the East European communist mass media and governments, as well as his own influence and long-time service to the Soviet Union, Bakdash engineered his return to the locus of power within the party. He decimated any opposition, frightening those who were around him into submission and rewarding those who proved their absolute loyalty with lucrative party representation in the government and the Progressive National Front. What strengthened his hand all through this party crisis was that the Soviet Union and the international communist movement recognized only him and his group as the Syrian Communist Party. Further, what made him more attractive to the regime than those in the dissident factions was the fact that he gave his unconditional support to the regime while the dissidents were raising questions about the nature of the regime and the party's degree of cooperation with it. Thus, the Bakdash group enjoyed both cabinet representation and participation in the Progressive National Front. To serve the regime and prove his loyalty, Bakdash went as far as to link the interests of the Soviet Union and the Arab national movement with those of the Syrian regime. The party newspaper repeatedly declared its complete confidence in the Soviet position and its total support for the Assad regime's policies. Emphasizing the mutual dependence of both Syria and other progressive Arab forces with those of the Soviet Union, the party newspaper asserted that both interests could coincide through mutual cooperation.

When Syria became politically and militarily involved in Lebanon in early June 1976, this incited the wrath of many Arab regimes, the Palestinians, Lebanese nationalists, and Arab nationalists. Between June and November of that year, *Nidhal al-Sha'ab* (the official organ of the SCP) repeatedly and without reservation supported the Syrian regime's position and encouraged the Soviets to accept this intervention. Furthermore, it called upon the Arab, Lebanese, and Palestinian forces to support the Syrian position. Thus, Khalid Bakdash was able to navigate the muddy waters of his party, Syrian turmoil, and Arab politics and hold his fifth congress in May 1980.

Chapter 8—
The Disintegration of the Syrian Communist Party

By 1974, the process of disintegration of the Syrian Communist Party had progressed so far that it was no longer only two "wings" of one party. Indeed, soon after Riyadh al-Turk was elected as secretary general in January 1974 by the anti-Bakdash Politburo group, conflict began to arise within the leadership of the Politburo group itself. Yusuf Nimr broke away to form a new organization called Itihad al-Shiouy'ieen fi Suriyah (Union of Communists in Syria) and charged that the crisis emanated from Riyadh al-Turk's personal style of leadership. Al-Turk, he maintained, was guilty of Bakdash's style of control and did not allow for the collective leadership process that had been expected. [1]

Bakdash continued to use the SCP name because of his association with it for almost half a century. The Politburo group also clung to the old name as this gave more legitimacy to the group and capitalized on the special and historic role of the Syrian Communist Party in Syrian politics. The group in fact popularized its association with the old name out of a fear of the wrath of the regime.

There was much popular support for Politburo group, particularly among the younger party cadre and new recruits who had expected some changes in the original Syrian Communist Party in both leadership style and substantive ideological positioning, particularly after its isolation following the breakup of the UAR in 1961 and the 1967 Arab-Israeli War. These aspirations for change were directed toward the Soviet position vis-à-vis Arab issues, Soviet control over the international communist movement, Syrian militarism, the oppression exercised by the Hafez al-Assad regime, and the intolerance of the Baathist Party to any opposing views. These were all issues of concern to younger party cadres.

Khalid Bakdash concentrated his efforts on poisoning the political envi-

ronment following the split through isolating the old guard of the SCP from the rebel splinter groups and rallying the Baathist government against the new and radical splinter Politburo group of Riyadh al-Turk. As evidence of Khalid Bakdash's success, the government subsequently conducted a campaign of oppression and terror against al-Turk's Politburo group, which resulted in the majority of its members either quitting or being driven underground and its leadership being either jailed, tortured, or driven into exile. Riyadh al-Turk refused to leave the country. He was imprisoned in 1974, freed in 1975 when he went underground, and was recaptured in 1978. Shortly after being released in 1980, he was imprisoned again and was not released until 31 May 1998. His group, however, has been active outside Syria in the National Alliance for the Liberation of Syria, an umbrella organization of opposition groups formed in Paris in 1982 and made up of the Iraqi faction of the Baath, the Arab Socialists led by Akram al-Hourani, the Socialist Union led by Mohammed al-Jarah and Jasim Alwan, the Muslim Brotherhood group of Adnan Sa'ad al-Din, the Islamic Front led by Sheikh Abdul Fatah Abu Ghuda, and a number of independent personalities. [2]

The outcome of Riyadh al-Turk's challenge to Bakdash, Bakdash's tactics, and the ultimate fate of Riyadh al-Turk indicated that there was no room for any ideological challenge either to the Syrian regime or Bakdash's position vis-à-vis the regime. Opposition from dissatisfied members was consequently not directed to substantive ideological issues but rather was directed toward the personality of Khalid Bakdash and his leadership style. Thus, in a direct challenge to Khalid Bakdash in December 1979, Murad Yusuf and Nayif Qaysiyah, members of the Bakdash SCP Politburo who were party leaders in two important regions (and who had been entrusted with the preparation of the forthcoming fifth party congress), walked out of the SCP. They called themselves representatives of the organizations of the SCP and charged that a month earlier, on 26 November 1979, eight members of the Central Committee, including themselves, had addressed a letter to the Politburo containing basic and important suggestions to reunite the party and steer it toward sound basic ideological foundations and principles in accordance with an earlier January 1978 unanimous Politburo decision along the same lines. In response, the SCP paper, *Nidhal al-Sha'ab,* in a December article entitled "The Two of Them Have Nothing To Do with the SCP," notified the party that at a meeting of the Central Committee on 27–28 December 1979, Murad Yusuf, Nayif Qaysiyah, and six others had been expelled for "un-party" activity, violation of bylaws, and criticism of Khalid Bakdash.[3]

A few months later, this group formed a separate organization under the name the Syrian Communist Party Grass-Roots Organization (al-Hizb al-Shiouy'ie al-Suri Munadhmat al-Qai'dah). Like Riyadh al-Turk, and for the same reasons, they used the traditional name of the party. They declared that they, more than any other group, represented the party through its grassroots, which had elected them and not the secretary general (who had, in fact, been elected by the Central Committee). However, in contrast to the Politburo group, Murad Yusuf's group focused more on the personality of Bakdash, the secretary general, than on his ideology, almost certainly to avoid the wrath of the regime, which had fallen on al-Turk and his group. Murad Yusuf and Nayif Qaysiyah continued to challenge Bakdash using every possible public forum and declared that the fifth congress was a "dangerous schismatic action undertaken by the opportunist right wing leadership of the party. . . . Its decisions are not binding on Syrian communists. The party, headed by Khalid Bakdash, violated basic party by-laws." [4] The group's position vis-à-vis Bakdash, however, was not perceived as a threat by the Baathist regime of Hafez al-Assad. They were, in fact, welcomed by the regime as a sign of a weakening of the SCP as a whole and because they made Bakdash even more dependent on the regime.

Manipulating the situation, the regime, in order to link Bakdash publicly to them, in January 1980 invited the Bakdash organization of the SCP to be observers for the first time of the Baath Party congress. Taking advantage of this opportunity, Bakdash asked the Baath party for permission to allow his party's official organ, *Nidhal al-Sha'ab,* to be legalized and to allow the party access to high government offices, particularly since the SCP was already a formal partner in the Progressive National Front and had held two cabinet portfolios for almost a decade. On 20 March 1980, this was responded to favorably, in rhetorical and symbolic forms, signaling thereby the regime's approval of Bakdash and its support for him in his difficulties within the party and for the upcoming fifth congress.[5] Thus, after completely allying itself with the Assad government and branding all opponents of the Bakdash group as enemies of the regime, the Communist Party of Khalid Bakdash found itself, in order to maintain its existence, an appendage of the Assad regime. The effect of this was to entice opportunists to the support of Khalid Bakdash's party, now a tool of the state lacking substantive ideological or practical credibility as a communist party.

Fifth Congress of the SCP

In this environment, the fifth congress of the Bakdash SCP was held in Damascus between 29 and 31 May 1980. It was attended by 177 official

Syrian party representatives and twenty-one observers. Although the congress was supposed to be held in secret, *al-Safir* (Beirut), 24 May 1980, reported that the congress enjoyed the regime's tacit approval; though officially illegal, it was not clandestine and was widely reported on in Baath party newspapers. As a result, Khalid Bakdash saw his survival becoming more and more dependent on the regime; to prove his utility to the regime, he steered the party more closely to it.

The price of this unconditional dependence and loyalty was seen in his tacit support of the Syrian involvement in Lebanon in 1976 despite the Lebanese Communist Party's contrary position. This support for the Syrian regime, however, resulted in, among other things, the disapproval of the Lebanese Communist Party, which had been under Bakdash's control until a decade earlier. This disapproval became evident in the Lebanon party's boycott of the fifth congress and its refusal to send even formal greetings, an expected courtesy that seventy-two other communist groups from around the world, including all other Arab communist parties, had offered.

The ideological blueprint of the party's program arising from the fifth congress was delineated in the Central Committee's report as presented by Bakdash to the congress. This report centered on three basic issues:

1. The challenges facing the Arab world, represented by imperialism, Zionism, and Arab reactionaries and described as the American scheme, which aimed at extending imperial hegemony over the area with the support of international Zionism, Israel, and the help of the Sadat regime and Arab reactionaries. [6]

2. (a) The party's mobilization of the masses in this confrontation with the enemies of the Arab people, viz. Arab reactionaries, Zionism, and imperialism; (b) "the return to the path of social progress . . . ;and (c) the complete elimination of the role of the exploitative bourgeoisie."[7] This was tantamount to the adoption of the basic social content of Baathist ideology and not the program of a proletarian party.

3. The solidification of the party against all divisive forces.[8]

Position toward the U.S. and the Arab-Israeli Conflict

The report gave special importance, in both quantitative and qualitative dimensions, to the American threat to the entire Arab liberation movement, including that of Syria. Indeed, it devoted double the number of pages to dealing with the American approach than it did, for example, to the section

on the evolution of the class structure in Syrian society or the section on "the return to the path of social progress."

This tactic gave Bakdash a means of highlighting American imperialism and its anti-Arab orientation and of reaffirming the Soviet Union firmly as an anti-imperialist force. Through the introduction of this perspective, he was able to attack all his opponents inside the party, who viewed the USSR and the U.S. as qualitatively similar superpowers. He attacked this view as erroneous, based on a proposition of similarity between the two superpowers. The criteria of similarity, however, only compared their military capabilities, and ignored the differences in their positions vis-à-vis the overall liberation movement, including the Arab liberation movement. This, he maintained, amounted to a defaming of the USSR and a defense of the U.S.

The Central Committee report identified the U.S. as the primary enemy of the Arab liberation movement and declared "the most important national issue our party faces now is our position towards the U.S." [9] The report warned against "the dangers of using the term [superpower] without any distinction between the deep class nature of each one of them [the U.S. and the USSR] and without differentiating between a socialist state ruled by workers and peasants and one ruled by capitalist imperialist monopolies."[10]

In an attempt to discourage Syria's overtures to the West in general and the U.S. in particular, and to reaffirm the formal Syrian-Soviet treaty signed only a few months earlier, the report carefully played down a possible rapprochement with the U.S., asserting that it was an illusion to think that the U.S. could be neutralized in the Arab-Israeli conflict.[11] This might be explained as a gentle attempt to alert the Hafez al-Assad regime, which, while not supporting American overtures which led to the Sinai agreement between Israel and Egypt in 1978, was not actually opposing them and was gradually opening diplomatic channels with the U.S. and dealing cautiously with its Soviet allies. The Central Committee report to the fifth congress hinted that this position could be interpreted as venturing into the dynamics of the Cold War as a member of the American camp. It cautioned against becoming tied to the local bourgeoisie, which was, in fact, an extension of foreign capitalist-imperialist forces. This had been demonstrated, the report maintained, by the petit bourgeois revolution of Nasser and by the Algerian, Syrian (prior to Hafez al-Assad), and Iraqi regimes, which substituted rhetoric against the U.S. for any actual steps towards socialist transformation and change.

Bakdash's position must be understood against the background of an increase in U.S. involvement in the Middle East via Sadat's unilateral Egyp-

tian steps toward peace with Israel, beginning with his Jerusalem visit in 1977, the Camp David Accords in 1979, and the Arab world response to the accords in the Baghdad Arab Summit of December 1979. The summit culminated in the formation of the National Front for Steadfastness, which included Algeria, the People's Democratic Republic of South Yemen, Syria, and the PLO. The Central Committee report stated that "we can emphasize that the Arab national movement is in a stage of steadfastness . . . in comprehensive Arab solidarity against the Camp David Accords." [12] Consistent with the position of Khalid Bakdash's loyalty to the Soviet Union, he saw the animosity to the U.S. and friendship with the Soviet Union as two sides of one coin for the Arab world. The Central Committee report declared, "a greater number of patriots, nationalists and progressives have begun to realize that we have no other choice but permanent animosity to the U.S. as our staunch enemy and nothing else than permanent friendship with the Soviet Union as our constant, faithful and sincere friend because of its basic principles."[13]

One of the congress's first resolutions was a salute to the Soviet Communist Party, declaring, "Our party cannot ever forget the great role played by the Soviet Union and the glorious Leninist party in bringing to birth in the world the revolutionary and socialist movement. . . . Without the Soviet Union, it would be impossible for any revolutionary or socialist movement in the world to succeed . . . and every attempt to deviate from this, as some parties try in the name of independence, in the final analysis, will only serve the imperialist camp."[14] Bakdash then responded to his opponents by declaring that the Soviet Union:

> in its rich experience in all spheres will develop socialist thought, enrich it in building socialism and through its ideology, fight deviationism and opportunism, and defend Marxist-Leninist creative thought. [Through] its relationship with the international communist movement and its parties and cooperating with [these, the Soviet Union] generalizes the experiences of the international revolutionary movement and the international communist movement. . . . The relationship between our two [communist] parties, the Syrian and the Soviet, has always been a relationship of cooperation and friendship and our party has always been guided by the experiences of the glorious party of Lenin in addition to local experience. Based upon that, we have always looked upon [our] friendship with the Soviet Union and its principled positions as the cornerstone of our party's policies and as a foundation in its national and international struggle. . . . Our

party stands firmly in the face of all chauvinistic, nationalist, and left or right deviationist trends. [15]

In this statement, Bakdash was attacking those who would dare to challenge the direction of his leadership. Reflecting his inflexibility, Bakdash continued, "The party will work decisively to strengthen its organizational, political and intellectual foundations on the principles of Marxism-Leninism, those of the international proletariat and on the principles of Leninism in organization."[16] The secretary general also declared to the fifth congress, "the decade of the '80s will be a decade of increased victories for the internationalist socialist forces and the forces of national liberation and social progress."[17] In view of this, Bakdash considered that expressing friendship to the Soviet Union alone was inadequate and declared:

> I firmly believe it is not enough to declare [only] friendship to the Soviet Union. Rather, we must support every action in Soviet foreign policy which has always been, still is, and always will be in harmony with the interests of all people.

> This is the reason why the basic strategy of a communist party, and every genuine revolutionary party, must be in harmony with the general international revolutionary strategy, championed by the Soviet Union and continue to be under the leadership of the glorious party, the party of the great Lenin.[18]

The Party and the Regime

The Lebanese civil war became an internal Syrian issue as early as 1976. The SCP was at first careful not to unconditionally support the Syrian involvement, while not openly condemning it either. This obviously troubled the SCP, however, which went out of its way to be apologetic to the regime for not fully accepting the Syrian government position, declaring to the regime," the party suffered a great deal politically on the issue of Lebanon and was put under much Arab and international pressure."[19]

Because of these concerns and to play it very safe with the regime as well as to signal the Lebanese National Movement that it had done everything it could to warn the government against such an action, the SCP declared, "We want to declare frankly, so you may all know, we did not approve the Syrian involvement, and when we heard that there was an intention to enter Lebanon, a delegation from our Politburo went and met with the leadership of the Baath party and cautioned against such a move. . . . We learned later that our comrades, the Soviets, had done the same."[20]

Nevertheless, in the final resolutions of the fifth congress, the party ignored the problem completely and did not issue any resolution related to it. In addition, it did not even send any of the usual greetings to the Lebanese Communist Party, like those it had sent to the Afghanis, Cubans, or Iranian revolutionaries, and its letter of support to the Communist Party of Iraq and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Oman.

The party did, in fact, try to gently needle the regime in regard to its oppression and intolerance of democratic forces, the slowness of socialist transformation, and its tolerance of capitalist activity. Overall, however, it accepted the regime's positions and policies. It also occasionally lamented the limitations on its freedom, though carefully, as when it complained in the party report that "the forces of the right, even the Moslem Brotherhood, are allowed to move freely but the [regime's] position toward the SCP and other progressively oriented groups is entirely different. Many of our comrades have been transferred from teaching positions to clerical jobs; a great number have been banned from travelling abroad; many of our people unfairly dismissed from their jobs; and many of our comrades have been barred from holding appointments in the government." [21]

On Syrian economic policies, the Central Committee report characterized the economy as that of a Third World nation. It complained that the economy was being managed by a popular regime which, while opening avenues to a limited socialist transformation and state capitalism, allowed the growth of an exploiting, corrupt class. Unhappy with the direction of development in the Syrian economy, the party called for a "return to the path of social transformation." It was not enough, the report noted, simply to state that socialism was the aim of the government. The ruling party must have a blueprint for establishing socialism and must proceed to building its economy accordingly. The report advanced a mild program of fourteen points, which included: (1) uprooting the parasitic bourgeois class; (2) strengthening and developing the public sector and eradicating corruption from it; (3) serious measures to stop the emergence and growth of the new industrial bourgeois class; (4) abolition of middlemen between agriculture and the market; (5) state control of foreign trade; (6) state support for poor farmers and the instituting of a balance between wages and prices in order to control inflation; (7) higher prices for agricultural products and reduced upper limits to the size of farm holdings; (8) a more strident program of land reform, an increase in land redistribution, and the establishment of more state cooperatives; (9) a more active role for the state in commerce; (10) state help for small merchants and state control of larger commercial enterprises; (11) control of land speculation; (12) state interven-

tion to deal with the housing crisis, particularly with regard to the housing of workers and small government employees; (13) more dependence on state public sector companies in all housing construction; (14) a campaign against corruption, bribery, and the mismanagement of state funds. [22] This program was very moderate for a communist party and was no different to its first program, forty years earlier in 1941, which was not considered to be a socialist program even then.

Fragmentation and Division

In his report, Bakdash brushed aside the serious division and fragmentation of the party, stating, "The intellectual and political foundation of these crises that we have suffered in the past, and still plague some of our brother countries where genuine and broad proletarian traditions have not yet developed, emanate from a petit bourgeois mentality, whether from the left or the right."[23] The report, in addition, attacked both Riyadh al-Turk and Murad Yusuf, calling al-Turk's demand for an independent position from the Soviet Union, the eradication of Israel, and the creation of a unified Arab communist party a "nationalist, narrow, petit bourgeois outlook, a trend which is at its peak at this time."[24] Bakdash viewed Murad Yusuf's call for an independent position from the Soviet Union as a policy which would "inevitably lead to [a policy] aiding of the enemies [of Syria] who ranged from Sadat [in Egypt] and the dictatorial regime of Iraq, to the Moslem Brotherhood."[25] Bakdash also accused Murad Yusuf of attacking the party itself because of the party's support of the existing regime. Just as he had done with al-Turk, Bakdash accused him of trying to destroy the party and to dismantle it.[26]

With the convening of the fifth congress, the party was at an end as a political force in Syrian politics. It was fragmented into three main groupings, each of which claimed to be the *true* communist party of Syria, but each was too weak to claim any serious role in Syrian politics. Each faction was partly tolerated by the regime, which encouraged the party's fragmentation to neutralize its potential. Their activities were limited to purely symbolic public meetings that were closely scrutinized by the regime. At the same time, they were placated with representation in Parliament and in the Progressive National Front. The political impotence of the communist movement in Syria, the regime's brutality, and sophisticated security apparatus added to the demoralization of communists. Further, the dearth of genuine leadership and the plethora of new and alternative Marxist-Leninist groups on the Syrian scene provided a number of alternatives for

potential new recruits, but some of the old guard were tempted in this environment to abandon all political activism. The party grew more and more fragmented and more irrelevant.

One example of Bakdash's relationship with the regime occurred in December 1981. At the time, the Muslim Brotherhood was actively opposing the government, and the government reacted by charging that the Muslim Brotherhood was responsible for sponsoring acts of violence and assassination. As part of the effort to crackdown on Brotherhood members, the Defence Platoon (a paramilitary organization headed by Hafez al-Assad's brother, Rifaat) took to the streets and initiated a harassment of veiled women in an attempt to identify Brotherhood members. This resulted in a public outcry, and Assad appeared on television to denounce the action and order the withdrawal of the Defence Platoon. Bakdash's party issued a statement condemning the Defence Platoon's actions. The government did not allow distribution of the statement, collecting all of the flyers from their distribution points. The next day, the party's official organ carried an editorial condemning the Platoon's actions. In response, Hafez al-Assad issued an order suspending Bakdash's party from the Progressive National Front, nullifying its participation in National Assembly elections for that year. [27]

Thus, between the new Marxist-Leninist circles and the harsh punishment of the party by the regime, the number of those who chose the route of political activism grew fewer, and the formal parties grew less and less important. Ultimately what was left of the old SCP grew more dependent on the regime because of its dwindling popular base. For all practical purposes, the fifth congress, which was supposed to signal the rejuvenation of the Syrian Communist Party, marked instead its end as a political force in Syrian politics even though it continued to operate formally.

Even within the Bakdash clique, friction began to develop. Soon after the fourth congress, Bakdash turned against all his old allies, including Yusuf Faisal, the assistant secretary general and the first in line for his position. According to Yusuf Faisal and his group, during the fourth congress, Bakdash began spreading rumors that a conspiracy was being hatched against him by Faisal with the support of Ibrahim Bakri, Dhuhair Abd al-Samad and Daniel Neimah. However, this issue seems to have been settled and the fourth congress was able to conclude. Nevertheless, immediately after this congress, according to the Faisal group, "This tone of conspiracy against the secretary general resurfaced and was given ideological and political overtones through which Bakdash accused his opponents of rightist or leftist deviations. . . . However, things took a different turn when

comrade Murad Yusuf and seven members of the Central Committee, finding it difficult to deal with Bakdash because of his tactics and maneuvers, walked out taking with them a sizeable section of the party membership and calling themselves al-Hizb al-Shiouy'ie al-Suri Munadhmat al-Qai'dah." [28]

According to the Faisal group, there was no apparent political, intellectual, or organizational reason for the schism:

> the responsibility for this must lie with the overbearing inflexibility of the secretary general, evidenced in his actions towards Comrade Murad Yusuf. . . . This responsibility, nevertheless, must also be shared by Murad Yusuf himself who did not take a sober view and [instead] succumbed to an emotional response. The rest of the Politburo must also bear some responsibility for going along with Comrade Bakdash in this case and in not playing a mediating role which could have avoided the third split within the party.

> After the fifth congress, two years passed with relative calm and the Central Committee tried diligently to work in a new spirit of cooperation to unify the party. For the first time in its history, the Central Committee developed an annual agenda for its operations and a number of meetings were held in order to deal with the issues of an organizational nature, those regarding activities among workers and those related to youth and women. It also had a blueprint for action and wished to form a national conference to monitor the decisions of the fifth congress. None of this, however, was ever put into practice and the following year [1982], despite a number of unsuccessful attempts to rejuvenate a new plan, no serious meeting of any sort took place . . . and, in fact, the number of Central Committee meetings dwindled and became confined to a discussion of political news and routine issues.[29]

In the second half of 1983, to isolate and silence his critics within the Central Committee, Khalid Bakdash gave an interview to the official organ for all Arab communist parties, published in Prague, *al-Nahj*,[30] in which he indirectly hinted that the Faisal group were rebels who were trying to transform the communist party from a true Marxist-Leninist proletarian revolutionary party to a petit bourgeois democratic socialist party. However, according to the Faisal group, the transformation of the SCP was "not aimed at protecting the party . . . but was a means to justify Bakdash's preconceived plan to [silence his opponents by] dismissing a great number

of the Central Committee and its Politburo and replacing them with a group loyal to him, who would accept the 'personality cult' and not criticize or question him on anything, now or in the future." [31]

In this, he intended to cast doubts on his opponents' loyalty to the international communist movement and to the Soviet Union, thus nullifying the utility of the Faisal group to the Assad regime as a liaison between the Soviet Union and the Syrian government and presenting his group as the only valid Soviet supported group. In order to discredit his opposition, Bakdash charged that "when the splits began to appear in the Baath Party in 1984, some members of the Faisal group were about to support the clique against Hafez al-Assad if it had not been for my speedy intervention."[32]

Sixth Congress of the SCP

The crisis, according to the Faisal group, took a different turn during 1984 and 1985 when the strategy was "gradually escalated from one of accusations . . . to an election campaign aimed at winning support in the elections of the sixth congress."[33] Thus, by the end of 1985 and during the preparations for the sixth congress, the Central Committee began to turn against Bakdash and to solicit the support of the membership against Bakdash. In response, Bakdash attempted to switch the confrontation from a conflict regarding his personality cult and violations of internal democratic bylaws to accusations that the members of his opposition were creating dissent in the party "and putting their personal interests above the party, national and international interests."[34]

Consequently, the meetings of the Central Committee became an arena of condemnation and accusation. Faisal and his group counted on the sixth congress to settle the issue. On 18 August 1985, they began boycotting Central Committee and Politburo meetings, paralyzing the party. In order to limit the confrontation to the leadership level, the Bakdash and Faisal groups reached an agreement on 5 November 1985, known as the Damascus Agreement, that would maintain the facade of party unity and leave the final decision to the congress. This agreement was supposed to be based on the enactment of all previous congress resolutions and on the understanding that the forthcoming sixth congress should be held no later than March 1986. Until then, it was agreed, all decisions related to the congress should be unanimous, and all members of the Central Committee should attend the congress as delegates working to unify all party organizations. Thus, preparation for the sixth congress became the battleground for both factions in order to assert their legitimacy and regain control of the party.

The Central Committee began organizing itself in preparation for a congress resolution that would settle the controversy and lead either to Bakdash's forced retirement or his expulsion.

Khalid Bakdash, on the other hand, began utilizing his old networks inside and outside the party to circumvent the Politburo and Central Committee in an attempt to weaken his opponents and ultimately replace them during the elections for the sixth congress. When a Central Committee meeting took place on 13 February 1986, Faisal's supporters moved to discuss putting into action the Damascus Agreement of 1985 to prepare for the sixth congress. Surprised, Bakdash asked for a recess until the next morning, claiming that discussions were too heated and the participants needed time to cool down. However, the Central Committee refused and continued its meeting in order to deal with the issue of preparation for the congress. With this, Bakdash walked out and considered the meeting to be a nullification of the Damascus Agreement. Despite Bakdash's withdrawal, the Central Committee continued. All proposed representatives to the forthcoming congress were approved, and others were appointed to the remaining vacant delegate positions, thus tilting the balance of power in the Faisal group's favor. All in all, the Central Committee felt confident that it would be able to position the anti-Bakdash group in key positions in the sixth congress and thus ensure the success of its agenda for replacing Bakdash. To justify its actions in continuing the meetings without Bakdash, and in order to publicly condemn his actions in challenging the legitimacy of the Central Committee's meeting, the Central Committee issued a statement to the cadre the following day to the effect that the secretary general and some of his supporters had walked out of the meeting. The meeting was legally justified in continuing its deliberations, the statement maintained. [35]

In a countermove, Bakdash mobilized his supporters, claiming that earlier in November 1985, just prior to the Damascus Agreement, he had received, in his position as secretary general of the party, a number of requests from the elected delegates to the forthcoming congress asking for an implementation of the internal bylaws, particularly article 22, which stipulated that the sixth congress should be held within five years of the fifth congress. Bakdash claimed that he had not held the congress in the time requested because of his commitment to the Damascus Agreement, which had designated March 31 as the date for the congress. He went on to claim that "the majority of the party, through its elected delegates, decided to hold the sixth congress on 31 March 1986 in accordance with both article 22 of the internal by-laws of the party and section 1 of the Damascus agree-

ment. Comrade Yusuf Faisal organized a campaign of distortions against holding the congress on that date." [36]

Bakdash insisted on holding the congress on 31 March, thus making it virtually impossible for the Politburo, controlled by the Faisal group, to organize itself and its supporters and cope with the maneuver Bakdash had presented them with. The Communist Party of the Soviet Union and a number of communist parties in the Arab world intervened at this point to avert another crisis and settle the confrontation, which seemed to be similar to the one that had occurred a decade earlier right after the third congress. With this intention, a number of Arab communist party representatives met with Bakdash and the Central Committee, and Bakdash offered to delay the congress if Faisal and the rest of the Politburo and the Central Committee would agree to rescind the 13–14 February Central Committee decisions resulting from that meeting. Ultimately, neither agreed to compromise and both were consequently called upon to meet with the Central Committee of the CPSU in Moscow. An attempt to pressure the Faisal group into accepting a compromise that would bring Bakdash some sort of face-saving legitimacy was made in this Moscow meeting, but the Faisal group reacted negatively to this, fearing that in this new situation, Bakdash would find a way to subvert the agreement and regain control of the party as he had in 1973.

Despite the CPSU's warning to Bakdash not to hold the congress while there was a high probability of a split, neither Bakdash nor Faisal was willing to heed Moscow's advice and nothing was achieved in the meeting with the Soviet Union. Thus, Moscow was forced to dispatch an official representative to Bakdash in Damascus to restate its advice and to warn Bakdash that if the congress were held and a split took place, the CPSU might recognize the Faisal Politburo rather than his.[37] Despite this, Bakdash decided unilaterally to hold the congress on 29 May 1986, making it very difficult for Faisal's Politburo group to organize its forces and to solidify its support among the cadre. As a result, Bakdash brought about the split that the CPSU had feared. Even for Bakdash this was too soon to adequately mobilize his followers, though his core of support continued unaffected. Consequently, when Bakdash reconvened the congress in Damascus in mid-July 1986, the split had become formal and the two groups had reached the point of no return. The congress was convened under empty slogans: "Defending the People's Food"; "The Struggle for International Peace"; "Strengthening the Friendship with the Soviet Union and the Glorious Party of Lenin"; and "Working To Achieve the Unity of All Syrian Communists."[38]

The most important aims of the congress were to assure the regime of its commitment and loyalty, to emphasize the traditional Marxist-Leninist Soviet-oriented party line, and to cast doubt on the utility of the Faisal group for both the regime and the Soviet Union. The three resolutions adopted by the congress were:

1. Cooperation with all progressive and nationalist forces, particularly the Arab Socialist Baath party.

2. Emphasis on the independent position of the party toward principled positions and important political issues.

3. Defense of the demands of workers, peasants, and all toilers. [39]

Once again, Bakdash was elected as secretary general and his staunch supporters were made members of the Politburo and Central Committee.

The Faisal Politburo group ignored Bakdash's congress, considering it illegal, and continued preparation for its own sixth congress to be held between 29 and 31 January 1987. At their sixth congress, the Faisal group received twenty-seven letters of greeting and support from the international communist parties, including the Communist Party of Lebanon as well as other progressive parties from around the world. Following the formalization of the split, both Bakdash's and Faisal's groups, despite the earlier warnings to Bakdash by the CPSU, were recognized by the Politburo of the USSR as two local and separate communist parties.

On the domestic scene, since both Bakdash and Faisal had been representatives in the Progressive National Front from the time of the unified SCP's admission to it in 1972, the issue was much simpler on the organizational and structural level for the Baath leadership to deal with. Both Bakdash and Faisal continued their affiliations with the Front, although they now represented two different and weakened Syrian communist parties. Because of this competitive situation, to win more popular support and to weaken the Faisal camp among the cadre, Bakdash resorted to Marxist-Leninist rhetoric to express his continued commitment to the masses. In some party leaflets he described the Faisal group as lackeys of the regime, as not representing the will of the masses. Meanwhile, he presented himself as the only true advocate of the people in the party. For example, in *Kuras Nidhal al-Sha'ab*, an official internal policy leaflet that he now controlled, Bakdash openly criticized the decline in economic conditions in Syria and government policy in Lebanon. Regarding the Iran-Iraq War, he described it as "far removed from vital national and pan-Arab interests." The leaflet criticized the close working relationship between the Syrian government and the Libyan regime.[40] Bakdash also began advocating popular positions

on issues of public concern, such as poverty, housing, income security, inflation, and limits to the power of bureaucracy. The Baath Party apparatus and the state security functionaries became alarmed, but Bakdash did not pose any real threat to the regime. The split was in fact beneficial to the regime as it weakened the party and made both factions more dependent on the regime for their continued existence. To resolve the regime's concern, in a meeting with the Baath leadership regarding his advocacy of public issues, Bakdash declared, "We do not see ourselves as a substitute to you but because we are communists and tied to the masses, we must [exaggerate our defense] of their demands and this support of the people's demands gives us more justification in supporting you . . . without this public support, what would our commitment to you be worth. We represent our people's demands and we support you. I don't see any contradiction between the two." [41]

On the regional level, Bakdash continued his membership in the meetings of the communist parties of the Arab East and continued to represent the party on the editorial board of the *World Marxist Review,* the official organ of the international communist movement. In addition, he continued his control of the party theoretical journal, *Dirassat Ishtirakia.*

The Faisal group began communications with all dissatisfied breakaway factions in order to reunify the party and to demonstrate to the regime and to the Soviet Union that the leadership style of Bakdash had caused the fragmentation of the party and the dissipation of its membership. On the eve of the convening of their sixth congress, the Faisal group announced that an agreement had been reached with the Union of Communists in Syria regarding a merger with their group. The Union of Communists in Syria had already split twice, once in association with the al-Turk group (an anti-Bakdash group) and then a year later from the al-Turk group itself, taking with it a good number of the organization's members. This proposed merger gave the Faisal group an acceptable nucleus around which old communists could rally. Daniel Neimah, speaking as a Politburo member of the Faisal group, heralded this action of reunification as "a commitment to the principles of Marxist-Leninism, to the international proletariat, to a respect for the Leninist principles of organization, democratic centralism, the establishment of collective action principles, and collective leadership and as evidence of the expansion of democratic practices in the party."[42]

In a gesture of solidarity and as guest observers, twenty-two former communist leaders who had been expelled over the years from the Bakdash party or had walked out in protest attended the congress. These

included Murad Yusuf, secretary general of the Munadhmat al-Qai'dah, and a number of his Politburo. This broad spectrum of participation gave the congress both the appearance of legitimacy and the potential of reviving a renewed and reunified party. To this end, Murad Yusuf participated actively in the congress and indicated in a speech to the delegates his hope for the realization of this future unified communist party. [43]

The congress was attended by more than 60 percent of the original SCP delegates who had been elected earlier in 1985. Their 1985 election was in accordance with the original party bylaws, which had been approved by the Politburo and the Central Committee and affirmed by the November 1985 Damascus Agreement. In addition to the already approved delegates, the Faisal Central Committee appointed fourteen additional delegates as stipulated by the bylaws.

The first step of the Faisal congress proceedings was the approval of an agreement that would lead to the merger of the SCP-Faisal group with the Union of Communists in Syria (UCS). Following this, the representatives of the UCS were then added to the congress as official delegates. As a result, a total of 171 delegates were represented in this unified congress. The newly reunified congress then withdrew and nullified all unfair expulsions from the party by Bakdash during the period of his control over the last forty years. Daniel Neimah called for rigorous attention to be paid to the intellectual improvement of the party. Another Politburo member, Maurice Salibi, introduced the Central Committee's resolution to amend party bylaws in order to reflect more democratic practices in the party, to respect "democratic centralism and collective leadership . . . and completely remove the practices of the personality cult . . . in order to achieve the party's ultimate goal of strengthening its unity and revitalizing its role in the political life of the country."[44]

The opening statement to the congress by Ibrahim Bakri affirmed the "legitimacy of this congress as the true expression of the hopes, ideas and consciousness of all Syrian communists . . . [and that] this congress is the congress of unity among and between all Marxist-Leninist communists who will accept the basic principles of our program and policies . . . the unity of all communists is a national and international responsibility. It is a historic responsibility for us all."[45] Yusuf Faisal, in his report to the congress, affirmed his commitment to reunite the party and expressed the promise that he would extend an appeal to Khalid Bakdash and his group to rejoin the party,[46] although it considered the November 1985 Bakdash congress as illegal, divisive, and in violation of party bylaws and spirit.[47]

On 18 January 1987, just prior to the Faisal congress, Bakdash issued a

pronouncement entitled "Towards the Unity of all Syrian Communists" in which he called for all communists to return to the mother party. In reaction to this pronouncement, the Faisal group, in the final resolutions of its sixth congress, called upon Bakdash and those in his group to rejoin the party as represented by them and declared, "It was very clear in the congress that the fundamental issues that unite communists are much more important and greater [than those which divide us] as was emphasized and called for in Comrade Bakdash's pronouncements. . . . [This] proves that the last split that occurred in our party had no objective reason at all. The congress declares that the schisms in the party have no future and the future is for unity and unity alone." [48]

In response to the Faisal congress, Bakdash and his Politburo issued on 4 February 1987 another pronouncement, entitled "A Clarification from the Politburo and the Central Committee of the SCP," which accused the Faisal group of being "a minority in the party and every organization within the party. They violated the basic Leninist principles in organization which emphasize the necessity of submission of the minority to the majority. They also repudiated the Leninist principle that the congress is the supreme authority in the party. As such, the [Faisal] congress did not represent the great majority inducted in the [Bakdash] July 1986 congress. Thus, their congress is illegal . . . [and] this position is proof that Yusuf Faisal and his group were determined to divide the party."[49]

Both groups emerged from their respective congresses weak, divided, and heavily dependent on the regime. Each then conducted a public-relations campaign to discredit the other and to regain some degree of recognition in Syrian politics by calling on the other side to return to the party; each regarded its leadership as legitimate and its congress as the only legal one and placed the responsibility for the split on the other group.

Seventh Congress of the (Bakdash) SCP, 1991

Bakdash's seventh congress was held in May 1991, and in it Bakdash was once again elected secretary general. Bakdash's group distinguished itself from the Faisal group basically by continuing its adherence to orthodox communism and undying faith in the USSR. The party was the least affected by the reform debate that had erupted in the late 1980s around the meaning and magnitude of Perestroika. The party had cautiously viewed these debates that were raging within the Arab communist parties and among Marxist factions within Syria and had perceived them as an "attempt to destroy the Leninist foundation of the Syrian Communist Party,

and to distort its history, not only among its members, but also before the whole of the Syrian people, including both its allies and its political opponents." [50]

The view of the party and its leadership on the debates was an expression of the party's stance on Perestroika. This, according to Khalid Bakdash, was a fraud: "The Western world drummed and whistled praising Gorbachev who, attempting to hide his treason, had misled the Soviet peoples under the guise of gradual reformation of socialism through democratization."[51]

Consequently, Bakdash considered Perestroika a conspiracy aimed at destroying the socialist experiment. According to Bakdash, the result would be the perpetuation and triumph of capitalism and the creation of an international capitalist order on the basis of a unipolar economic power.[52]

The concept of a conspiracy remained the central theme in Bakdash's analysis of the collapse of the socialist experiment and the crisis this precipitated in the Marxist-Leninist theoretical model. This approach avoided the agony of a questioning of the collapse of the Soviet Union and its aftermath. The main feature that characterized the response of the party to these issues was avoidance. Hence the party, in an attempt to minimize the magnitude of the collapse, called the downfall of the Soviet model a backslide. This characterization called to mind the attempts of some pan-Arab nationalists and leftist groups to deny the defeat in the 1967 Arab-Israeli War by calling it a setback.

Instead of critically evaluating the orthodox Marxist concepts on which the wrecked socialist experiment was based, the Bakdash group directed its critique at capitalism, reproducing the same old theoretical discourse.

In a document published in *Nidhal al-Sha'ab* the party stated, "The setback that has afflicted international socialism lately did not wipe the slate of capitalism clean and [we] assert that nothing can happen to alter its exploitive nature."[53] Again, Qadri Jameel, a member of the Bakdash Politburo and the editor of the paper, in an article entitled "The Crisis in the Evolution of Socialism," described the directions of various political groups that advocated the renewal approach, including Perestroika, as "nihilist currents." He admitted, however, the significance and need of some renewal, stating that the rigidity that considered the accomplishments of Marx, Engels, and Lenin as absolutes was "no less harmful than nihilism." He went on to praise Lenin's achievements with regard to the evolution of the dialectical approach. However, later in the article he modified his position when he warned, "Apparently, this task requires a vast

communal effort to maintain the Marxist heritage and its evolution to meet the major contemporary challenges." [54]

The evasive method of Bakdash's group was epitomized in a total defense of orthodox communism, to the degree that the collapse of socialism in Europe did not produce any serious theoretical reconsideration within the circles of the Bakdash group. Moreover, whenever "the crisis of socialism" was mentioned, the debate reverted to an attack on capitalism and an emphasis on its disadvantages and contradictions. This, in turn, inevitably led to an intellectual impasse.

Salih Bodhan, a member of the Politburo, elaborated on the same point in his analysis in an article in the same issue of *Nidhal al-Sha'ab* entitled "A Critique of the Philosophy of Revisionism in the Communist Movement in Syria." He wrote, "The revisionist philosophy within the communist movement in Syria is being led by an army of retreaters and deviationists [both] in Syria and worldwide."[55] In a clear reference to Yusuf Faisal's group, Bodhan went on to assert that the split of 1986 "was incited by some influential figures in the foreign relations apparatus of the Soviet Communist Party. This was a prelude to the exporting of Perestroika to the Syrian communist movement."[56]

Therefore, since the downfall of the Soviet Union was the outcome of a conspiracy, the intellectual rivalry among various factions of the communist movement in Syria must also be viewed as a conspiracy, and as an extension of the conspiracy emanating from the Soviet Union. At the time, it seemed that the Bakdash group was the only Arab communist party that was explicitly defending a Stalinist approach. *Nidhal al-Sha'ab,* in response to an article attacking Stalinism and its ramifications by Dhuhair Abd al-Samad, a member of the Faisal Politburo, stated that "[Winston] Churchill was more objective than Dhuhair Abd al-Samad . . . for he acknowledged that Stalin had taken over power in Russia when it was [economically] backward and using traditional ploughs in cultivation and left it a fully fledged nuclear state."[57]

This analysis, of course, to some degree, released Stalin from any responsibility for the failure of the socialist experiment. Portraying Stalin as an "ascetic" who, rather than seeking the position of secretary general, wanted to abolish it, *Nidhal al-Sha'ab* published excerpts from minutes of the Central Committee of the Soviet Communist Party on 19 December 1928, where Stalin offered his resignation as secretary general.[58] The party organ also cited news of large demonstrations that had swept Moscow in March of 1994, the commemoration of the forty-first anniversary of Stalin's

death, stating, "People acclaimed the Stalinist era, and expressed their dissatisfaction with the situation in Russia since the democrats had assumed power." [59]

The strong defense of Stalinism was inextricably related to the nature of the party and its leadership by Bakdash. Khalid Bakdash was considered the longest surviving and one of the most senior communist leaders in the Arab world and was often referred to by all those who split the party as a Stalinist. Here, too, Bakdash continued his strong hold on the party as he had in the past, monopolizing all positions of real power within it. Because of this, the Central Committee relied on the interviews he gave to the different party newspapers and the positions contained in the documents of the party congresses as guidelines for the correct political line of the party and never deviated from these.[60]

With increasing challenges to his domination and splits within the party, Bakdash's insecurities began to show in a very visible way. The main theoretical party journal, *Dirassat Ishtirakia,* began to carry articles overtly flattering to Bakdash. In an international seminar, "Socialism and Capitalism in Our Contemporary World," the party representative declared, "He [Bakdash] protected the party from deviating into the mainstream of Perestroika . . . explaining that the mistakes of the historic socialist implementation should not be used to justify the crime of Perestroika."[61] Bakdash's total control of party affairs was further reinforced by the presence of his wife and son as members of the Central Committee and the dismissal of those who disagreed with him in any way, along with the elevation of any he saw as loyal to him, just as he had always done. This was clearly illustrated in the demotion of his old disciple, Fahad Dura, from the Central Committee and Politburo and the appointment of his son, Ammar, and his new disciples Walid Faris and Qadri Jameel to the Politburo in December of 1992. The reign of the Bakdash family over the Communist Party in Syria consolidated the Stalinist orientation of the party and continued his way of arbitrary selection and dismissal of the party leadership, even when he was incapacitated by illness in late 1992.[62]

Stalinism, as reflected in party discourse and practice under Bakdash, represented a unifying force for old-guard Marxists against political and leadership challenges. Bakdash expressed this idea eloquently when commenting on the collapse of the Soviet Union. "I believe in the famous saying of Abu Bakr al-Sadiq, the first Khalif of the prophet Muhammad, when he said, 'For those who believed in Muhammad, Muhammad is gone . . . but for those who believe in God, God is lasting and eternal.'"[63] The above quotation indicates that the failure of the socialist experience in the former

Soviet Union did not shake the firm belief of the party in orthodox communism. From this perspective, the party's defense of Stalin makes sense. Overall, the party's conspiratorial interpretations of the socialist crisis and the non-critical approach used to analyze the predicament of the party led to the prevalence of a blind conviction that there would eventually be a return to socialism in the former Soviet Union. The party leadership described the collapse of the former Soviet Union as a "temporary absence" and foresaw the political convulsions in the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe as harbingers of the ultimate triumph of communism in these countries. [64]

One of the leaders of the pan-Arab movement, on a panel held by the Progressive National Front in Syria, commented, "For the first time, we witnessed the transformation of socialist countries to capitalism." To this Bakdash retorted, "All this change is temporary: all this is temporary."[65] Moreover, Mohammed Nasri, a member of the Bakdash Politburo, asserted in a speech which he gave at the commemoration of the Bolshevik revolution, " No, No, a thousand times. This [anarchy] will not last long . . . undoubtedly it will change. Since uni-polar politics resembles standing on one leg, this [political state] will soon lose balance and crumble, especially when people realize that the leg is infected. . . . We are witnessing demonstrations permeating most Russian cities; and Eastern Europe is resisting capitalism and American imperialism. . . . Instead, these countries are hailing socialism and the ideas of Marx, Engels and Lenin."[66]

In essence, the defense by the Bakdash group of the old Soviet model reflected a fear of change and renewal. The ongoing tactic of the party was to cast accusations of treason on opponents. This, however, was likely to cause serious havoc within the party and incite further fragmentation. Shakir Habib, one of the prominent cadres of the party, wrote, "The elements that facilitate the success of the 'black alliance' [Perestroika] over socialism are attributed to the following: . . . The power of capital resulting from its international exploitation and its dependence on highly developed technology . . . the weakness of international solidarity . . . the opportunism of the rulers of the Third World countries who exploited the former Soviet Union in a non-ethical manner . . . the betrayal of socialism, inside and outside the Soviet Union and even among the communist party and the Red Army, the vanguard of the proletariat."[67] Within the same context, Mohammed Nasri wrote, "Imperialism and international Zionism have realized the threat that the former Soviet Union . . . posed against their interests. Therefore they planned subtly and meticulously the biggest conspiracy in the history of humanity to destroy the Soviet Union from inside.

. . . These [capitalist] forces made use of the results of the twentieth congress of the Soviet Communist Party which deposed the working class from its leading position and facilitated the 'ascendance to power of the enemy's agents, such as Gorbachev, Yeltsin and Schevarnadze.'" [68]

Any criticism of the Soviet experience was always met by a staunch defense of the theoretical foundations of Marxism-Leninism by Bakdash and his group, who blamed the failure of the Soviet Union on practice and never on theory. Qadri Jameel, a Bakdash Politburo member, argued, "Truly the faults in socialist practice [in the USSR] have caused weaknesses in the theoretical and epistemological foundations of socialism, and created the objective grounds for [its] total collapse."[69]

Democracy was viewed as an expression of the form of the state.[70] According to Ammar Bakdash, democracy had to reflect the dictatorship of the proletariat and its interests in the state apparatus. Despite the party's claims of a commitment to democracy and pluralism, its understanding of democracy was selective and limited to only the confines of the Progressive National Front. Therefore, according to the party, bourgeois democratic freedoms were deemed superficial and transitional, leading finally to a true democracy in communism. The party, however, did not elaborate on the meaning and details of this communist democracy.

In regard to internal issues, glorification of the party's leader was extended to President al-Assad. The party lauded the contributions of the president and, in particular, his initiative in establishing the Progressive National Front, despite the difficulties arising from the subsequent conglomeration of very different parties into one political body.[71] Bakdash reiterated that the party, as well as the other parties joining the Progressive National Front, enjoyed an independent political status. However, the political reality in Syria showed that autonomy of Syrian parties, including Bakdash's communist party, was largely fictional. Participation in the Progressive National Front was perceived as a privilege granted by President al-Assad and not as a right. Indeed, the role of the Syrian Communist Party inside Syria was viewed by the regime as only decorative.

In a flurry of optimistic activity after the initial success at reunification with the Itihad al-Shiouy'ieen fi Suriyah at the sixth congress, the Faisal group moved toward reunification with another major breakaway group. Negotiations were initiated with al-Hizb al-Shiouy'ie al-Suri Munadhmat al-Qai'dah following the attendance by the majority of that group's Politburo and their secretary general's speech of support during the proceedings of the sixth congress. Against the background of a critical Syrian, Arab, and international environment, both factions were ready to initiate formal

steps toward unification. After three years of continuous contacts and deliberations between the politburos and the central committees of both factions, two lengthy position papers were produced dealing with the most important issues facing Syria and the communist movement. Following a meeting on 12 July 1991 of both Central Committees, a forty-eight-page draft document was issued to serve as a general theoretical base with proposed internal bylaws. The draft was entitled *al-Itijihat al-Siasiyah wa al-Fikriyah wa al-Maham alati Younadhal al-Shiouy'iun al-Suriun Min ajliha fi al-Marhalah al-Rahenah* (The Basic Political, Intellectual Orientation and Aims of the Syrian Communist Struggle To Be Achieved at the Current Stage).

The main aim of the draft was described as being a prelude to discussions among the cadre of both parties in preparation for final deliberations regarding unification, to be voted on by the cadre in the forthcoming seventh congress. The draft delineated the primary aims of this stage in Syrian history as being a national democratic stage in which complex interrelated socioeconomic and democratic processes of national liberation and Arab struggle were mixed. According to the document, this critical situation required the mobilization of all national Arab and progressive forces to deal with the crisis in the region and country successfully. The draft also delineated the following aims:

1. The liberation of the occupied Golan Heights and the protection of national independence in confronting imperialism and Zionism, both of which threatened national sovereignty.

2. The struggle to deal with backwardness through the development of the material infrastructure for the purpose of increasing productivity by the implementation of well thought out and balanced social and economic programs.

3. The development of socioeconomic and political conditions necessary for the structural and material needs of the masses in order to raise their health, socioeconomic and cultural standards and to improve [the capacity for] social justice in every sphere of life: [This to be achieved by a] widening of public participation in the political and social life of the masses and by struggling to advance the country on the path of social and democratic progress toward a human and democratic socialism.

4. The creation and completion of a modern civil state, based on a respect for human rights, a strengthening of constitutional life and a democratization [of civil life] through just laws, a spreading of

democracy in the state and society and the adoption of universally democratic forms and means in social and political life.

5. The creation of a functional [form of] Arab solidarity involving the government, political parties and mass organizations for the sake of liberating all occupied Arab lands and in order to strengthen and expand economic cooperation . . . [and] work to create one Arab common market . . . which would lead to a civil, humanitarian and democratic Arab unity.

6. The struggle to remove the danger of world war through the reduction of weapons of mass destruction and the creation of conditions of international harmony that would strengthen international peace and solve regional conflicts by peaceful means and on a just basis for the protection of the environment and the safeguarding of life on the planet. [72]

Unifying Congress of 1991

About this time, both Central Committees produced a second, elaborate seventy-page document entitled, *Maudh'at al-Lajan al-Markazziah Lil Hizb al-Shiouy'ie al-Suri Ila al-Mu'tamar al-Sabi'e Lil Hizb* (Topics of the SCP Central Committee to the Seventh Congress), in which the most important ideological and political issues to be discussed in the congress were articulated. On economic conditions in Syria, the document proposed more government intervention in the public sector and proposed steps to advance the development of socialism through the development of the public sector. To achieve this, it proposed the following steps:

1. The enactment of new laws to give more independence, power, funds, and autonomy to public-sector organizations.

2. The expansion of the public-sector base of the Syrian economy to include not only macroeconomic activity but also to involve small-scale and light industry.

3. The relaxation of state bureaucratic control in the management of the public sector, limiting government involvement to the issuing of guidelines in order to ensure the public sector's compliance with overall state economic development plans.

4. The provision to the workers of more social and health insurance benefits and increased participation by them in the management of public-sector organizations.[73]

Regarding the private sector, the document emphasized that national interest required "a distinction between national, Arab and foreign capital" for the purpose of protecting workers and consumers, assuring the workers of acceptable working conditions and the consumers of fair prices. [74] The document described agriculture as the source of the nation's food. As the sector where most of the working class was concentrated and from which the majority of the national income was derived, agriculture served as the foundation for all other industry. The document recommended that more attention be paid to the interests of the peasantry. It recommended that machinery, seed, and special financial assistance be made available to them through government cooperatives. It also recommended a reduction in red tape to make it easier for peasants to obtain loans and, for an overall agrarian reform, an expansion of irrigation systems and the encouragement of agricultural school graduates to enter the farming sector by providing them with state land.[75] The document identified the cause of Syria's economic crisis as being "the low level of productivity; the low technological level of development; difficulties in economic development; a low level of savings and investment; and weak coordination between all the various economic activities." The economy accordingly suffered from underdevelopment and a dependency on foreign capital. The paper stated, "we see the remedy for the economic crisis through increased and improved productivity, and the rewarding of increased productivity that would encourage all kinds of productive activity in the country and make work available for all able-bodied people. . . . Our party supports state action to improve productivity and the reduction of the government's deficit, but at the same time we see that the main burden for the remedying of the crisis must be borne mainly by those of high income and that the government must be vigilant to protect and improve the standard of living of the working class, poor farmers and the educated middle income class."[76]

The document called upon the government to continue its support of state subsidies of basic staples for the population along with its important participation in local development. It also recommended encouraging Arab cooperation to reduce dependency and "gradually achieve Arab unity."[77]

The document noted that social development in Syria over the past ten years had not made any visible qualitative improvement. In fact, social disparities were increasing. "The 'agricultural bourgeoisie' was increasing in size through improvements in agriculture. . . . As for the role of the industrial and commercial bourgeoisie, they were increasing to the point that they were influencing economic and social policies and putting pressure on

the government to weaken the state public sector. . . . The nouveau riche groups, new merchants, the parasitic bourgeoisie and state bureaucrats created greater class distinctions with a tendency to spend lavishly, resulting in public resentment." [78]

The document called for "the protection of the state's progressive accomplishments through the widening and improvement of the Progressive National Front; . . . respect for the constitution, the implementation of laws and a respect for individual rights."[79] It proposed the implementation of democracy and democratic practices through the following means:

1. The institution of constitutional rights and equality before the law.

2. A guarantee of civil and human rights, particularly as regards arbitrary arrest, torture and the imprisonment of political prisoners.

3. Guarantees of health insurance, suitable housing, and work for citizens.[80]

The document also called for a new understanding of the role of religion in the cultural and spiritual foundations of society. It suggested that "there exists a number of common denominators and meeting points which can unite communists, progressives and other nationalists with religious believers in the struggle against imperialism, Zionism and social and moral hypocrisy in the struggle for justice."[81] This was certainly a startling suggestion, and a significant departure for a Marxist-Leninist party that definitely distinguished it from Bakdash's group: "Our special socialist path can be called the path toward Arab socialism which will require great intellectual and collective effort [to create] that socialism which reflects our country's specific realities. To develop this concept and understand it we must avoid a rigid copying of [other socialist experiments] in regard to both form and content, and utilize the experiences of the past and present in today's world, honestly and with an open mind. The socialism that we aspire to will be an outcome of the struggle of different political forces, wider alliances, humanist and democratic features and will include multiparty participation, and respect for all forms of ownership. We depend on the Marxist-Leninist methodology while utilizing the revolutionary Arab cultural heritage."[82]

These position papers became the most important documents and the backbone of the seventh unifying congress discussions, amendments and eventual congress resolutions. The unifying congress was actually held between 11 and 14 October 1991 and attended by 303 delegates representing all party organizations and the most important representatives of all

parties in the Progressive National Front, including the ruling Baath Party, a number of cabinet members, members of professional mass organizations, representatives of Arab communist parties including the Lebanese Communist Party which had boycotted the previous SCP congresses, and a great number of international communist parties. The congress was given public recognition and governmental approval, making it the most symbolically significant, yet powerless, communist group in Syria and in a way (in appearance at least) the most credible SCP in local, regional, and international spheres.

The timing of the congress came at a critical period in Syrian, Arab, and international life. At the domestic Syrian level, in addition to the usual brutality of the regime in dealing with any perceived dissent, inflation skyrocketed and corruption prevailed in every aspect of social, economic, and political life. At the international level, the collapse of the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe left Syria exposed. The ramifications of this were manifested at the regional level. In the disastrous Gulf War, Syria entered a coalition against another Arab country, Iraq, under the banner of the U.S. This, in effect, shattered both the regional system and challenged the old slogans of Arab politics. All these events made the need for serious reconsideration, restructuring, and even repositioning of political forces in Syria imperative. Yet, in the Syrian context, real political activity was virtually impossible. The new party needed to address these issues and give guidance to a demoralized cadre, but in this environment the party had little choice but to deal in generalities as it could not deviate from the state position on local, regional, and international issues. At the organizational level, the two groups unified the political reports of their Central Committees. Yusuf Faisal himself delivered the unified report, while the opening of the congress was given by Murad Yusuf. One of the most important issues the congress addressed was the collapse of the Soviet Union. The party accepted the failure of the Soviet experiment but attempted in a general way to give it some explanation. The main unified report declared, "A new world has begun to form . . . everybody today wrestles in order to influence the new world order with their own vision and we . . . are expected to challenge the new order [if it serves only the interests of imperialism and Zionism]. On this basis, our party must look objectively to the changes taking place [in today's world] and must try to understand the contradictions that impact it and build our policies on this understanding. We proceed . . . from the interest of our country Syria and the Arab world, and from the interest of the Arab liberation movement toward our ultimate goal of

freedom, progress, and unity. Our party looks with favour on the conclusion of the Cold War. . . . We also support the settling of regional issues on a just basis." [83]

The report examined Perestroika and condemned the concentration of power in the hands of the Soviet elite and their sacrifice of democracy for the sake of economics.[84] Beyond this, however, the report postponed an examination of the implications of Perestroika to a national conference to be held two years later. In the meantime, it openly condemned the centralization that had taken place in the Soviet Union and indirectly condemned The CPSU. Based on the realities of the post–Cold War world, the report proposed the following: The complete independence of each communist party whose basic responsibility should be toward local issues and conditions; in the case of Syria and the Arab world it called for "a dialogue between Arab revolutionary groups with all Arab nationalist political groups, in addition to the open-minded nationalist religious forces in a free democratic environment."[85] It also admitted that in the past, "We were part of a movement in which we received rather than gave. We gave priority to the general [Soviet] issues rather than to the specific [local] issues . . . thus our party gives priority to . . . issues of national sovereignty: the protection of progressive achievements, development, . . . raising the standard of production and productivity, the achievement of social justice . . . and, foremost among our aims, the liberation of the Golan Heights and occupied Arab lands."[86]

The party still insisted on its adherence to Marxism-Leninism and still claimed to base its structure on democratic centralism, though in reality it had departed fully from these principles. As a matter of fact, Murad Yusuf, in his opening address to the party, admitted his political fatigue and demoralization when he declared, "The reason why we united [is the same as] the toiling nation's problems. Each one of us runs to feed his family, carrying at the same time the burden of his people and this is what caused us to reunite. We had different means . . . for the achievement of our people's goals . . . but after our experience, we discovered that our divided input was weaker and less effective . . . this is why we declared among our priorities the responsibility of strengthening the national identity and spirit of the party. . . . One of the most important concerns of any party should be the love of the nation. . . . What united us was our Arab national concerns. Our people are its basic component."[87]

The congress, in a secret ballot, elected an eighty-member Central Committee.[88] The Central Committee subsequently elected a Politburo; Yusuf Faisal was elected secretary general and Murad Yusuf as his deputy and

second in command. A member of the newly elected Central Committee, Daniel Neimah, insisted that the group continue to use the name Syrian Communist Party, hoping that they would eventually unite even with the Bakdash group. They issued their own version of the party organs, *Dirassat Ishtirakia* and *Nidhal al Sha'ab,* both claiming to be the official organs of the Communist Party, even to the numbering of the issues, but Bakdash's hammer and sickle was more pronounced and in the center while Faisal's group "modernized" the symbol and had it at the left while the contents showed clearly the differences in their ideological orientation.

For all practical purposes there were now two communist parties, both claiming to be legitimate. Faisal declared that personal loyalties, whether tribal, sectarian, or personal, had a lot to do with the Bakdash group's existence, in addition to theoretical and political reasons. [89] Both groups continued to function in accordance with a specific role in the Progressive National Front and to run as Front members in both local and national elections. Yusuf Faisal's paper, *Nidhal al-Sha'ab,* was no different than other government-controlled newspapers, and when the time came for a Baath celebration of any sort, it was one of the first to applaud the regime. Yusuf Faisal, for example, on the occasion of the thirty-second anniversary of the Baath takeover, declared, "We communists, alongside all other nationalist and progressives, are committed to the defence of the 3 March revolution . . . the Progressive National Front is a very important nationalist achievement of the corrective step [the November 1970 Assad coup] around which all political forces coalesce."[90] The communist representative, Adnan Kizawi, in the People's Assembly, on the same occasion declared, "We in the SCP express our unremitting support for the nationally solid stand of Syria under President Hafez al-Assad."[91]

Post-Bakdash SCP Politics

In reality, the basic line of the party continued unchanged up to the point when Bakdash died on 15 July 1995, less than a month before his eighth congress. Following his death, rumors began to appear in the mass media of the possibility of a merger or reunification, a "return to the roots of the party" since Bakdash had been the main obstacle to any unity and the major cause of all of the splits in the party since the third congress in 1969. However, these rumors were laid to rest with the convening of the congress between 24 and 26 August 1995, when Bakdash's wife, Wissal Farha, sixty-five years old and a member of the Progressive National Front Central Committee and of the People's Assembly since her husband's incapacita-

tion, was selected as the new secretary general by acclamation. Their son, Ammar, and Bakdash's most staunch supporters and disciples were also elected to the Central Committee and Politburo. Farha thus inherited her departed husband's position. The congress in which Farha was acclaimed secretary general was held in complete secrecy, with the organizing committee intentionally incorrectly announcing that the congress would be held on 29 August rather than the actual date of 24–26 August. A member of the Central Committee rejected the idea that it was a secret meeting and said that "the congress was closed and held hurriedly prior to the fortieth day memorial service for practical reasons." [92]

The congress was attended by 180 representatives from all party organizations and its resolutions emphasized complete adherence to Marxist-Leninist principles and commitment to the international proletariat as well as to the principles of democratic centralism in organization. It also emphasized its commitment to the positions articulated by the Syrian government.

Consequently, the idea of a merger was formally dismissed by Faisal because he considered the pronouncements of the Bakdash congress, entitled " A Call to All Syrian Communists To Return to the Mother Party," were nothing more than a rehashing of the old Bakdash line. This interpretation was subsequently justified by the comments of a member of the Bakdash Central Committee, who emphatically stated that this call was the same as the 1986 call for unity. The most powerful man in the Bakdash Politburo, Abd al-Wahab Reshwani, put the final nail in the coffin of unity when he resorted to the old rhetoric of confrontation, declaring, "The Faisal group has departed from Marxism as the basis of organization, does not approve of democratic centralism, and does not adhere to proletarian [principles] and Marxist theory." He went on to say that they [the Bakdash group] have serious disagreements with the Faisal group. [93]

League of Communist Action

The only Marxist-Leninist communist organization that was taking an antiregime stand and had been functioning as a serious underground intellectual leftist group was the Hizb al-'Amal al-Shiouy'ie fi Suriyah, the Communist Action Party in Syria. This organization was an outgrowth and a continuation of the League of Communist Action, Ribatat al-'Amal al-Shiouy'ie, which had been founded in August 1976. The League of Communist Action had emerged from the amalgamation of Marxist groups that had proliferated in Syria in the early 1970s. Three enlarged secret meetings

during 1974–76 resulted in building the intellectual, political, and organizational foundation of a revolutionary communist group in Syria. The two secret organs of these groups, *al-Rayat al-Hamra'* (The Red Banner) and *al-Shiouy'ie* (The Communist) were published to spread their revolutionary message.

Five years later, on 19 August 1981, the League evolved into the Communist Action Party and held its first congress. In its final resolutions, the party declared, "[The party] sees the governing regime in Syria as the regime of a bureaucratic bourgeoisie and as a non-nationalist dictatorship. The party works to win political freedoms and spread democracy through a victory of the socialist revolution in order to attain the historic aims of the working class and build a society free of exploitation and oppression. It calls for the complete liberation of Palestinian land and the building of a unified socialist society in the Arab world. It also calls for and struggles for the creation of a unified international centre to lead the struggle of the entire proletariat in order to confront international capitalist forces." [94]

Six months after the inception of the party, the Syrian intelligence service began a campaign of oppression against this new organization that has continued until the present. The party claims that the campaign from September 1987 to January 1988 was devastating and that more than 2,000 people were arrested. Of those, only 800 were accounted for in prison. To corroborate this, it issued a detailed list of the names of prisoners and the places of their imprisonment and described the torture of Syrian political prisoners from all groups, including their own. [95]

The party attempted to answer the question of why there existed a Syrian military dictatorship, declaring:

> The real substance of every class rule, whatever its form of government (royal, republican, constitutional, liberal, absolute, fascist or a Bonapartist military dictatorship) is dictatorship over productive classes and these dictatorships can take different forms. [The forms they take] depends on their ability to provide the productive classes with basic material and moral necessities sufficient to sustain continued economic growth. . . . When the ruling class is unable to provide these necessary material and moral needs, it resorts to naked oppression and dependence on overt agencies of coercion, such as the army, the police, the political security forces and militias. However, when it [the ruling class] succeeds in providing those needs, its need to resort to overt oppression declines; legal means of coercion and control—courts, laws and prisons—are the norm. In this situation, the form of

government appears as liberal and democratic and conceals its [real] dictatorial essence. [96]

In the case of Syria, the Communist Action Party maintained the bourgeois class had been born "artificially . . . with the encouragement of French imperialist control."As such, according to the party:

> It was born before it had reached its political, economic and ideological maturity which would have given the bourgeoisie the means to successfully challenge feudalism, its historical class opponent. . . . Thus, the birth of the bourgeoisie, in real historic terms, was premature in comparison to the evolution of the bourgeoisie internationally and the European bourgeois imperial phase. The European bourgeoisie had consequently surpassed the Syrian bourgeoisie in terms of political, social and economic development. This being the case, the Syrian bourgeoisie's destiny had, in practical terms, been predetermined as a backward bourgeoisie and, as a result, a dependent one, primarily because of French imperialism and secondarily, because of international imperialist markets. . . . Accordingly, [because of] this backwardness and its dependence . . . the entire economic structure of the Syrian bourgeoisie continued to be deeply distorted and unable to meet the material and moral needs of the productive classes.

> This impotence became more evident after the emergence of the complicated national issue which was embodied in the success of the imperialist Zionist alliance to establish colonial settlers and occupy Palestine. This put the Syrian bourgeoisie, and all Arab bourgeoisies, in a severe and constant crisis as a result of their continuous failure to meet the challenges posed by [Israel].[97]

This, according to the party, explained the instability of Syria from its independence in 1946 up to the Assad regime in 1970. Because the working class had been unable to attain power under the leadership of the communist party, the situation allowed the birth of the Assad regime, which had cloaked itself in petit bourgeois slogans. This resulted in a military dictatorship, essentially because the military was the oldest and most powerful institution in Syria. The political bourgeoisie had used it to achieve its control. The Syrian army continued to play this role in political life, especially after their politicization as a result of the Baath coup in 1963 and the expansion of the army's numbers after the defeat in 1967 in Palestine. As a result, the army was the largest and most organized institution in Syrian society. According to the party,

Oppression did not extend only to political opposition, but extended even to people who exercised any political or cultural activity and did not meet with the approval of the authorities. In some cases, this even encompassed Baath followers or [people] who did not show enough loyalty on this occasion or that. . . . [The oppression included] falsifying political or union elections and in some cases, simply abolishing them . . . in addition to security surveillance of every social, cultural and athletic organization, the militarization of society in the [form] of youth militias, and the absolute monopoly by the regime of all the means of communication, such as radio, television, journals and the press. . . . [There was also] the requirement for approval, prior to publication, by the political intelligence agencies, of all printed matter whatever its nature, including books, academic and literary publications and even advertising, as well as approval for any appointment or employment in any state agency, including universities and institutions of higher learning. . . . The address of every citizen had to be known to the security agencies . . . and arbitrary arrest and search of any citizen, at any time, at home or anywhere in the country, was common. [98]

According to the Communist Action Party, since Assad assumed power in 1970, government security agencies had unlimited power and mushroomed to the degree that this sector became the most powerful and most funded agency in the country, employing tens of thousands of agents and hundreds of thousands of informers.[99]

Chapter 9—
Conclusion:
Continuity and Change

This examination of the record of communist discourse in Syria and Lebanon has revealed patterns of change and continuity in the movement's evolution. We have examined these patterns in order to understand the nature of the movement in terms of the political dynamics that shaped it and the role it played in Syrian and Lebanese politics in the twentieth century.

Patterns of Continuity and Change

The origins of the communist movement in Syria and Lebanon can be traced to the political turmoil in the Arab world in the wake of World War I. Young Arab intellectuals such as Yusuf Ibrahim Yazbak were on the one hand inspired by humanist philosophies and visions of a new sociopolitical order and on the other hand disillusioned by the postwar political settlements among West European powers, which culminated in the establishment of a French mandate over Greater Syria and a British mandate over Iraq and Palestine. Marxist ideology and communist activism provided ready models of protest for an intellectual elite disempowered and marginalized by colonialism.

The organization of Marxist circles and the foundation of a socialist press in the early twenties provided a venue for the debates of young idealists and disaffected intellectuals. By then, communist activists, spearheaded by the Comintem, were networking throughout the world. When Fouad al-Shamali arrived in Beirut in 1923, he initiated the organization of unions among workers; in 1924, Joseph Berger catalyzed the formation of the Lebanese People's Party; Artin Madoyan, a communist from the Armenian community in Beirut, midwifed its transformation into the Communist Party of Syria and Lebanon in 1925. Thus, out of the conjunction of

labor organizers, communist activists, and disaffected intellectuals emerged the synergy for the initial communist party formations.

From these origins, the communist movement in Syria and Lebanon evolved over the course of the twentieth century. This evolution was examined in terms of four stages. The first stage, spanning the decade of the twenties, encompassed the foundations of the movement from its origins and through a period of active labor mobilization and organizational expansion into centers outside Beirut and Damascus. Party organization in this stage was based on the participatory process. Party programs stressed a Syrian ontology in the framework of Marxist epistemology. That is, Syrian sociopolitical and socioeconomic conditions were the focus of party praxis, while the dismantling of capitalism and building of socialism were its mission. The dominance of domestic issues in party discourses in this stage reflects this ontology.

The end of the first stage and beginning of the second stage is marked by Khalid Bakdash's coup against Fouad al-Shamali's leadership of the party. This stage spanned the period from 1932 to 1961. Its initiation with coup and character assassination did not auger well for the movement. Like the Soviet Union under Stalin, the Communist Party of Syria and Lebanon under Khalid Bakdash reflected centralized control and the cult of personality in organizational form and prescriptive dogmatism in party discourse. While this transformation was not immediate, by the time it was apparent and protested, Khalid Bakdash's control was consolidated, centralized, and rigid.

For the first decade of this stage, party programs continued as they were in the first stage. Domestic socioeconomic and sociopolitical issues were emphasized, with party praxis centering on labor mobilization and activism. The March 1943 parliamentary elections provided the first indication of change. Khalid Bakdash assumed a decidedly un-Marxist—indeed, unsocialist—position on class and property issues in the campaign for Parliament, not only denying a revolutionary communist program but even an evolutionary socialist agenda. However, it was the party's 1943 national congress that clearly marked its transformation from a Marxist into a Stalinist party.

At the congress, Khalid Bakdash introduced a motion to split the party into separate Lebanese and Syrian parties with a common central committee headed by himself. The motion was easily adopted. The division of the party gave Bakdash greater control because he could more easily isolate opposition, contain the spread of liberal and nationalist ideas percolating in Lebanon's more open political environment, and control party function-

ing at will. His decision in 1950 to reunify the Syrian and Lebanese parties reflects the arbitrary nature of this control. Over the course of the stage, he utilized his control to purge the party of competition and opposition to his leadership, and to Sovietize the movement—that is, to harmonize the policies and programs of the party with Soviet policy and Soviet interests.

In the process, domestic issues (local and regional) were forsaken as chauvinist in favor of Soviet issues which were legitimized as internationalist. The party ceased to play a vanguard role in labor activism and endorsed policies advocated by the Soviet Union even if they were antagonistic to the Arab world. The partition of Palestine is the most glaring example. In the second stage, in other words, party programs stressed a Soviet ontology in the framework of a Stalinist epistemology.

As a result, the party lost touch with the grassroots of the Syrian and Lebanese working classes. Instead of mobilizing the proletariat, party praxis focussed on building political alliances and a national liberation front, a strategy that was in effect dictated by the Soviet Union. Bakdash proved to be a formidable politician in Syria's liberalized political arena in the mid-fifties, winning a parliamentary seat in 1954 and participating in a parliamentary bloc of progressive forces. But this was the zenith of the party's viability as a political actor in Syrian politics. The popularity of the parliamentary bloc was checkmated by the nationalist forces with their call for union with Egypt. Bakdash's inability to have any input into the unification process reflected the degree to which the party was out of touch with the nationalist tide that engulfed the grassroots. The party in effect had become fundamentally irrelevant to the politics of nationalism, which had achieved paramount status in the region's politics by the late fifties.

In response to the unification of Syria and Egypt, Bakdash decided again to divide the party into separate Syrian and Lebanese groups. Although the union was short-lived, the separation would prove fundamental and irreversible. The breakup of the United Arab Republic in 1961 marked the end of the second stage. The theme of the third stage, which spanned the period from 1961 to 1967, is the demise of the communist movement in Syria and its rebirth in Lebanon.

In the third stage, Khalid Bakdash tied the party to the coattails of the Baath government in an effort to gain official legitimacy. In the process, the party sacrificed ideological legitimacy and political autonomy. By the end of the stage, through the suppression of real debate on ideological issues, the communist movement in Syria was effectively stultified and unable to renew itself. In Lebanon, on the other hand, in spite of Bakdash's efforts to repress opposition to his dictates, a number of splinter groups formed.

Even as they fragmented the party, they served to rejuvenate the communist movement in Lebanon.

The fourth stage spanned the period from 1968 to 1995 and encompassed the separate paths of the Syrian and Lebanese parties. The initiation of this stage in 1967 was marked by the efforts of both the Lebanese and Syrian communist parties to break Khalid Bakdash's grip. The SCP was unsuccessful; as a result, the themes already identified in the third stage were played out over the remainder of the fourth stage. The absorption of the party into the Baathist regime, internal intrigues in the party, and the bastardization of ideology all contributed to the fragmentation of the party and the demise of the movement. Bakdash died in 1995, but his legacy was carried on by his wife, who assumed the mantle of secretary general; his son became a member of the Central Committee.

In contrast to the Syrian Communist Party, the story of the Lebanese Communist Party in this stage is the struggle for independence and internal democracy, for relevance to the domestic sociopolitical and socioeconomic environment, and for an authentic Marxist-Leninist praxis. By 1973, when the civil war started, the party had effectively asserted its independence and democratic character. The war presented a profound crisis in the fabric of Lebanese society. In the effort to address the crisis, the party applied the tools of scientific socialism and dialectical analysis. This contributed to the process of demystifying Marxism in general and communism in particular. By the end of the war, the party had mastered the dialectic and attained deep insight into the nature of Lebanese society, including the internal and external forces that acted within and upon Lebanon. By the nineties, the party was able to advocate and initiate bold initiatives in the struggle to construct a democratic society in Lebanon.

Dynamics of Continuity and Change

The patterns of continuity and change identified in the evolution of the communist movement in Syria and Lebanon over the twentieth century were shaped by the complex interplay of international, regional, and local forces that impacted on the political economy of the Middle East. The movement, founded in the international climate of imperialist competition for spheres of influence in the region, was impacted by the dynamic interplay of Arab nationalist aspirations to establish a unified Arab state in the Arab lands of the region; Zionist ambitions to resettle Europe's Jewry in Palestine and establish a colonial settler regime in the midst of the Arab homeland; European duplicity and treachery in dealing with Arab leaders

and Arab populations; and the Third International (1919–43), with its antipathy for imperialism and nationalism on the one hand and its solidarity with national liberation movements on the other.

During the second stage, international forces were reconfigured as the imperialist powers in the Middle East—Britain and France—faced the threat of fascist Germany. The international communist movement—the Third International—unequivocally supported anti-fascist forces, in effect placing communist movements in the Third World in the anomalous position of supporting imperialist powers and colonialist regimes. In the Arab world, this set the communist movement on a direct collision course with nationalist forces. Unable to transcend the Eurocentrism of the Third International, the communist movement in Syria and Lebanon fundamentally compromised its vanguard role in the national liberation struggle.

The end of the Comintern in 1943 heralded the absorption of the world communist movement into the Soviet state. Already blurred, any distinction between communist ideology and Soviet policy ceased to exist. The support of the communist movement in the Arab world for the partition of Palestine in 1948 was a reflection of the degree to which Soviet policy was accepted as communist praxis. Throughout the second stage, Khalid Bakdash's blind adherence to Soviet doctrine went unchallenged in communist circles inside and outside the Middle East.

By the end of the third stage in the evolution of the communist movement in Syria and Lebanon, nationalist forces had achieved political dominance in the Arab world. Under the banner of nationalism, the suppression of communism and persecution of communists and communist sympathizers reached unprecedented levels in Middle East politics. Throughout the region, dictatorial regimes set up elaborate and technologically sophisticated security forces to squash all political opposition. In Syria, the Communist Party abrogated a vanguard role in Arab liberation to nationalist forces and allied itself with the Baathist military regime for political legitimacy.

By the fourth stage, local forces had achieved ascendancy over international and regional forces in influencing the evolution of the communist movement in Syria and Lebanon. In effect, the movement reflected the local environment in which it operated. Thus, the Lebanese movement was shaped by the same dynamic that culminated in civil war. Like Lebanese society itself, the movement fragmented and re-created itself in a new image. The Syrian movement, on the other hand, was shaped by the dynamic of a totalitarian regime. And, like Syrian society, the movement was dominated by one man who controlled and stultified its intellectual founda-

tions. Thus it fragmented, and it has been unable to reconstitute itself in a new image due to internal suppression and external oppression.

Roles of Continuity and Change

Over the course of the twentieth century, the role played by the communist movement in Syrian and Lebanese political development has been determined by its relationship to the dynamics of continuity and change. In other words, the movement's relationship to the forces promoting fundamental sociopolitical change specified its role. By ideological definition, a communist movement is committed to fundamental sociopolitical change. Examined from this perspective, the role played by the communist movement in Syria and Lebanon is a reflection of the movement's nature, defined in terms of its relationship to the patterns and dynamics of change in Syria and Lebanon.

In the first stage, spanning the period from 1923 to 1932, the movement played a vanguard role in the dynamics of change. This role was delineated in terms of organizing the Lebanese working class and articulating its political interests in opposition to patterns of feudalism (represented in the impoverishment of the peasantry), to the forces of colonialism (represented in the mandate) and to capitalism (represented in the exploitation of workers). In this way, the movement not only politicized the social problems of poverty but also contributed to the broadening of public participation in the political process in Lebanon and Syria.

In the second stage, spanning the period from 1932 to 1961, the vanguard role in the dynamics of change gradually gave way to a subsidiary role. This role was delineated by the relationship of disciple the CPSL assumed vis-à-vis the Soviet Union. At the pragmatic level, the role transition was reflected in the change in CPSL praxis from labor activism among the working classes to ideological education among the intelligentsia. In brokering Soviet interests in the local political arena, the CPSL abandoned a vanguard role in Syrian and Lebanese politics for a subsidiary role in the politics of change that swept through the region on the nationalist tide. This role shift reflected the fault lines in the movement that had surfaced with the loss of Palestine.

In the third stage, spanning the period from 1961 to 1967, the role changed again, transmuting from a subsidiary role in the dynamics of change to a vanguard role in the dynamics of continuity. This transformation was delineated in terms of the SCP's role in assisting the Baath in Syria to organize and subordinate progressive political forces to Baathist hege-

mony. In brokering Baathist interests in Syria, Khalid Bakdash transformed the role of the SCP from change agent to establishment emissary. The SCP ceased to function as an actor in the communist movement in Syria and Lebanon.

It was in this period that the fault line in the movement crystallized into a full-blown rupture in the party. The SCP and LCP, formally separated in 1958, both represented actors in the communist movement. It was not until 1968 that the ten-year process of separation of the communist movement from the SCP was finally unequivocal.

By the fourth stage, then, the SCP functioned as a Syrian political party, not as an actor in the communist movement. With the entrenchment of Assad's power in Syria, the SCP assumed a subordinate role in the political establishment of the Baathist government.

While there were efforts from within the SCP to rejuvenate the movement, these were successfully checked by Khalid Bakdash, who, in effect if not by intention, squashed the communist movement in Syria to further his own political career. Supported by both the CPSU and the Assad regime (each manipulating the SCP to serve their own ends), Bakdash was able to withstand successive internal efforts throughout the 1970s and 1980s to reform the party and restore its communist character as a vanguard of the working classes. Thus, by the 1990s, the only representative of the communist movement in Syria was the Communist Action Party, a small clandestine association originating as a splinter group of the SCP in the mid-1970s.

In contrast to the stultification of communist ideology in the SCP over the fourth stage, in the LCP communist ideology was rejuvenated through the art of social critique. Civil war and social reconstruction presented unprecedented challenges to party praxis, forcing the LCP to successively redefine and renew its role in Lebanese politics. In the process, the LCP reformulated the role of vanguard party in the concrete context of Lebanese political realities.

NOTES

Chapter 1—
Establishment of the Communist Movement in Syria and Lebanon

1. The most authoritative sources on the Communist Party in Lebanon and Syria are Mohammed Dakroub, *Judhur al-Sindiyanah al-Hamra': Hikayat Nushu 'al-Hizb al-Shiouy'ie al-Lubnani 1924–1931,* 2nd edition (Beirut: Dar al-Farabi, 1984); S. Ayoub, *al-Hizb al-Shiouy'ie fi Suriyah wa Lubnan, 1922–1958* (Beirut: Dar al-Huriyah, 1960); and Ilyas Murqis, *Tarikh al-Ahzab al-Shouy 'iah fi al-Watan al-'Arabi* (Beirut: Dar al-Tali'ah, 1964).

2. W. E. Hocking, *The Spirit of World Politics with Special Studies of the Near East* (New York, 1932), p. 288.

3. Interview, Rabat, Morocco, 27 May 1981.

4. Yusuf Ibrahim Yazbak, *Hikayat Awal Ayyar fi al-'Alam: Thikrayat wa Tarikh wa Nusus* (Beirut: Dar al-Farabi, 1974), p. 51.

5. Prior to World War I, he had published a newspaper that he called *The Bardoni.* He closed it down when the war broke out and moved to Boston, where he wandered about and returned after the war. He then issued his newspaper twice a week under the new name, *al-Sahafi al-Ta'eh.* His close friend Yusuf Ibrahim Yazbak describes the name by saying, "This refers to his previous straying. Nothing could describe him more accurately than 'al-Ta'eh.' He is wandering both in terms of his thoughts and behavior, as well as his way of expressing himself. Nevertheless, he is incredibly funny, humorous, sharp tongued, witty and full of esprit."

6. Interview, Rabat, Morocco, 28 May 1981.

7. *Al-Ahram* (Cairo), 26 May 1923. See also Rifa'at El-Said, *Tarikh al-Harakah al-Ishtirakiyah fi Misr, 1900–1925,* (Beirut: Dar al-Farabi, n.d.), pp. 226–27.

8. *Al-Sahafi al-Ta'eh* (Beirut), no. 67, 9 June 1923.

9. Mas'oud Dhahir, *Tarikh Lubnan al-Ijtima'i, 1914–1926* (Beirut: Dar al-Farabi, 1974) p. 299.

10. Fouad al-Shamali, *Asas al-Harakah al-Shiouy'iyah fi al-Bilad al-Suriyah al-Lubnaniyah* (Beirut: al-Fawai'd Press, 1935), p. 12

11. Ibid., pp. 60–64.

12. Ibid.

13. Report delivered by Haim Auerbach, chairman of the Palestinian Communist Party (PCP), at the secret meeting of the Central Committee of the PCP held in Tel Aviv on 8 March 1927. *Abstract of Intelligence* (Iraq), para. 609 of 2 June 1927 has reference.

14. Ibid.

15. Dakroub, *Judhur al-Sindiyanah al-Hamra',* pp. 218–21; see also Fouad al-Shamali, *Naqabat al-Umal* (Beirut: al-Raiyah Press, 1929), p. 49.

16. Yazbak, *Hikayat Awal Ayyar fi al-'Alam,* p. 69.

17. Ibid., pp. 69–74.

18. Ibid., pp. 85–86.

19. Interview, Beirut, 18 July 1971.

20. *Al-Ayam* (Damascus), 22 April 1936.

21. 'Abdullah Hanna, *al-Harakah al-'Ummalyah fi Suriyah wa Lubnan, 1900–1945* (Damascus: Dar Damashiq, 1937), pp. 209–10.

22. Artin Madoyan, *Hayat 'ala al-Mitras* (Beirut: Dar al-Farabi, 1986), pp. 56–60; see also *al-Nida'* (Beirut), 15 April 1979.

23. Dakroub, *Judhur al-Sindiyanah al-Hamra',* p. 321.

24. Ibid.

25. *Al-Ma 'radh* (Beirut), 16 July 1925; *Zahlah al-Fatat* (Beirut), 22 July 1925; and Dakroub, *Judhur al-Sindiyanah al-Hamra',* pp. 290–96.

26. Al-Shamali, *Asas al-Harakah al-Shiouy'iyah fi al-Bilad al-Suriyah al-Lubnaniyah,* pp. 33–34.

27. Haim Auerbach's secret report of 8 March 1927; see *Abstract of Intelligence* (Iraq), para. 609 of 2 June 1927 for reference.

28. Ibid.

29. Iraqi Police (Major J. F. Wilkins), file no. 1831.

30. Hanna Batatu, *The Old Social Classes and the Revolutionary Movements in Iraq: A Study of Iraq's Old Landed and Commercial Classes and Its Communists, Baathists, and Free Officers* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), p. 386.

31. Fouad al-Shamali, "How We Organized the Clandestine Communist Movements in Syria and Lebanon," *al-'Asifa* (Beirut), no. 54, 27 August 1933, p. 16.

32. Ibid., part 2, no. 55, 4 September 1933, p. 16.

33. Batatu, *The Old Social Classes and the Revolutionary Movements in Iraq,* pp. 213–17, 234–38.

34. *Al-Ahram* (Cairo), 12 July 1930.

35. Fouad al-Shamali, "How We Organized the Clandestine Communist Movements in Syria and Lebanon," *al-'Asifa* (Beirut), no. 56, 11 September 1933, pp. 16–17.

36. *Al-Ahwal* (Beirut), 6 June 1930.

37. Special issue of *al-Thikra* (Beirut), 12 May 1929.

38. Dakroub, *Judhur al-Sindiyanah al-Hamra',* pp. 350–51.

39. Ibid., pp. 351–53.

40. *Al-Yaqdha* (Beirut), nos. 11–12, June–July 1930.

41. *Al-Barq* (Beirut), 10 February 1931.

42. Elyas al-Bawari, *Tarikh al-Harakah al-Umaliyah fi Lubnan: 1908–1946,* vol. 1 (Beirut: Dar al-Farabi, 1986), pp. 147–49.

43. The entire program is reprinted as an appendix in Dakroub, *Judhur al-Sindiyanah al-Hamra',* pp. 421–37.

44. Ibid., p. 424.

45. Ibid., pp. 426–29.

46. Ibid., pp. 429–30.

47. Ibid., pp. 430–32.

48. Ibid., p. 432.

49. Ibid., pp. 432–33.

50. Ibid., pp. 433–34.

51. Ibid., pp. 434–35.

52. I. V. Spector, *The Soviet Union and the Muslim World, 1917–1958* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1958), p. 136; complete text of resolution, pp. 129–40.

53. Ibid., p. 140.

54. Based on interviews with Yusuf Yazbak, Paris, 18 April 1981; Nikola Shawi, Beirut, 8 July 1972; and Mohammed Dakroub, Beirut, 4 July 1971. For details of the accusations, see Nikola Shawi, *Tariqi ila al-Hizb* (Beirut: Dar al-Farabi, 1984), pp. 298–300; and Ayoub, *al-Hizb al-Shiouy'ie fi Suriyah wa Lubnan, 1922–1958,* p. 71; see also Yusuf Khatar al-Hulo, *Awraq min Ta'rikhuna,* vol. 1 (Beirut: Dar al-Farabi, 1988) pp. 430–32.

55. Interview, Paris, 18 April 1981.

56. Shawi, *Tariqi ila al-Hizb,* pp. 301–3.

57. Al-Hulo, *Awraq min Ta'rikhuna,* p. 421.

58. Shawi, *Tariqi ila al-Hizb,* p. 334. Also see al-Hulo, *Awraq min Ta 'rikhuna*, p. 280.

59. Madoyan, *Hayat 'ala al-Mitras,* p. 139–40.

60. Dhahir al-'Akari, *al-Sahafah al-Thawriya fi Lubnan, 1925–1975* (Beirut: Dar al-Farabi, 1975), pp. 13–17; for an account of Salim Khayatah's role see 'Abdullah Hanna, *al-Itijhat al-Fikriyah fi Suriyah wa Lubnan, 1920–1945* (Damascus: Dar al-Taadum al-'Arabi, 1973), pp. 142–68.

61. See Hanna, *al-Itijhat al-Fikriyah fi Suriyah wa Lubnan, 1920–1945,* pp. 93–125.

62. *Al-Tali 'ah,* quoted in Hanna, *al-Itijhat al-Fikriyah fi Suriyah wa Lubnan,* pp. 93–94.

63. "Hitler's Gross Racism," *al-Tali'ah* (Damascus), 20 December 1935, pp. 22–23.

64. *Al-Tali'ah* (Damascus), 19 May 1939, p. 247.

Chapter 2—
The Bakdash Regime

1. In the 1950s Bakdash was seen by Zionist writers as "the number-one figure in Levant Communism" and the probable paymaster of the Israeli Communist

Party. Judd L. Teller, *The Kremlin, the Jews, and the Middle East* (New York: Thomas Yoseloff, 1957), p. 137.

2. Batatu, *The Old Social Classes and the Revolutionary Movements in Iraq,* p. 581.

3. Madoyan, *Hayat 'ala al-Mitras,* pp. 107–10, 129–30. Insight into Bakdash's character is given in Madoyan's report that shortly after assuming the role of secretary general at the formal meeting of the Central Committee, Bakdash physically assaulted a veteran member. The minutes of the meeting recorded the consternation of the other member over this (p. 135).

4. Ibid., pp. 135, 151.

5. According to Patrick Seale, Bakdash's books, pamphlets, and speeches reveal a well-trained and subtle, rather than an original, mind. But he nevertheless stood out from most Syrian politicians for his skill in debate, his ability to disarm opponents, and for the doctrinal coherence of his views. *The Struggle for Syria: A Study of Post-War Arab Politics, 1945–1958* (London: Oxford University Press, 1965), p. 161.

6. Ibid., pp. 135–36.

7. Madoyan, *Hayat 'ala al-Mitras,* p. 185.

8. Ibid., pp. 136–37.

9. Ibid., p. 144.

10. Walter Z. Laqueur, *Communism and Nationalism in the Middle East* (New York: Praeger, 1956), p. 294.

11. M. S. Agwani, *Communism in the Arab East* (Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1969), p. 17.

12. Laqueur, *Communism and Nationalism in the Middle East,* p. 143.

13. Ibid., p. 18.

14. Agwani, *Communism in the Arab East,* pp. 17–18.

15. Madoyan, *Hayat 'ala al-Mitras,* p. 152.

16. Ibid., p. 157.

17. Muhamad Harb Farzat, *al-Hayat al-Hizbiyah fi Suriyah* (Damascus: Dar al-Rwad, 1955), p. 116.

18. Tabitha Petran, *Syria* (London: Ernest Benn Ltd., 1972), pp. 64–65.

19. A. H. Hourani, *Syria and Lebanon: A Political Essay* (London: Oxford University Press, 1946), p. 199.

20. S. H. Longrigg, *Syria and Lebanon under French Mandate* (London: Oxford University Press, 1958), p. 216.

21. Madoyan, *Hayat 'ala al-Mitras,* p. 169; al-Hulo, *Awraq min Ta'rikhuna,* 1: 22.

22. Longrigg, *Syria and Lebanon under French Mandate,* p. 221.

23. Longrigg, *Syria and Lebanon under French Mandate,* p. 219; and Munir Taqi al-Din, *Wiladat Istiqlal* (Beirut: Dar al-Ilm lil-Malayyen, 1953), p. 22.

24. Hourani, *Syria and Lebanon,* p. 202.

25. *Sawt al-Sha'ab* (Beirut) 9 April 1938.

26. Interview, Damascus, 15 July 1959.

27. Madoyan, *Hayat 'ala al-Mitras,* pp. 189–90. al-Hulo, *Awraq min Ta'rikhuna,* vol. 1, pp. 23–24.

28. Madoyan, *Hayat 'ala al-Mitras,* p. 189.

29. Hourani, *Syria and Lebanon,* pp. 213–17.

30. Ibid., p. 219.

31. Ibid., p. 220.

32. *Sawt al-Sha'ab* (Beirut), 11 and 25 September 1939.

33. Hourani, *Syria and Lebanon,* p. 254.

34. Ibid., p. 254.

35. Ibid., p. 256

36. *Sawt al-Sha'ab* (Beirut), 9 May 1943.

37. Khalid Bakdash, *Al-Hizb al-Shiouy'ie fi Suriyah wa Lubnan: Siyasatuhu al-Wataniyah wa Barnamujuhu al-Watani* [The Communist Party in Syria and Lebanon: Its National Policy and Its National Program] (Beirut: Communist Party of Syria and Lebanon, 1942), pp. 23–24.

38. *Sawt al-Sha'ab* (Beirut), 9 May 1943.

39. Bakdash, *Al-Hizb al-Shiouy'ie fi Suriyah wa Lubnan,* p. 30.

40. *Sawt al-Sha'ab* (Beirut), 20 June 1943.

41. *Tariq al-Sha'ab* (Beirut), 12 June 1943.

42. *Sawt al-Sha'ab* (Beirut), 3 August 1943.

43. *Sawt al-Sha'ab* (Beirut), 12 September 1943.

44. Khalid Bakdash, *Ba'dhu Masa lona al-Wataniyah* [Some of Our National Questions] (Beirut: Communist Party of Syria and Lebanon, 1943), p. 18.

45. Ibid.

46. According to General Catroux, the relevant figures were 35 percent for Syria and 25 percent for Lebanon. However, the Lebanese authorities claimed 53 percent. Longrigg, *Syria and Lebanon,* p. 330.

47. Ibid., p. 329.

48. *Sawt al-Sha'ab* (Beirut), 2 January 1944.

49. Madoyan, *Hayat 'ala al-Mitras,* pp. 238–42.

50. Madoyan, *Hayat 'ala al-Mitras,* pp. 266–67; al-Hulo, *Awraq min Ta'rikhuna,* vol. 1, pp. 30–31; interviews with Nikola Shawi, Beirut, 3 July 1972.

51. Quoted in Laqueur, *Communism and Nationalism in the Middle East,* pp. 148– 49.

52. *Sawt al-Sha'ab* (Beirut), 7 January 1944.

53. Ibid.

54. Khalid Bakdash, *La Charte Nationale du Parti Communiste en Syrie et au Liban* (Beirut, 1944), p. 43.

55. Ibid., p. 16.

56. *Sawt al-Sha'ab* (Beirut), 26 July 1944.

57. Madoyan, *Hayat 'ala al-Mitras,* p. 292.

58. Al-Hulo, *Awraq min Ta'rikhuna,* vol. 1, pp. 32–33.

59. *Al-Tariq* 5, nos. 7–8 (1946), p. 32.

60. Al-Hulo, *Awraq min Ta'rikhuna,* vol. 1, pp. 32–33.

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32. *Ila al-Amam* means "Forward," and the word has significance in communist jargon. The word "Forward" was commonly used by the socialists, communists, and other radical leftists as a title for their numerous journals and publications. Lenin himself, after his resignation from the editorial board of the organ of the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party, *Iskra* (The Spark), caused by his quarrel with the Mensheviks and Plechanov, published a new weekly, *Vperyod* ("Forward" in Russian) during the period from 4 January to 18 May 1905. The paper was published in Geneva and smuggled into Russia, where at the same time the outbreak of the 1905 Revolution undermined the Tsarist regime. Louis Fisher, *On the Life of Lenin* (New York: Harper and Row, 1964), p. 41. In 1914, on the eve of World War I, Lenin read in reports of the German Social Democratic paper *Vorwarts* ("Forwards") that in Berlin the party members of the *Reichstag* had joined the right-wing parties in voting for huge war credits; this caused his famous comment: " This is the end of the Second International. . . . From this day on, I cease to be a Social-Democrat and become a Communist." Ronald W. Clark, *Lenin: The Man Behind the Mask* (London: Faber and Faber, 1988), p. 153. Even in Krakow before 1939, the Polish Social Democrats published their party's daily under the title *Naprzod* ("Forward" in Polish), and its editor, the Polish-Jewish socialist Emil Haeker, was one of the leading political activists of the period.

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132. Ibid., p. 110.

133. Ibid., p. 111.

134. See our discussion of Mroué articles in the next chapter.

135. *Al-Mutamar al-Watani al-Khamis lil Hizb al-Shiouy'ie al-Lubnani: al-Mohemat al-Rahina wa afaq al-Mustaqbal,* p. 119.

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138. See our discussion of the debates of the 1990s in the next chapter.

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