

Edited by: Jamil Hilal and Katja Hermann

# MAPPING OF THE ARAB LEFT

Contemporary Leftist Politics  
in the Arab East

**ROSA  
LUXEMBURG  
STIFTUNG**  
REGIONAL OFFICE  
PALESTINE

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# MAPPING

OF THE ARAB LEFT





**Contemporary Leftist Politics in the Arab East**

# Foreword

During times of rapid changes in the Arab world, with new political constellations in the landscape and open prospects for future changes in the region, we need to thoroughly understand political actors, programs, and options. However, when we consider the contemporary Arab Left, critical knowledge that goes beyond the level of stereotypes and slogans is difficult to find and rather scattered, especially outside the Arabic speaking milieu. It becomes even more relevant against the background of the increasing influence of neoliberal policies on the one hand and the critical role of political religion in the region on the other hand to reduce this gap, to gain a clearer understanding of compositions, constituencies, tasks, demands, goals, influences, and challenges faced by the Left.

While the socio-economic and political requirements in the countries considered in this book (Palestine, Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, Iraq and the Palestinian-Arab Community in Israel) call clearly for changes and alternatives based on a genuine understanding of social justice, freedom, and equality, the Left seems currently unprepared to take on the challenge. Even more, the contemporary Arab Left is still more fragmented than unified, more often criticizing the status quo than proposing effective alternatives, a situation not much different from the status of other leftist actors, e.g. European Leftist actors.<sup>1</sup>

The goal of this mapping of leftist actors is to not only support debate of the Left in the Arab world but to also encourage alternative action. It is self-evident that any kind of “mapping” can only be a beginning, a very first step of a longer journey to be shared by many. However, hopefully this project will feed in and contribute to a larger process of re-considering and re-strengthening leftist understandings in and outside of the Arab East. In order to have a fruitful process of transnational exchange and cooperation, one must understand the similarities and differences experienced by various actors in order to properly move forward.

As part of the process for understanding and presenting the Arab Left, it was necessary for RLS to reach out to local Arab scholars and experts to put together pieces on varying topics impacting the Left in the Arab world.<sup>2</sup> Listening to voices from the Arab East invites the reader not only to learn more about political discourse in the region, but also avoids the standard

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1 See Michael Brie and Cornelia Hildebrandt (eds.): *Parties of the Radical Left in Europe, Analysis and Perspectives*. Rosa Luxemburg Foundation, Berlin: Karl Dietz Verlag 2005.

2 With the exception of the paper about the Iraqi Left.



Eurocentric perspective most are subjected to. To reconnect the discourse of the Left in the Arab East to the international community, and in particular to non-Arabic speaking people, the book is bilingual and presents all essays in both Arabic and English. The content of the book, including the political language of the papers, is the sole responsibility of the authors and can under no circumstances be regarded as reflecting the position of Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung Regional Office Palestine.

**Katja Hermann**

Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung Regional Office Palestine  
Ramallah, December 2013

# Introduction: On the Self-definition of the Left in the Arab East

\* Jamil Hilal

## On the Meaning of the Left in the Current Arab Reality

When discussing the current state of the Left in the Arab world, one must first take into consideration the impact of the Arab Spring and its transformation on the relationship between the Arab people and their governments. Such transformation requires the mobilization of the experiences and wisdom accumulated by the Left during the last decades. This book does not represent a summary of the Left's experience. None of the participants in this booklet, despite their experience and knowledge, seek to deprive the Leftist forces, groups, and organizations from their right and duty to take part in this review and to draw the appropriate lessons. Additionally, there is a need to objectively examine the direct and indirect roles played by the Left in the recent Arab popular uprisings and to evaluate these with the aim of reviving the Left and its political, social, and cultural projects. In addition, the Left must reaffirm its intellectual autonomy after years of repression. The review should include the positions of both the communist and the non-communist Left and their relationship with the despotic regions in the area, as well as their role in confronting both imperialism and the State of Israel. The review should also include the justifications presented by certain sectors of the Left for foreign intervention. In fact, it has been proven that intervention, whether regional or international, has not been beneficial in ridding the region of despotic regimes. This has been documented by a number of papers in the present book.

The Left at this stage might not aspire to be more than a compass that points to the change for a civil democratic state, and a vanguard against plans aimed at diverting the uprisings away from their original goals. The Left also acts, upon this basis, to mobilize efforts of the youth and adults for the sake of rebuilding the institutions of a new political order based on principles of freedom, equality, and social justice. At the same time, most sectors of the Left reject foreign intervention and conditions imposed by neo-liberal capitalist globalization support the Palestinian people's liberation struggle against the

colonial policy and racial segregation of the Zionist order, and support liberation aspirations worldwide.

The Left cannot but participate actively in what I call deep democracy. That is a democracy that seeks to protect and advance social, economic, and cultural rights. It is the democracy that responds to the goals of Arab popular uprisings. Deep democracy relies on the values of freedom and equality, and aims at achieving social justice based on granting equal opportunities to all citizens. It seeks the establishment of a democratic regime regardless of the potential local, regional, and international forces with their financial, economic and media capacities and influence whoever may wish to counter their initiatives. All of these things require the mobilization of the Left and other forces which have an interest in establishing a new regime which does not base itself in reactionary and conservative ideologies.

The current papers involve analyses of the cases of the Left in Palestine (on both sides of "the Green Line"), Jordan, Lebanon, Syria and Iraq. They refer, though through different details, to the development of the Left's experience in these societies. They show the special experience of the Left in each of these countries according to the determinants of its political arena, to the changing social-economic structure prevailing there, and to the Left's position vis-a-vis the cultural and intellectual trends (liberal, Islamist, leftist, pan-nationalist and a combination of some of these) which are in conflict to dominate such an arena. One source of confusion for the Left in its diagnosis of Arab regimes goes back to its one-dimensional view evaluating their stand against Israel and the USA. These movements must once again formulate policies initiated by these regimes which are destructive to the causes of the Left.<sup>1</sup>

The papers pose the question of the meaning of being leftist under the current Arab, regional, and international conditions, which is a question debated by leftist forces worldwide.<sup>2</sup>

The answer to this question might entail leftist actors making a distinction between two important levels of their activities. First, they must address issues common to leftist participants in different political fields, and similar socio-economic and cultural characteristics of their societies. Second, they must deal with their specific political field, the specific socio-economic and cultural components thereof, and the conditions for leftist activity in each society. To be sure, there is a conflict within the intellectual-cultural fields on the local political level within each state and each national movement. In addition you have conflict at the regional and international levels. At the regional level, most of these countries struggle with the influence of Political Islam at the international level, the social movements must fight against

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1    Iyad El-Abdallah, "The Left Defending Its State", (in Arabic) Al-Adab Magazine, Summer 2012.

2    Barry Rubin, "The Arab Political Left and the Islamist Drive for Power", Crethi Plethi, The Middle East, posted on November 7, 2011.

against brutal capitalism, neo-liberal policies, and environmentally destructive practices.<sup>3</sup> Tackling such conflict is beyond the scope of the present book.

## Consensus of the Left Regarding the Necessity of Democracy

What unites the leftist forces might be their stand against capitalism, being the main creator of inequality, privileges, exploitation, wars, and environmental destruction. It is not logical for one to be leftist and believe, at the same time, that capitalism is the highest stage of human development. Rather, we find that most of the leftist forces agree that socialism is the best order for humanity, as it directs resources towards the betterment of human beings as a whole. This is contrary to capitalism which concerns itself with interests of a tiny minority who are interested in accumulating profits and wealth and in formulating mechanisms (laws, police, armies, propaganda and media etc.) for protecting the interests of such a minority.

There is a connection between the stand regarding capitalism on the leftist agenda and the concern for democracy. Democracy has come to be considered a fundamental part of socialism and a guarantee for avoiding the fate of the Soviet socialist experience. This is the basis for the view that Marxism in the Arab world "has contributed to the making of its own crisis, as it sought to justify and theorize a political structure that wouldn't tolerate its existence nor the existence of any different ideology in the arena. All that would occur under pretexts which Marxism has defended, while forsaking one of the most important conditions for such existence, democracy<sup>4</sup>.

Under the current Arab conditions, with their diverse landscapes, the concern for democracy goes back to the necessity of dismantling despotic regimes. With their dismantlement, there would be the creation of a civil democratic regime whose institutions and legislations are based on equality in rights and duties. In addition they would advance rights such as freedom of expression, religion, political orientation, and the right to unionize regardless of gender, religion, sect, ethnicity, or nationality. As a result, we find the idea of being a leftist defined as "the one who tries to connect between the two values of freedom and equality, and who recognizes that, under the specific conditions of our countries, the realization of political democracy is an integrated historical task that entails the dismantling of despotic regimes and replacing them by civil democratic regimes, institutions, and legislation. The leftist is the person who recognizes that avoiding the negative aspects of political democracy

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3 Jodi Dean, "The neoliberal trap", *OpenDemocracy*, 17th July 2013.

4 Iyad El-Abdallah, "Arab Marxism: On Justification of Authoritarianism" (Arabic), *Al-Adab*, 6/7/8-2010.

cannot be achieved through a dictatorship which represses freedom without the realization of equality, but rather through the reinforcement of freedom by equality, that is, the disengagement between democracy and the domination of capital, and progress towards socio-economic democracy.”<sup>5</sup> In other terms, the Left has to oppose attempts at reducing democracy into mere election ballots far removed from the values of freedom, equality, and social justice, as well as the institutional and legislative expressions thereof. The election ballots have been, and could be, used to legislate the domination of capital, to justify inequality in the distribution of wealth and power, to restrict freedoms, and to hinder the right of all citizens to education, health facilities, and housing.

## The Role of the Idea of Social Justice in Leftist Movements in the Arab World

It should be noted that the collapse of the socialist experience in the USSR and elsewhere has made the leftist literature in the Arab World void of writings on the building of socialism. This doesn't necessarily mean that the Left “has abandoned the goal of building of socialism, rather it has become to be considered the optimal solution in the long run for the problems of man and society.” Socialism has come to be the vision that “seeks to realize maximum social justice without a violent revolution that destroys the capitalist regime...a vision that rejects making Marxism the last word of humanity...but rather a project aimed at the liberation of man to be a free-acting subject.”<sup>6</sup> The estimation that the socialist transformation is not possible in the near future has led the Left to concentrate on other issues such as national liberation (building the independent national state with what that entails of struggle against foreign occupation, colonialism, and imperialist domination), democracy, social justice, equality, and gender equality. The task of building democratic states has preceded other tasks of the Left because in the Arab world this task hasn't been achieved.<sup>7</sup> Still, there are those who refer to the recent developments in Latin America to show the necessity of maintaining the goal of building socialism in the programs of the Arab Left. To recognize the reality of the Arab Left today, we have to become familiar with the “currently existing Left,” that is the political parties and movements seeking to realize social justice in different parts of the world. This is especially true in Latin America, where we find the beginning of a new bloc that aims to create a worldwide movement, not just a local movement. In Bolivia, Evo Morales achieved a great success in the

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5 Fawwaz Trabulsi, “The Left in the Revolutionary Era”, *Bidayat*, Winter/Spring 2012.

6 Michele Kilo, “The Arab Left: the Crises and Proposals”, *Al-Adab*, 6/7/8-2010.

7 See: Jamil Hilal, *The Palestinian Left: Where to?*, Ramallah: Rosa Luxemburg Institute, 2009 (The Introduction); see also: Conference of the Arab Left concerning its Tasks, in Abdul-Ghaffar Shukr (ed.), *The Arab Left and Future Issues*, Cairo: Madbuli Library, 1998.

presidential elections held in December 2009. It is worth noting that the name of the movement to which Evo Morales is affiliated is "The Movement towards Socialism," and the word "towards" is perhaps the best expression of the programs of leftist movements of today, because it refers to the practical, rather than the ideological "Salvationist" trend. One must consider the programs, not the end purposes ("Salvationist" or otherwise), as the proof of what is leftist, even if those programs are transitional<sup>8</sup>.

It could be said that the concept of social justice has become the most widespread determinant of the Left in the Arab world. For Nayef Hawatmeh, the first determinant of the democratic left is the linkage of the left "with the substance of the concept of social justice, and the distribution of state and society revenues among the maximum number of people. In addition it must integrate the concept of progress as its vision to achieve the following goals, namely pan-Arab sovereignty, liberation from dependency, and sustainable human growth with all of its dimensions." Also, he calls for democratic solutions for the ethnic and sectarian problems chronic in most of the Arab countries, for equal citizenship without any discrimination, and creating the conditions for freedom of speech, organization, and political freedom."<sup>9</sup>

For one of the well-known Leftist intellectuals, the Left "is the actor capable, supposedly at least, of combining both the national issue and the two issues of democracy and social justice. However, the first condition for such a position and role is its commitment to a simple standard, to take the people's side. This means to get rid of the elitist tendency towards the people. This means not treating those who are uneducated in leftist ideology as stupid or backwards people. When movements attempt to make the ideology sacred then people become antagonistic towards the ideology because of its dogmatism, which is not much different from the totalitarian despotic regimes currently in power. Such a tendency justifies, in turn, despotism and dictatorship because it establishes an educational relation between the vanguard and the people. The people are ignorant of their interests, so the mission of "the small prophets" is to undertake their guidance and leadership."<sup>10</sup>

Due to the loose meaning of the term social justice, and in light of the current debate in the Arab world about its intellectual, programmatic, political and organizational determinants, there is a need to distinguish between Liberalism as a political and social concept and social justice as a Leftist concept. Liberalism advocates human rights, citizenship rights, and civil society (though it came to be reduced to the NGO's), while stressing the priority of the individual over

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8 George Jaqaman, "Is there a Need for the Left in the Arab Society?," *Al-Adab*, 4-5-2010.

9 Nayef Hawatmeh, *The Vision for the Great Revival*, Damascus: Al-Ahali; Beirut: Bisan, September 2009. See the review by As'ad Abu Khalil in *Al-Akhbar*, # 1315, 2011, under the title "The Crisis of the Arab Left: Nayef Hawatmeh as a Model"

10 Jadalliyah, "An Extensive Interview with Fawwaz Trabulsi on the Syrian Revolution," 4/5/2013.

the community, the prompting of competition among individuals, and the importance of free markets. The Left focuses on the importance of social justice, while Liberalism is not the least concerned about social justice, nor does it focus on equality, but rather on freedom, and personal freedom specifically. However, recent years have witnessed an increased usage of the term social justice by the discourse of governing elites, including monarchies. As a result, it became necessary for the Left to explain how it understands social justice and its prerequisites.

Some of the Left, because of the terrible repression its members and organizations had suffered by the ruling Arab elites, overestimated the freedom component, one of the two main components, while underestimating the other component, equality.<sup>11</sup> This clouded judgment obscured the inherent differences between democracy and liberalism. In fact, one must link the idea of freedom as being a tool for achieving equality. If one does not make these links, they instead use democracy to consolidate gross equalities in society. Additionally, neo-liberalism promotes the free market economy as a major determinant of the social order and of the opportunities for the life of individuals. Therefore, the Left has to stress the principle of equality in parallel with that of freedom. This does not mean mere equality among all before the law, but a strict form of equality that touches all aspects of daily life. Here arises the need for dismantling the structures of inequality in society through expanding the realm of rights (with all duties entailed) to include, together with the familiar political and civil rights, the social, economic, and cultural rights,<sup>12</sup> and for adopting the principle of affirmative action in order to compensate certain social groups for the injustice they have suffered.

The Left, Marxist or otherwise, is concerned with social justice, as evident in following papers and in the programs of Leftist parties in the Arab world. It seeks to distinguish itself from liberal parties through drawing attention to wealth distribution and providing the services to those who need them. Still, the Left has to fully explain the content of its conception of social justice and how it could be applied in different societies with different economies and abilities. Some of the ruling Arab elites maintain that the state is committed to the application of social justice as they do provide services to their citizens through distributing some of their revenues among citizens. This is not what is meant by the concept since what is done by these states (as is the case in some Gulf States) doesn't change the inequality structures, but rather reinforces

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11 Such a one-sided focus on democracy has led some to see (or imagine) intersections, even collusion, between neo-liberal capitalist globalization policies and "the democratic Left" (see for example: 'Ali Nassar, "The Democratic Left and the Colored Flags of Revolutions", *Modern Discussion*, # 1396, 11/12/2005.

12 The social, economic, and cultural rights (as mostly interpreted by international organizations) include the following: the right to work, safe work, the right to form and join unions, the right to social security to those who cannot work or do not find work, the right to pension or social care, the right to education, the cultural rights of minorities and native people, the right to participate in various cultural activities and in cultural production, the right to full health insurance, the right to proper housing, and the right to food.

them. This doesn't alter the distribution of wealth and resources in society, nor does it limit the monopoly of power on different levels. The institutionalization of social justice entails changing the socio-economic structure in a way that changes the balance of power between classes so that the existing structure no longer produces and continually reproduces the present inequality.

In short, the advocating of social justice<sup>13</sup> by the Left means linking it with the issues of social and economic democracy with a special focus to those sectors it traditionally claims to protect, namely workers, women, marginalized communities, and minorities. This has been noted by the papers in this book and by much of Leftist literature. Some of these have warned against elitist action and the narrow outlook at politics, compared to the activity of Islamist organizations which have paid special attention to social issues, though under charitable cover.<sup>14</sup> Others maintained that "the basic significance of the concept of the Left refers to the social question."<sup>15</sup>

## The Intellectual and Value Guidelines of the Left

### 1. Secularism

It might be true that the failure of the Soviet and Chinese socialist experience has contributed to the birth of a new way of dealing with Marxism. This new outlook stresses various components of freedom and equality instead of a dogmatic ideology. The new outlook is more consistent with the understanding of Marxism as a theoretical tool for analyzing the tangible and changing reality which draws upon organized collective human action being the determinant factor in the process of social change. It also urged the re-thinking of the role of the party as a tool for change, whose societal performance is measured by its capacity to change the society to be more free and equal among all its citizenry.

What are the value guidelines for the Left? In addition to the idea of public freedoms intimately related to democracy and individual freedoms, Left movements have put the idea of equality at the forefront of their guidelines and beliefs. This includes achieving equality for those who most need it, specifically workers, women, youth, marginalized communities, and those who are suffering under the current system. Many Leftist forces righteously insist

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13 Abdul-Khliq Hussain, *The Problem of the Iraqi Left. Modern Discussion*, # 3437, 25/7/2010.

14 Nadir Farjani, *Paradox of the Absence of the Left: The Case of Egypt*", *Al-Adab*, 6/7/8-2010.

15 Yasin Al-Haj Salih, *In Reality, not in Text: What Left, Where, and What Leftist Policies*, *Al-Adab*, 6/7/8-2010.



on considering secularism as a necessary component of the determinants of Leftist positions and vision<sup>16</sup>. That being said, the Left must address the role of religion in society. Indeed, it is a sad sight when leftist movements take up symbolic religious traditions in order to garner support from Gulf countries.

Part of the Left has focused on secularism in facing the political and fundamentalist Islamist trend which has emerged as a decisive political force (primarily because of the weakness of other political forces, including the Left)<sup>17</sup> following the recent popular uprisings. This trend began to use its new position in power to enforce its own agenda on the state and society (including the annulment of the previous secular and civil legislations), in addition to appeasing the US policy in the region, stressing its commitment to the former neo-liberal policy and to the truce with Israel. The policy of the Islamist trend, the Muslim Brotherhood and the fundamentalists, has generated a sharp polarization within society. The main features of which have been the developments following the demonstrations in Egypt on June 30, 2013, the political intervention of the military and the continuous external, regional, and international interventions in Egyptian internal affairs. However, suggesting secularism as against the policy of Islamizing the state and society makes it necessary for the Left to fully explain that secularism is not meant to be against religion, but rather to prevent the state from interfering in the religion of individuals and preventing religious leaderships from imposing their own interpretation of religious texts upon the society and state. This entails a constitutional text stipulating “the positive neutrality” of the state vis-a-vis all religions and beliefs and demarcating the borders between the religious and the political. In this sense, secularism is a condition for democracy.

## 2. Autonomy

It can be said that the Left is in a weakened and dependent situation. First, they were dependent on the Soviet Union and its satellites both for support and ideology. After the downfall of the Soviet Union, these movements became dependent in a way on the current Arab regimes which has been detrimental to their work. Additionally, “one of the most important conditions for re-building the Left in our region is its full autonomy from the present Arab regimes, even its condemnation of their repressive nature and practices. No credibility can be attributed to any group claiming to be leftist or advocating leftist values with democracy as one of its axioms while it establishes a relation with a non-democratic regime. Knitting relationships today by leftist parties with repressive regimes is typically at the expense of the credibility and identity of such parties. In the end, they are selling their souls, for almost

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16 Al-Adab, 4-5-2010, “The Arab Left: an Interview with Gilbert Achqar”

17 Salamah Kaileh, *Marxism and the Way to Victory of the Arab Uprisings*, Al-Akhbar (Beirut), August 22, 2012).

nothing, except a handful of dollars and authorization for opening offices under strict control.”<sup>18</sup> We also notice that there is a call for Arab Left intellectuals to disengage from Gulf regimes because of the new imperial role of the Gulf region.<sup>19</sup> It is not difficult to realize that what the Gulf rulers seek, through intensive propaganda and funding of political groups in the Arab countries that have recently witnessed democratic popular uprisings, to prevent the establishment of real democracies in these countries. What drives them is an attempt to generalize the model of government based on dependent capitalist rent and Islamist trends.

The leftist forces also differ in their view of the political forces which could make an alliance with and agree with them on common denominators, particularly in societies torn by divisions and violent conflicts, as is the case in most political arenas covered by the present book (Palestinian, Jordanian, Lebanese, Syrian, and Iraqi). In these arenas (and in most, if not all, of the political arenas in the region), there are sharp polarizations that mostly take sectarian or ethnic dimensions. Moreover, the Arab societies have witnessed certain tensions resulting from the difference in the distribution of resources and privileges. These lead to the deprivation of some people and to the feeling of exclusion on sectarian, ethnic, tribal, or regional bases.

### 3. Vision of a Unitary Project

The leftist forces in the Arab world are discussing a project for Arab unity, though it was not considerably noted in the papers of this book. The project is based on several factors, the common linguistic, cultural, and historical elements of the Arab world, its human capacities, and various natural resources. In addition, there is a new connection in the Arab world which is bringing it together, namely the age of globalization. The project draws upon a leftist vision based on the following factors:

**First:** is the willingness of these movements to emphasize Arab unity through democratic methods instead of relying on despotic regimes with intents to control the region.

**Second:** is the gradual implementation that could be initiated through common discourse. This means that integrated markets, as well as movements based on common problems in the Arab world, could lead to further interdependence.

**Third:** is taking into consideration the ethnic, religious, sectarian and pan-nationalist formations of these states as to guarantee the rights of such groups to self-determination and to remove the injustice and discrimination to which

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18 Gilbert Achqar, op.cit.

19 Nahed Hattar "The Arab Left: The Challenge of Becoming Relevant," Alakhbar English, 24/4/2012.

they have been, and still are, subjected to. The condition for such guarantee is establishing a civil democratic state that provides all its citizens with freedom, security, and necessary care, irrespective of their inherent affiliations (tribal, religious, sectarian, ethnic, or regional).<sup>20</sup>

In other terms, the Arab unity project has to hold a deep democratic content and be realized through a gradual democratic process "that maintains for each Arab people their sovereign decision, and for each country its cultural characteristics." In the Left's view, "Arab unity is not an end in itself; it is a means to realize an Arab renaissance of a socialist progressive content."<sup>21</sup>

There are many reasons why the Left has emphasized and advanced a plan for Arab unity. First, it increases the ability of the Arab world to resist the neo-liberal capitalist globalization policies. Second it helps put an end to policies of foreign intervention in the region, and third it puts the Arab world in a better position to deal with the question of Palestine. Currently, the Arab states are extremely divided on the issue which has allowed Israel to control all of historic Palestine, as well as wage aggressive wars against many Arab states. However, we find a common agreement among the leftist forces regarding the solution of the Palestinian question. Some of the leftist parties support the establishment of an independent Palestinian state with Jerusalem as its capital on the Palestinian territories occupied in 1967, adding the phrase "a just solution for the Palestinian refugees' question." Other leftist groups believe that the progressive solution is conditioned on the establishment of one secular democratic state in historic Palestine and the abandonment of Zionism by the State of Israel which has been the main motivating factor in oppressing the Palestinian people.

#### 4. Focus on Intellectual Versus Social Identity

There are two trends within the Left: One which focuses on the priority of the social identity in its program, and the other which focuses on intellectual identity. The first one maintains that the failing of the Left lies in its negligence of the various social issues in actuality (not in the texts of its by-laws or social and political platforms). On the other hand, the second trend argues that the crisis of the Left consists in "the intellectual retreat and theoretical weakness of the leftist parties and groups, together with alienation from reality, and thus the failure of such parties in recognizing this reality...and in the weakness of conscience of most leading organs, which suffered some kind of lack of Marxist conscience or ambivalence... together with isolation from their organizational bases and

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20 Al-Hrub, "Tribalism and Sectarianism.. and Electoral Illiteracy," *Modern Discussion*, # 3985, 27/1/2013.

21 Ghassan bin Khalifah, "So that the Left be our Way to Revival," *Al-Adab*, 4-5-2010. For a Leftist view on the foundations of Arab unity, see: Fawwaz Trabulsi, op.cit.

masses, in addition to dogmatic bureaucratic decline, and the accumulation of opportunist class interests created through relation with one regime or another.” It is noted that evidence of this crisis is that the influence of the Left is very weak “or absent among the people, the evidence being the eruption of Arab uprisings without any tangible role played by the leftist parties and groups.”<sup>22</sup>

Most of the leftist literature in the Arab world (including the countries covered by this book) no longer draws upon Marxism-Leninism as the sole, or even major, reference in defining the leftist party identity. Nor does it do so in determining the intellectual tools for analyzing reality or as a determinant of the internal organizational structure or of its relationship with people (as the leading vanguard party of the working class). Still, there are some groups who declare their commitment to Marxism-Leninism, but most of them are small or consists of few individuals.<sup>23</sup> The main reason for such change might be the failure of the Soviet Union and the adoption by the Chinese Communist Party leadership of the capitalist market economy. Most reviews by the communist and other leftist parties have concluded, with varying degrees of clarity, the inability of the Left to analyze and understand the current reality while basing itself on the Soviet experience. Some movements have made it an initiative to capitalize on the current situation and adapt their ideologies. For example, in the Arab world, the liberalization of economy and reduction of the State’s welfare role have generated high rates of unemployment (especially among the youth) and of poverty in non-oil Arab countries (and some of the oil states), as well as enforcing the rental character of the oil-producing and other Arab states. This potentially opens the door for leftist movements to adopt policies that minimize the impact of these forces and in the process make themselves more relevant.<sup>24</sup>

## Reasons for the Marginalization of Leftist Parties in the Arab World

For some of the leftist intellectuals, the present Left in the Arab world is composed mostly of groups with limited size and influence. Therefore, they would prefer to talk about “a new Arab Left project, there are remnants on one side, and embryos on the other. Both are very limited and both don’t have any real impact on society.” However, what is more important is the moving forward process, instead of just focusing on the past. If we have to compare the European communist movement since the 1950s with the Arab communist movement, we would see clearly the difference as to the Soviet role. While the capability of the Soviets to influence most of the European parties was greatly

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22 Ghazi Al-Surani, “A Short View on the Crisis of the Marxist and Leftist Parties,” Badil Center, March 15, 2012.

23 See: “The Socialist Forum; Ideological Identity and Practical tasks” Al-Adab, 4-5-2010.

24 Ratib Sha’bu, “On the Necessity of Creating a New Nucleus for the Left,” Al-Adab, 4-5-2010.

reduced after the 1970s, the dependency of many of the Arab communist parties on the Soviets and their material support has been total and largely restrictive following these parties own tempo because of repression. The comparison with the Cuban case here is illustrative. Cuba, because of the continuous American siege, was forced to comply with USSR economic conditions, thus reducing its revolutionary role. Moreover, the tempo of the Cuban revolution and the cohesiveness of its leadership in its independence from Moscow restricted their dependency so that Cuba has been able to continue to endure in spite of the USSR's collapse. The new leftist tide in Latin America in the 1990s and 2000s came to put an end to its isolation there and to make it even stronger. However, the current deterioration of the Left in the Arab world does not divert attention from "the positive or progressive effect of the struggle of workers or socialist forces in the national and social fields."<sup>25</sup>

## The National State Besieges the Left

Karim Mroueh, a left-wing writer, enquired as to the reasons behind the defeat of the Arab Left and responded as follows: "It was first defeated by the newly-born national state, which genuinely believed that the nation's aspirations entail its unity, with no inner conflicts or differences, and ended up as a unilateral authority. Such a regime would embody society, the intellectual class, the party, the newspaper, and the trade-unions. It would encompass everything and leave nothing outside of it. Secondly, it was overcome by the 1967 war, which saw the defeat of the national state with all its "enlightened" and "pan-nationalist" slogans. Third, the defeat was reinforced by an alliance, explicit or implicit, between the repressive authorities and the petro-dollar which tamed political parties and intellectuals in varying degrees and worked to eliminate what it considered not in harmony with 'authenticity.'" Karim Mroueh (one of the founding leaders of the Lebanese Communist Party), reflects upon the Arab scene in an attempt to understand the condition of social modernity, without which there would be no politics, no political parties, and no future. In this sense, the Left becomes a metaphor for a expansive renaissance at the social/national, and pan-national level. At the same time, the Left could not be reduced to just a "political party" but instead an idea of change into a more progressive form of society. The call for enlightenment became a leftist call par excellence. Karim Mroueh, in his book "Towards a New Revival of the Left in the Arab World," calls for the principle of equality whereby people have equal rights to political action and where the acknowledgement of equality in politics is a condition for renaissance. In all cases, the concept of Left remains a complex metaphor, implying patriotism, enlightenment, and the defense of knowledge."<sup>26</sup>

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25 Ashqar, *op.cit.*

26 Faisal Darraj, "A review of Karim Mroueh, Towards a New Revival of the Left in the Arab World," *Al-Itihad Al-Ishiraki*, 14/8/2010. The book was published by Dar Al-Saqi (Beirut), 2010.

## The Failure of the USSR and its Impact on the Arab Left

For a number of reasons, much of the literature on the Arab Left attributes the current weakness of the radical Arab Left to the failure of the USSR. First, the USSR was a strategic ally of the Left in “the Third World” against imperialist powers. Its collapse led to a change in the international balance of power from a bipolar world to a uni-polar world. Second, an important reason lies in the answer to the following questions: “Why have the programs posed by the Arab Left failed in realizing the transformations required in the Arab reality? Why has not the Arab Left become a real force for change? Why has this Left begun to weaken following the collapse of the USSR and the Socialist block?” The answer, according to one of the most important leaders of the Palestinian Left, is the dependence of the Arab Left “on ready-made theoretical theses, produced by the world’s Marxist parties...and applying them to our reality, without looking into the requirements and problems of this reality, therefore it has not produced a consciousness compatible with the Arab movement.”<sup>27</sup> The third important reason is the high degree of organizational rigidity as manifested in the adoption by the Arab Left of the organizational model of the Communist Party and State while negating democracy, either in the Party’s internal relations or with society at large. Instead of forming and advancing democracy and democratic movements, many Arab Left movements have gotten stuck in the process of bureaucratic-centralism. As a result, democracy has been pushed back on the agenda in order to protect the party. Lastly, one cannot forget the gross repression put on the Arab Left movement which has indeed left its mark.

## Intellectual and Organizational Rigidity and its Impact on the Arab Left

The lessons drawn from the popular uprisings are of importance for leftist organizations in the Arab world, as explicitly shown in some detail in the papers of the present book. One lesson is the need to realize the risks of intellectual and organizational rigidity of the Left. This must be done to show how this rigidity causes splits within the Left.<sup>28</sup> Weakness of the Left has facilitated the exposure of Arab societies to three kinds of threats. “The first threat is

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27 George Habash, “The Crisis of the Arab Left: Where to?,” *Mudawwanat Al-Qawmi Al-Arabi*, 1/2/2008.

28 Fawwaz Trabulsi, 2012, op.cit., Jamil Hilal, 2009, op.cit., Riad Suma, “The Crisis of the Lebanese Communist Party: the New Chapter”, *Al-Adab*, Autumn 2012, Muhammad Faraj, “Facing a Crisis or Establishing a Project” *Al-Adab*, 6/7/8-2010. Hisham Al-Bustani, “The Crisis of the Project or of those Responsible for it?” *Al-Adab* Summer Of 2012, Salam Abbud, “Death of the Vulgar Marxism or the Dilemma of Triumph (The Iraqi Experience)” *Al-Adab*, 4-5-2010. Sharif Yunis “Towards a General Concept of a New Arab Left”, *Al-Adab*, 4-5-2010.

despotism, which has marginalized the supposed role of the State and its institutions, deepened backwardness, maximized social injustice, and made the state susceptible external interventions. The second kind is the despotism in society practiced by different religious fundamental trends. The third kind is the brutality of global capital which impacts all aspects of our daily lives.”<sup>29</sup>

## The Left and Transformations in the Region and Worldwide

The transformations witnessed by the region pose challenges for Leftist forces in the Arab world. The Arab popular uprisings have entailed the need for political, economic, and social change in the Arab countries on the basis of democracy. These uprisings have caused those in power to use aggressive force in an attempt to turn back the tide and bring the situation to the way it was before the uprisings. The conflict is expected to continue for a long time between the two contradictory agendas, a revolutionary one aiming at establishing democratic political regimes concerned with the interests of the broadest sectors of people while the other agenda does not want structural changes that would threaten the interests of the USA and its allies in the region (Israel and the conservative oil-producing Gulf regimes). In the context of this conflict, the Left has to mobilize its forces in defense of the goals of the popular uprisings.

On the regional level, the USA has failed to realize a “peace process” in the Palestinian and Arab arenas to deal with the Arab uprisings and to control their developments.<sup>30</sup> The need for the restoration of the Left cannot be overstressed. Considering the impact of neo-liberalism on the region, the Left is at a point where it could potentially lead a movement to fight neo-liberalism. The Left must at the same time continue to struggle against American imperialism in the area which has caused high rates of poverty and massive repression. The Left has to play a role in educating people about the repercussions of dependency and the continued commitment of imperialism (especially the USA) to protect Israel and to guarantee the military edge of Israel over the Arab states.

The Left is expected to distinguish itself from other forces by its intellectual, cultural, social progressive, and mobilizing role, by paying deeper attention to understanding the changing reality, and consequently by formulating strategies for change. It is expected to exert more energy in establishing

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29 Karim Mrewweh, “The Need for a New Arab Left, and for a Practical and Current Program for Change,” *Modern Discussion*, # 3358, 7/5/2011. See also: Hilmi Sha’rawi & Abdul-Ghaffar Shukr (eds.), *Dialogues with Karim Mrewweh: Theses on new Revival of the Left in the Arab World*, Cairo: Jazirat al-Ward Library, 2011.

30 See, for example, Riad Suma, *op.cit.*, Gilbert Achqar, *op.cit.*

solidarity among sectors of society who have been marginalized by economic and imperialist domination. In addition, it must support the new world social movements struggling against capitalism, racism, discrimination, and destruction of environment for the sake of profit. It has to realize its program in the light of the collapse of the socialist camp and the non-allied movement, the emergence of religious political movements, the widening of social gaps, and the rising poverty and unemployment rates.

This is not to say that the Left as a whole is fully supportive of fulfilling these roles. In fact, many are content with sitting around and allowing the situation to continue for various reasons. As a result, youth movements are starting to play an important role in leftist politics. The role played by the youth in the Arab popular uprisings might explain why there is a resurgence of leftist thought. The popular uprisings have also called upon the Left to get back to basics and start the education and mobilization aspects of their work. Youth are also in a position whereby they could potentially move into important sectors of leftist movements because it has been realized by many that the youth are able and willing to lead this movement.<sup>31</sup>

## Contents of the Book

This section tackles the issues discussed in the six papers. Each paper was written independently and is not meant to be presented as continuous. As a result, each is to be read and analyzed separately. However, I have a few points of interest I wish to highlight.

**First:** Five of these six cases are characterized by sharp political polarization. Four of them, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, and the Palestinian Authority, have witnessed internal fighting and of territorial domination by conflicting parties.<sup>32</sup> In the sixth case, Jordan, some are seeking to convert it into a base for political polarization between trans-Jordanians and Jordanians of Palestinian origin. As for the 1948 Palestinians (Palestinian citizens of Israel), polarization is taking place on political, ethnic, and national lines between Jewish settlers and the indigenous Palestinian population who have become a minority in their own homeland.

**Second:** In all six cases, the Left has witnessed a significant retreat during the last three decades, especially since the 1980's, but it is a mistake to reduce the ongoing polarization in Iraq, likewise, in Lebanon, Syria and Palestine, to mere religious, sectarian or ethnic factors. True, there are such factors

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31 Ahmad Qatamish, "How Marxism-Leninism was Present in my Political Experience," *Al-Adab*, 4-5-2010.

32 Factors Leading to sharp polarization in Lebanon, Iraq and the Palestinian Authority Territories", Beirut: Carnegie, 2009.



(except in the Fatah-Hamas case), but of these are much more are related to distribution of power, economics, and ideology, not ethnic issues exclusively. This explains the formation of political parties on a sectarian or ethnic basis which leads to fractured states with much animosity between the groups. Such structures expose the political field to foreign intervention and internal political blackmailing, and thwart efforts to build a secular democratic state, the broader condition for the development of the secular Left.

**Third:** Common to the six cases is the split phenomenon witnessed by the Arab Left and the virtual lack of Leftist blocs to struggle against reactionary blocs. This relates to the fact that all cases, except Israel, suffer from increasingly difficult living conditions, as manifested in high rates of unemployment (especially among the youth), severe poverty, and a weak economy mostly as a result of neo-liberal policies followed by these states. In addition, all Arab regimes discussed here have been exposed, during the last three decades, to severe political, social and economic upheavals.

**Fourth:** The Leftist groups in all six cases are facing an increased religiosity in their societies. As a result, many political systems are dominated with Islamist parties. However, Political Islam has a weakness, namely its inability to formulate answers to its constituents about important issues. Put another way, once in power, many of these movements are at a loss how to run a functional state. Many of these Islamist movements push for the same economic agenda as the despotic regime before it which caused unemployment and poverty.

## Differentiation in Political Fields and Socio-Economic Structures

The conditions and challenges facing the Left differ according to their specific political fields and to the economic, social, cultural, and structures reacting with each field. This renders the condition of the Palestinian Left the most complicated, though not necessarily the most difficult, because of the requirements of the multiple fields in which it is acting. The absence of a Palestinian nation-state made it imperative for the national movement to give birth to the national political field and to dominate at the same time. This lasted until new forces (Hamas) started to arise and changed the ruling party (Fatah) and attempted to push its vision of national liberation. This new challenge encompassed the Left, an active participant in the movement ever since its beginning. The entrance of Islamist forces into Arab political fields was all-inclusive and its impact can be felt in most aspects of political participation. This is not to say that there is no chance to change the current tide, instead it is just presenting the reality as it is.

Repression facing the Left is different in every country it operates and the papers presented in this book detailed each situation accordingly. While the Left in Lebanon has enjoyed full freedom of public action and organization, such freedom has been outlawed since the 1950's, except for the Muslim Brotherhood, up till the early 1990's. In Syria, the communist Left has been contained within the framework of the Progressive Nationalist Front, led by the Ba'ath Party, while other organizations have been repressed by the state apparatus dominated by that Party. In Iraq, where the Communist Party had been a mass party and the biggest leftist organization in the Arab East, the party, after the ascendance to power of the Ba'athist regime under Saddam Hussein, suffered horrific forms of repression, acts of physical liquidation, and expulsion. The Palestinian case was very different. Each Palestinian community had its own rules and laws, according to the relation of each regime with the PLO and its factions. In the West Bank and Gaza Strip, the activity of all organizations, Left and Right, has been banned since 1967 up till the Oslo Accords and the establishment of the Palestinian Authority in 1994. As to the Palestinian organizations within the "Green Line" (i.e., inside Israel), they have been subject to Israeli laws pertaining to political parties. In Lebanon, Palestinian political organizations enjoyed freedom of action from the late 1960's up till their expulsion in 1982 (following the Israeli invasion of Lebanon), though they are still active within Palestinian refugee camps.

These papers highlight a key characteristic of leftist movements in the Arab world, namely their dependency on forces both in and out of their respective countries. This was what happened to the Communist Parties of Iraq and Syria (when they allied themselves with the ruling Ba'ath parties), and in Lebanon. Sometimes this led to internal divisions, as was the case within and outside the "Green Line," as well as in Jordan, Syria, Iraq, Lebanon, and other Arab countries.<sup>33</sup>

The papers also show the effect of repression on the ability of leftist movements to garner public support. What they also do is explicitly show that public action and the freedom of organizational and political action is not a sufficient condition for transforming the Leftist party into a mass movement. This has been clearly demonstrated by the retreat of Leftist influence in Jordan where such freedom has become available, by the retreat of the Palestinian influence in the West Bank and Gaza following the Oslo accords and the establishment of the PA in 1994. The same applies to the Iraqi Left following the collapse of Saddam Hussein's regime, and to the Lebanese Left, which has been enjoying freedom of political action for a long time. The experience of the Palestinian Left within "the Green Line" is no exception. In Syria, the experience of the Left remained tied by domination of the ruling Ba'ath Party over the political, security, and military power and its interrelation with the country's economic elites.

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33 Karim Mrewweh, "Towards a New Revival of the Left in the Arab World", Al-Bayan Al-Yawm, 9/2/2013.

In the present papers, significant differences emerge as to the characteristics, components, and determinants of the political fields where the Left operates. These are evident through the following analyses:

## 1. The Palestinian Leftist Organizations

The Palestinians in Israel face a discriminatory apartheid regime that deals with them as being religious and sectarian minorities, rather than a nationalist minority or native population. The Palestinian Left consists of the traditional (communist) Left founded before the creation of the State of Israel and of a non-communist, pan-Arab left. The Left faces an active Islamist current. These three currents have not succeeded in forming a unified block with a minimum platform in the face of discriminatory Israeli policies, for reasons and considerations detailed in the paper on the Palestinian Left within the "Green Line." In the meantime, the Left perhaps has to make more efforts to build executive and representative formulas for the Arab minority, including the development of "The Higher Follow-up Committee of the Arab Masses,"<sup>34</sup> and to create organs for coordination with representative Palestinian organizations in the West Bank, Gaza Strip, and elsewhere wherever possible.

In the West Bank, Palestinians face a different form of gross discrimination. They are in conflict with a settler-colonial movement that has expropriated much of the land of the West Bank through the construction of the Wall, the closure of large swaths of land, and the expansion of Jewish-only settlements. The Gaza Strip on the other hand is the largest open air prison with all movements going in or out being regulated by Israel or Egypt. In their diaspora, Palestinian groupings are subject to restrictions on their civil, human, political, and economic freedoms. In addition, the national organs (especially those of the PLO) are either absent or marginalized. As a result, there is no unified leadership or strategy to face occupation, settlement expansion, or discrimination and to put an end for the political-geographical division between the movements of Fatah and Hamas.

As for the Left, it still suffers from fragmentation and loss of influence since the establishment of the Palestinian Authority. This has been a big loss for the Left as it used to be part and parcel of the Palestinian struggle. For example, during the first Intifada, leftist movements allied with Fatah to create the Unified Leadership, which has an influential role in uniting Palestinians against the occupation. The nationalist, social, and cultural role of the Palestinian Left has tremendously retreated following the Oslo Accords as detailed in the paper. After the Oslo Accords, the Left parties were not given any important

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34 The Committee was established in 1982. It includes heads of the Arab local councils, Arab Knesset members, representative of political parties, and non-parliamentary groups. It constitutes a development and extension representative framework of the indigenous community of Arab Palestinians in Israel following the establishment in 1974 of The Committee Heads of Arab Local Councils.

or influential political posts. As a result, they further became marginalized and insignificant. The PA itself, with its state-like form (not function), came under the control of Fatah, and after 2007 under that of Hamas in Gaza. As negotiations and the role of the PA became more prominent, the Left was further left behind with no real future in sight.

The marginalization of the PLO institutions by the national Palestinian Right has contributed to a limited autonomy authority, and contributed to its split into two weak authorities, one in the West Bank under the control of Fatah and the other in Gaza under the control of Hamas. The one in the West Bank is besieged by colonial settlements, the separation wall, by-pass roads for Israelis alone, and complete control of external trade and borders while the other authority is completely besieged. The Palestinian Left has failed to form a third pole capable of reunifying the Palestinian national movement and rebuilding the PLO on a democratic basis that would represent the components and national aspirations of Palestinians.<sup>35</sup>

## 2. The Lebanese Left

The political field in Lebanon has witnessed some important events and transformations such as the Civil War, numerous Israeli invasions, the expulsion of the PLO from Lebanon by Israel, the occupation of southern Lebanon until 2000, and the emergence of Hizballah, an Islamist party supported by Iran and Syria. Hizballah succeeded in forcing Israel to withdraw from most of Lebanon in 2000, thus placing itself as a Lebanese power confronting the State of Israel. With the assassination of the Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Hariri in 2005 and the exit of Syria under political and popular pressure that year, Lebanon entered a sharp polarization between two blocs, the March 8th bloc headed by the Hizballah Party and the March 14th bloc headed by the Mustaqbal Current and its chief Sa'ad Hariri. The two blocs have different internal and external alliances and connections. The war waged by Israel in the summer of 2006 against Lebanon made Hizballah and the March 8th bloc insistent on keeping its arms. The spring of 2008 witnessed political and military tension between the two blocs, which finally led to the so-called "Doha Agreement," which did not address the real conflict between the two. Ever since, the two blocs have switched ruling the government although the Lebanese could not really tell the difference politically or economically.

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35 For an extended discussion of the Palestinian Left conditions under the PA and the division between Fatah and Hamas, see: Jamil Hilal, *The Palestinian Left: Where to?*, op.cit, 2009. For additional critical observations on the behavior of the Left, see, for example: Imad Abu-Hatab, "On Criticizing Communism, the Left and their Parties," *Modern Discussion*, # 3091, 11/8/2010; Muhammad Khader Kurrash, "It is High Time for the Left to Be Ashamed and to Respect What Remains of Its Own Public", *Atlas Agency*, 27/4/2013; Hazim Bal'umrah, <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/ar/contents/articles/opinion/2013/02/rise-fall-palestinian-left.html#ixzz2Lq1N6pCC>.

The influence of the Lebanese Left has become minimal over the last decades. This is counter to their role from the 1960s to 1980s where they were considered resistance fighters and protectors of Lebanon against Israeli aggression.<sup>36</sup> As a result of war, occupation, and poor governmental structure, Lebanon is a very fragile state that has many ethnic, religious, and sectarian issues that could potentially tear it apart.<sup>37</sup> Under such conditions, the Lebanese Left lacks the subjective condition necessary for transforming Lebanon into a progressive and democratic state that advances minority rights.<sup>38</sup>

### 3. The Iraqi Left

Since the 1980s, Iraqi society has been in a constant sense of war or sanctions. The latest of these wars was the one launched by the United States in 2003, which resulted in the toppling of Saddam Hussein's regime, the dismantling of the state, the dissolution of the Iraqi army, and the banning of the Ba'ath Party. These measures have caused many Sunni Iraqis to feel like they are being collectively punished for the crimes of Saddam Hussein. This has driven certain groups from within that sect to resort to all kinds of violence in reaction to their feeling of marginalization and exclusion.

These events have left deep effects on Iraqi society, economy, culture, and in the political arena. The Iraqi Left has also been a victim of war and sanctions. It is important to follow the developments of the Left in Iraq because of the transformations that took place within the Communist Party from its inception until the present. The paper also notes the confused positions the Party has taken in the aftermath of the US invasion of Iraq in 2003 and the developments which followed. The greatest challenge facing the Iraqi Left is perhaps the confrontation with the Iraqi regime which was established following the occupation and it maintains its power through a sectarian and ethnic distribution of power.

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36 The Lebanese National Movement: a front including a number of nationalist and leftist parties and movements. Formed in 1969, it was actually launched in 1973 with a common program calling for political and economic reforms, together with explicitly declaring Lebanon as an Arab country. Headed by Kamal Jumblatt until his martyrdom in 1977, the Movement included: The Socialist Progressive Party, the Communist Party, The Communist Action Organization, The Social National Syrian Party, the two Baath Parties (loyal to Syria and Iraq), the Independent Nasirists Movement, and the Nasirist Popular Organization. The Movement allied itself in the beginning of the civil war with the PLO against the rightist Lebanese Front of the Maronite Christian majority. It achieved successful military battles, and so controlled most of the Lebanese territories. But the Movement suffered painful blows following the Syrian military intervention in June 1976, and the assassination of Jumblatt in March 1977. His son, Walid Jumblatt, assumed leadership of the Movement, but focused on his role as a leader of a Durzi party, and sought to improve relations with Syria. The Movement then declined and eventually disappeared following the 1982 Israeli invasion. See: Sa'dul-Allah Mazra'ani, "On the National Movement for Democratic Change", *Al-Akhbar* (Beirut), 26/1/2013. See also: Naji Safa, "On the National Movement: Changing Conditions and Justifications," *Al-Akhbar* (Beirut), 11/2/2013.

37 After 15 years of internal wars in Lebanon, the Constitution was amended in 1990 to contain two patterns of representation (personal and sectarian). However, these amendments have not been applied so far.

38 For more remarks on the Lebanese Left in the present book from within the Communist Party itself, see, for example: 'Ala' Al-Mawla, "The Communist Party and the Battle for Relative Representation: Easiness and Short-sightedness," *Al-Akhbar* (Beirut), February 23, 2013. See also, "Does the Communist Party Take the Initiative Before It Is Taken by Surprise by Its Own Followers?" *Al-Akhbar* (Beirut), June 25, 2011.

The US-Iran accord on Iraq made the Sunni parties feel discriminated against and excluded. What is happening in Iraq clearly shows that sectarianism is political in essence, that is, it is related to structure of power relations among sectarian (ethnic and even tribal) groups in Iraqi society, some of whom enjoy benefits while others suffer deprivation and injustice. In order to overcome sectarianism, Iraq must restore balance among different social forces through legislation. First, there must be laws that stipulate and enforce equality among all citizens, including supporting affirmative action for the groups suffering deprivation and injustice. Second, there must be just solutions for ethnic minorities (for example, the Kurds in Iraq and Syria), and the provision of necessary protection for groups threatened with losing their benefits.

It may be true that sectarianism is not new to Iraq but that does not mean it played as prominent a role as it does now. Its manifestation has even affected the leftist parties as was the case with the Communist Party itself when Kurdish communists split from the Party on nationalist grounds.<sup>39</sup> It might also be true that the collapse of the old regime has provided “the Iraqi Left a rare opportunity to re-arrange its agenda on a new and unique basis that benefits from the absence of dictatorship in order to create the widest democratic front. This will allow Iraq to face the occupation with a national program and alliance, as well as allow Iraq to eliminate sectarianism and racism by progressive reform. However, nothing has happened in this regard.”<sup>40</sup>

#### 4. The Syrian Left

The ongoing conflict in Syria, which began in March 2011, has resulted in hundreds of thousands of civilian casualties. It has also resulted in displacement and the emigration of millions of citizens. The impact of these features, as well as the ongoing destruction of Syrian infrastructure, will be felt for decades. The conflict, as is the case of the popular uprisings in Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen, Libya, and Bahrain, is the result of a deep social crisis, where internal and external powers have joined forces to divert the goals of the uprising of freedom and to put an end to dictatorship and corruption. Syria has also suffered high unemployment rates, severe poverty, and extravagant wealth, but only among a very small minority. All these have grown with the Syrian economy opening to neo-liberalism, leading to the impoverishment of the peripheries in the countryside and suburbs following the reduction by the state of its social services, accompanied by the lack of the citizens’ (individual and collective) political and social rights. These wide differences were not limited to the distribution of income, wealth, and resources, they also included the distribution of political power. There emerged some “exorbitantly political wealthy elites that

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39 See: ‘Abdul-Khaliq Hussain, *op. cit.*

40 See: Samir ‘Abbud, 2010, *op.cit.*

do according to their own likes.”<sup>41</sup> “The era of Bashar Assad turned out to be one of neo-liberal reconstruction, dismantling state capitalism of his father’s era, and providing basic concessions as to the structure of the Syrian economy according to the directives of the IMF. The agriculturally and industrially based economy has been transformed into one of financial backings, real estate, imports, and services which are dominated by a handful of relatives and clients.” This has led to “increased unemployment, deterioration of agriculture, increased class differences, and the spread of conspicuous consumption in cities.” Therefore, “in this sense, what happened in Syria does not differ from what had happened in Egypt, Tunisia, and Yemen.”<sup>42</sup> The legitimacy of the regime, dominated by the Ba’ath Party for decades, has been eroded. This took place after it became evident that the regime’s slogans on resistance and steadfastness were used to cover up for the lack of democracy, to cover up the repressive practices of the regime’s security apparatus, to sustain the Emergency Laws, and to camouflage different forms of cronyism, which are the same practices which were used by the regime during its control of Lebanon.

The main challenge facing the Left and the democratic and liberal forces in Syria is to prevent the imposing of a sectarian solution for the current conflict. They must also act for creating a democratic state and with it a constitution that protects individual and collective rights and promotes equality for all. The external powers (especially, the oil-rich Gulf countries and the USA) do not consider what is going on in Syria a battle for generating a deep democracy in this country but rather want it to be a war against Iran (e.g., Saudi Arabia) and a war against extremist Islam (e.g., the USA). Saudi Arabia supports Salafi Islam against Muslim Brotherhood forces (and against Arab nationalist and communist forces, as it has done previously). Other Gulf states, such as Qatar, and the USA support the Muslim Brotherhood as being the group that represents the “moderate Islam,” and is considered capable of harnessing jihadist Islam.<sup>43</sup>

## 5. The Jordanian Left

The challenges facing the Jordanian Left, a very weak left indeed,<sup>44</sup> are common to most other leftist organizations of other Arab countries. They must simultaneously oppose neo-liberal policies, address impoverishment and unemployment of large sectors of the people, and confront the presence of a

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41 Yasin Al-Haj Salih, “A Concept for the Political Poverty Line,” *Modern Discussion*, 11/12/2004.

42 Jadalliyah, “An Extensive Interview with Fawwaz Trabulsi on the Syrian Revolution,” 4/5/2013.

43 For a radical Leftist view of the current prospects of the situation in Syria, see: The Syrian Leftist Coalition, “The Future of Syria and the Class Struggle for Domination”, *Modern Discussion*, # 4091, 15/5/2013. See the Coalition Facebook address: <https://www.facebook.com/Syrian.Leftist.Coalition>

44 See for example: Muayyad Al-Attali, op. cit.: “In general, what is common among the Leftist parties in Jordan is their decline as to their meager role of their defense of national and daily life issues.” See also Yasir Qbailat, “The Jordanian Communists: We have Comrades!!” *Al-Akhbar* (Beirut), 22/4/2013.

politically active Islamist current. However, the situation in Jordan is peculiar as the country struggles to define its national character, as well as its connection to the Palestinian national character. This is because of the demographic composition of Jordan, which because of the 1948 Nakba saw a huge influx of Palestinians. In fact, until 1988, Jordan administered civil issues for West Bank residents. Due to pressure emanating from the first Intifada, Jordan withdrew all claims to the West Bank and withdrew all services from it. A considerable percentage of Jordanians are of Palestinian origin and they do not want to forsake their identity or their historical rights and obligations, nor their rights or duties as Jordanian citizens. Although rarely mentioned in the news, there are movements in Jordan that wish to create a Palestinian-free sort of Jordanian identity and there are also movements in Jordan which wish to advance Palestinian aspects of Jordanian identity. This former view went on to maintain that hostility to Jordanians of Palestinian origin "has remained nascent in the media up till neo-liberalism came into being."<sup>45</sup> A sector of the Jordanians of Palestinian origin is worried because they fear the nullification of their Jordanian nationality and thus the loss of citizenship rights, the way it happened with West Bank holders of the Palestinian Authority passports.<sup>46</sup>

It is difficult, as shown by the paper on the Jordanian Left, to write about the history of the Left in Jordan without factoring in the Palestinian Left. This is especially true since the Nakba in 1948, the establishment of the PLO, Black September, the birth of Palestinian Left organizations in Jordan in the 1980s, and the transformation following Jordan political liberalization, which allowed these movements to legally participate in the governmental process. Youth and popular movements have erupted since explosion of the popular uprisings in Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen, and Syria. The movements have called for reform and fighting corruption. They point out the urgent need for the Left to concentrate its platform on the national issue (liberation from foreign domination and intervention, and reinforcing the economic independence) and social issues which serve the interests of the majority of people, particularly the poor, exploited, and marginalized groups.

## Conclusion

With the economic liberalization in the Arab states, there emerged new class groupings which combined political-bureaucratic power (security-military and civil) with financial, real estate, commercial and rentier influence. This means that the Left in these states has to play a double role vis-a-vis two major issues:

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45 Joseph Masa'ad "Jordan between Nationalism and Chauvinism," Akhbar (Beirut), 10/9/2012. For a comment on this article, see: Nahid Hatter, "A Horizon for Building the 'Real Sham'," Akhbar (Beirut), 18/9/2012. See also, Hatter, "Forces of the Jordanian Left", 'Amon News Agency, 17/5/2012.

46 As an example, see: Samir Hijjawi, "Targeting Palestinians in Jordan," Al Fajr News, 24/2/1012.



## 1. Social Issues

The Left must address social issues that result from conservative or economic exploitation. It is a mistake to consider neo-liberalism as a mere economic theory that could be resisted and criticized through specialized economic concepts. It rather represents an integrated vision with social, political, and cultural dimensions. As part of these dimensions is the emphasis on the dominant power of capital and elite over justice, society, and politics. It is not just about managing the economy, but rather it is about the sustaining and re-production of the structural inequality system.

## 2. National Issues

This issue manifests itself in various forms of foreign domination. The Palestinians face settler-colonialism from Israel, Syria is fighting a civil war which has much foreign influence being exerted, and all countries are victims of Western imperialism.

The two causes, national and social, are interrelated as shown by the democratic popular uprisings in a number of Arab countries. Those leading the uprisings have combined the two in an attempt to create a broad coalition of support which will cover as many pressing topics as possible. The building of a serious democracy which strives to protect and advance the rights of its citizens is the goal of the popular uprisings. Since this goal is related to individual and collective rights, it combines both the social and national causes.

The Left can conclude that it must actively pursue the creation of a democratic movement that does not revolve around slogans and elitism. Also, it has to realize that national unity is not to be reduced to an agreement between major parties which have no support from the people. The experience of national "progressive" fronts in Syria and Iraq has had negative consequences for contributing Leftist forces. The experience of the PLO is no better. It created a semi-functional authority which has marginalized leftist parties by creating a quota system.

The six papers contain what could be useful for the Left because many of the conditions are similar, and so are the mistakes and the tasks. They are an introduction for more dialogue and verification.

They are also useful in recognizing the necessity of involvement in the ongoing process of change in the Arab world which opens wide horizons for the Left. This is especially true regarding Islamic movements who have shown themselves to be unable, or unwilling to solve economic, social, and political issues. In addition, most have shown that they are unwilling to confront US policy in the region, especially regarding issues involving neo-liberalism. The uprisings have also made it clear that true democracy does not mean that winning the

general elections gives legitimacy for suppressing political opposition and for imposing a certain vision on society without the consent of all its participants. It might be useful for the Left to see that the concept of a nation-state, as commonly understood, might turn into a factor of division, polarization, and internal conflict unless it recognizes that pluralism is essential for establishing a democratic state. Here arises the threat of focusing on identity, religion, sect, gender, and ethnicity without placing these in their socio-political and political context and within the structures of inequality, discrimination, and deprivation that create and re-create these inherited identities.

The Arab uprisings have strongly indicated that the Left, while analyzing the current reality, should pay attention to the increasing amount of local, regional, and international alliances and coalitions being formed to counter-balance radical reforms in the political and socio-economic structure, and to thwart democracy. These alliances, as shown in the experience of all uprisings, resort to violence to quell dissent. It has become clear that the local forces might resort, for the sake of their own privileges, to use social groups to get help from external powers, and to use these structures, developed under the previous regime with whom they had common interests, to quell dissent. This is what has happened in Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen, Syria, Libya, Bahrain, and other countries.

In conclusion, the leftist forces have to revive their intellectual and cultural role, to get rid of their elitist view of the role of the intellectual and cultural capacities, and to reinforce the vision of pluralism as a source of enrichment of society and everyday people's lives. However, the current political and organizational weakness of the Left should not negate the fact that some of the Left have a distinguished intellectual and cultural tradition. Indeed, leftist intellectuals are highly regarded among the remarkable Arab intellectuals in Arab contemporary thought and are those who "have formulated dreams that the Arab reality has not awakened to realize."<sup>47</sup>

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47 Al-TaHER Labib, "Al-Ysar al-Arabi wa lltibasat al-Naqd al-Thati" (The Arab Left and the Complexity of Self-Criticism. *Majalat al-Adab*, issue no. 6/7/8-2010.

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# The Palestinian Left: Realities and Challenges

\* Hassan Ladadweh

This paper seeks to draw a map of the Palestinian Left and to highlight the challenges facing it. When examining the Palestinian Left, one must base it on a vision which stresses the link between the presence and activities of this left and the conflict with the Zionist occupation. One must always factor in the impact of the occupation on all facets of Palestinian life, but especially Palestinian political life, as these parties and organizations work in a multifaceted network which must balance national liberation and economic policy all in one. The history of left-wing parties and organizations forms a key part of Palestinian contemporary history. It has performed an important role in the process of reviving Palestinian identity and in strengthening it. Although these organizations and parties have been shaped outside an independent state, they remain as “representation, mobilizers, and organizational structures” for the Palestinian masses,<sup>1</sup> and through these roles they have sought to contribute to the formation of the political, economic, and social identity of Palestinian society.

## Introduction: The Economic, Social, and Political Environment of the Palestinian Left

Understanding the realities of the Palestinian left requires that one start from the background of the mass forced exile suffered by the Palestinian people, the continued fragmentation of Palestinian society and the military occupation and colonization of their land, which are all factors casting their shadows on the entire Palestinian social and political life. This also greatly distinguishes their experiences and identity from the rest of the region's peoples.<sup>2</sup>

The Palestinian exile is a direct result of the Zionist colonization of Palestine,

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1 Jamil Hilal, 2006, *Al-Tanhimat wa al-Ahزاب al-Siyasiya al-Filastiniya: bayna maham al-dimocratiya al-dakhiliya wa al-dimocratiya al-siyasiya wa al-taharrur al-watani* (The Palestinian political parties and organizations: between the tasks of internal democracy, political democracy and national liberation), Ramallah, Muwatin, The Palestinian Institute for the Study of Democracy.

2 Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation, 2010, *The National Report on the Integrated Social Policies in Palestine, 1994 – 2008*, Ramallah.

which has meant geographical isolation of the different Palestinian communities, big differences in the economic, social, and political experiences. The Zionist colonization of Palestine has created a fragmented community which continue to struggle for their basic human rights, such as self-determination and the right of return.<sup>3</sup> As a result of this phenomenon, another one has emerged. More than half of the Palestinians are refugees. In fact, even in Palestine, many Palestinians are either internally displaced, or registered refugees.<sup>4</sup> As a result of ethnic cleansing in 1948, most Palestinians lost their property and livelihoods, and a large number of them live in refugee camps under the responsibility of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA). This event in Arabic is called the Nakba, meaning the catastrophe. The Nakba has become one of the main contributors to Palestinian identity.

This reality has imposed on the Palestinian left-wing parties the need to combine, in their structure as well as their activities, the strengthening of the Palestinian peoples' unity on the one hand, while taking into consideration the specificity of each Palestinian community on the other. The national/political dimension has become a priority for these parties in this difficult equation. The creation of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) in 1964 marked the birth of a Palestinian organization established to achieve fundamental human rights of Palestinians. It formed a common umbrella for the Palestinian national struggle, and the heart of the Palestinian political field, particularly after it became led by the Palestinian resistance organizations in the wake of the June 1967 war. This specificity of the PLO provided the Left with an "unparalleled opportunity in the administration of the PLO and in determining its policies."<sup>5</sup> The different leading bodies of the PLO and its popular organizations (which formed the arms of the organization in the mobilization of the Palestinian people) were distributed according to the quota principle. Typically, the decisions were taken in accordance with the principle of consensus but under the dominance of Fatah, the largest faction. In this context, the Left parties tended to establish bureaucratic structures, including their military and service-related structures in the diaspora countries, especially in Lebanon. Their leftist liberation discourse was based on the grounds of the Fatah secular-nationalist discourse.

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3 The number of Palestinians was estimated at 11.6 million people in late 2012. There are 4.4 million Palestinians living in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, and 1.4 million in the Palestinian territories occupied since 1948 i.e., about 58.8% of the total Palestinians are still living within the borders of Mandate Palestine. The other half live in Arab countries, specifically in Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, the Persian Gulf, or in foreign countries, (the Central Bureau of Statistics, 2012, *Palestinians at the end of 2012*, Ramallah - Palestine, p. 19).

4 The number of refugees registered in the UNRWA records is 5.3 million Palestinians, and the figure represents the minimum number of Palestinian refugees, who make up more than a quarter of the West Bank population (26.9%), and the majority of Gaza's population (66.9%) (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2013, *The Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS) reviews the conditions of Palestinian refugees on the eve of the International Refugees Day 20/06/2013*).

5 Jamil Hilal, 2009, *Al-Yasar al-Filastini Ila Ayn: Al-Yasar al-Filastini Yuhawer Nafsahu wa Yataamal Masirahu*, Ramallah (The Palestinian Left – Where to?), Rosa Luxemburg Foundation, p. 16.

## The Oslo Accords: A Fundamental Change in the Palestinian Political Landscape

As a result of the Oslo Accords, the Palestinian Authority (PA) was established on a part of the Palestinian territory occupied since 1967.<sup>6</sup> This established a new reality whereby the most important body of the Palestinian political decision-making structure, including the political decision of the Left parties, moved to Palestine. As a result, the Palestinian Authority practiced semi-sovereign statism tasks. This has created tension between two different processes, the first is the completion of the national liberation task and the second is taking responsibility for state building. The overlap between the requirements of the national and social struggle became more complicated, and this has given the leftist parties the opportunity to display their leftist identity in addressing these issues. However, this opportunity has not yet been utilized. The Left parties and organizations continue to occupy the same ambiguous position, with some differences between one organization and another, they are part of the Palestinian political decision (PLO and the Palestinian Authority), and at the same time they define themselves as “opposition” forces. In fact, the creation of the PA has marginalized the PLO and has caused tensions in the relations between the two. The PA was created to be one of the PLO’s tools, however, it has become the center of Palestinian political decision-making. This has been accompanied by the transformation of the Left parties from forces operating from the underground into forces operating out in the open in Palestinian Authority areas, a change which has muddled the requirements of the struggle against Israeli occupation advocated by the Left parties.

The Palestinian political landscape has suffered from a state of severe polarization since the mid 1990’s. This polarization between Hamas and Fatah has culminated into a political/geographic division, specifically between the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The political space has become a place for conflict over dominance between two authorities: one in the Gaza Strip (the Hamas Movement), and the other in the West Bank dominated by the Fatah Movement. This split has caused tensions and poor relations in most aspects of Palestinian life, not just limited to the political sphere. It could be said that this polarization has exacerbated the marginalization of the role of the Palestinian left organizations, a role which was already limited.

The Palestinian case is characterized by the effective and active presence of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), especially those run by former or current leftist cadres. These organizations have an active presence, lots of

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6 According to the agreements between the PLO and Israel, about 60% of the West Bank territories remain under full Israeli control. The Palestinian Authority exercises administrative powers only in areas classified as B, and administrative and security powers in areas classified as A. In practice, Israel exercises security powers in all of the West Bank areas, especially after the invasion of the area classified as A in 2002.

work experience, and a network of direct relations with funders. This puts them, in many cases, in the position of competitors with political parties, and this has consequently led to a change in the nature of the relationship between these organizations and political parties on the one hand and between them and their constituency, on the other.<sup>7</sup>

## Societal Fragmentation and a Weak and Disintegrated Economy

Societal fragmentation has been further increased after the Oslo Accords in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip because of Israeli measures which have led to the separation of cities and provinces from each other, not to mention the separation and isolation of Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip from the West Bank. This situation has led to the deepening of social and economic inequalities between the different regions, depending on the nature of the siege imposed on them and also depending on the political and military conditions of these regions.<sup>8</sup> As a result of this, several factors in the formation of the Palestinian reality have overlapped: the class dimension, the place of residency, the refugee status, the region, gender dimension, education levels, and political affiliation. The affiliation of individuals with the ruling party has become a mechanism for improving the social status of individuals, especially in light of cronyism in the West Bank, and a holistic and a militia-based system in the Gaza Strip. This reality constitutes a challenge to the left-wing parties, which they have not yet formally formulated their programs and activities.

The Israeli occupation, during its long years, was able to dismantle the traditional Palestinian economic infrastructure and to re-form it in a way which deepens its failures and subordination, and in a way which increases its dependence on the Israeli economy. Moreover, the neo-liberal economic policies pursued by the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank and Gaza Strip have also deepened the dependency of the Palestinian economy and the Palestinian Authority on foreign aid and remittances. Therefore, the rentier nature of the Palestinian economy, which depends on external aid and the work of Palestinian laborers inside Israel, has been further deepened. However, the latter has recently declined since the second Intifada (and stopped completely in the Gaza Strip when Hamas won the 2006 legislative elections). This has increased the

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7 For more details, see Muwatin, The Palestinian Institute for the Study of Democracy, 2000, *Al-Haraka al-Nisaiya al-Filistiniyah: Ishkaliyat al-Tahawul al-Dimurati wa Istratigiat Mustaqbaliya* (The Palestinian Women's Movement: The Complexity of Democratic Transformation and Future Strategies), the proceedings of the 5th conference of Muwatin, 17-18 December, 1999, Ramallah.

8 For more details about the strength of the spatial impact in defining the characteristics of the Palestinian community in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, see, Taraki, Lisa (ed.), 2008, *Al-Hayat Tahta al-Ihtilal fi al-Difa wa al-Qitaa: Al-Hirak al-Ijtima'i wa al-Kifah min Aji al-Baqaa* (Life under occupation in the West Bank and Gaza Strip: Social mobility and the struggle for survival), 2008, Beirut, Institute for Palestine Studies.

vulnerability of Palestinian society and economy and made their situation much more precarious.

Since the Oslo Accords, there has been a very high increase in both unemployment and poverty rates. Nearly one quarter of the Palestinian workforce is unemployed as of the third quarter of 2012. The unemployment rate is significantly high among young people (42% in the age group 15-24), and among university graduates, where it reaches about 32%.<sup>9</sup> The poverty rate, according to actual consumption, was 25.8% in 2011. The data shows a decline in the consumption of the poorest 20% of households during the same period (down from 10.6% in 2010 to 10.2% in 2011)<sup>10</sup>. However, these challenges have not been addressed by the Left on the level of its social mobility but instead, it has only diagnosed them. The response of the Left to this reality is still timid. For example, until today, the Left has not fought one real battle in defense of the popular masses' interests in the face of the PA's economic and social policies in the West Bank and Gaza, and it has not played any effective or active role in facing the political divide and the political and social fragmentation.

## Characteristics of the Palestinian Left

When one talks about the Palestinian Left, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, the Democratic Front, the Palestinian People's Party, and the Palestinian Democratic Union (FIDA) are always present and discussed. According to the Palestinian people, these four organizations shape the Palestinian Left. The Popular Struggle Front defines itself as a left-wing organization, and it has participated in dialogues on the unification of the Palestinian Left. There are also small organizations who define themselves as leftist organizations, such as the Palestinian Communist Party and the Revolutionary Communist Party. In this context, there were attempts to form a left-wing political gathering, but these attempts were not successful, such as the experience of the Democratic Gathering, or the Left Front, which remained dormant organizations. A number of ex-leftist party members have sought to form democratic political frameworks, but these attempts too, have failed, and did not reach anywhere beyond the stage of issuing statements and documents. As for the youth movements, there are popular youth branches of these parties, such as the Federation of Democratic Youth - ASHOD, the Progressive Democratic Gathering, and the Palestinian Struggle Youth Union. The new youth movements, which have emerged and have been impacted

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9 The Palestine Economic Policy Research institute (MAS), and the Central Bureau of Statistics, and the Palestinian Monetary Authority, 2013. Economic and Social Monitor, No. 31.

10 The Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (2012). Standards of living in the Palestinian territories: Spending, consumption, poverty, 2011. Ramallah, Palestine.



by Arab youth movements, are active around a certain idea or goal, such as solidarity with prisoners, ending divisions, the election of a national council, etc, and they are affiliated with leftist parties. However, their presence and effectiveness is still poor. Therefore, the main movements of the Palestinian Left are the above mentioned five organizations: the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP), the Palestinian People's Party (PPP), the Palestinian Democratic Union-FIDA, and the Popular Struggle Front.

## Marxist Socialist Parties

The main leftist organizations define themselves as Marxist organizations, guided by the Marxist ideology, or by "scientific socialism," and they claim that they defend the interests of workers, peasants, and other marginalized communities. They also define their aim as the building of a socialist system. Therefore, these parties, in their documents, stress the values of democracy, human rights, and secularism. The Struggle Front differs from the other four groups in its emphasis on building a "democratic civil society which is dominated by the values of freedom, social justice, and equality between citizens, and the guarantee of public and fundamental freedoms."<sup>11</sup>

As a way for these parties to define themselves, it should be noted that the Popular Front defines itself as a "resistance political party," the People's Party defines itself as a "socialist party," FIDA defines itself as a "democratic secular party,"<sup>12</sup> and the Struggle Front defines itself as a "national democratic" party. The Democratic Front introduced an amendment in its sixth congress stipulating that "the front has moved from being a revolutionary democratic party into a Leftist party diligently moving towards acquiring the definition of a popular party." These factions are closer to what might be called the "radical left," i.e., the Left which calls for overcoming the capitalist system and for the establishment of an alternative system, the socialist system.<sup>13</sup>

It should be noted that these parties, instead of adhering to a strict Marxist-Leninist ideology, have replaced it with a different definition, namely "being guided by Marxism, and the human and Arab progressive heritage." Most of the left-wing parties have also reviewed the basis their structure, which is based on democratic centralism. The People's Party, FIDA, and the Popular Struggle Front have all stressed the principle of democracy in party building, while the

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11 Palestinian Popular Struggle Front, the rules of procedure, quoting the web page of the front <http://www.nedalshabi.com/>

12 Jamil Hilal, 2009, *The Palestinian left – Where to?* Op.cit.

13 Daoud Talhami, 2008, *Al-Yasar wa al-Khayar al-Ishtiraki min al-Tajruba al-Suwietiah fi al-Tahawul al-Ishtiraki Ila Tahawulat al-Yasar al-Rahina fi Awroba wa al-Alam* (The Left and socialist option from the Soviet experience in socialist transformation to the current left transformations in Europe and the world), Ramallah, the Palestinian Institute for the Study of Democracy - Muwatin.

Democratic Front and the Popular Front stress the principle of “democratic centralism” as the key principle in party building. This was mitigated by claiming the renewal of this concept through the “expansion of democracy,” as stated in the rules of procedure of the Democratic Front issued by its third Congress. By tracking the web pages of these organizations, it becomes clear that their programs focus on their role in the contemporary Palestinian revolution, especially their role in the practice of armed struggle against the Israeli occupation and their political role. This is especially true regarding stances which they see as having a special impact on their history, such as the transitional program of the Democratic Front and the “resistance to the surrender approach” of the Popular Front. The People’s Party cares about highlighting its long heritage in working as part of the international communist movement, and how the PLO moved towards adopting its political leading stances.

The emphasis of these parties on their political role in addressing the masses indicates a blurred vision in dealing with their intellectual and ideological identity, and it shows how they marginalize social issues in their activities. In this same context, it is important to mention the ceremonial religious observance, practiced today by many leaders, cadres, and members of the Left, in light of the intellectual and ideological hegemony of Political Islam in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. In regards to the image of the Left, as perceived by its cadres and members, a study by Jamil Hilal (2009) showed that there are two approaches in defining the left. The first focuses on the intellectual identity, Marxism, and scientific socialism, and focuses on the approach as an alternative to the previous option, which saw in Soviet Marxism a doctrine which provides comprehensive solutions for all dilemmas faced by the party and the society. The second focuses on the values held by the organization such as secularism, democracy, freedom, equality and social justice. The two are intersecting criteria. Several leftists have stressed the importance of translating these values into practice.<sup>14</sup>

It is useful in this context to see how the Palestinian public perceives the nature or the features of the Palestinian Left. Unfortunately, there are no objective studies in this area, which raise doubts about their actual impact or influence in Palestinian society. The general impression is that the focus is on their political role, political stances, and in particular the role of revolution. One cannot ignore the change that began to emerge after the creation of the Palestinian Authority, as reflected in the move towards tackling various community issues such as rights for women, workers, farmers. Unfortunately, this shift has become more prominent in the work of non-governmental organizations associated with these parties, which is more closely associated with the global liberal discourse.<sup>15</sup> This diminishes the role of the left on this

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14 Jamil Hilal, 2009, *The Palestinian Left – Where to? Op.cit.*

15 This discourse focuses on fundamental rights: civil, political, economic, and gender equality and equity in the provision of social services, which also intersects with the local liberal discourse (the Third Way – Fayyad’s bloc, and the Palestinian Initiative).

level or weakens the advantage of the Left, which is supposed to be a critical or a rejectionist role of the global capitalist system and its foundations. At the same time, this Left is surviving on the funding of the global capitalist system while softly or sharply criticizing this system. The relationship of non-governmental organizations affiliated with the left may reflect a more blurred image of the Left among the Palestinian masses, especially as a result of its reliance on external funding and the change in the nature of relations between this Left and its constituencies.<sup>16</sup>

The Palestinian Left might be required to further clarify its values to the Palestinian masses through its practices, i.e., by embracing the demands of the masses whose interests it claims to defend. It is also required to fight social battles in defense of the masses' interests and to achieve their demands. This means moving toward systematic community work rather than hiding behind "revolutionary vocabulary" and critical discourses which hide the lack of actual struggle. The way the Left currently defines itself, through focusing on the national issue, keeps it inside the circle of polarization and competition between its factions, and this weakens its influence on the social reality as well as its chances to crystallize joint work mechanisms.

## Leftist Palestinian Organizations: An Active and Influential Past and a Sober Present

This section analyzes the present realities of the major leftist forces and their stances regarding key internal and international issues. It specifically analyzes their stances regarding the aspired Palestinian political and economic system, their stances on globalization, social and economic rights, women's rights, the status and the role of religion, Arab popular revolutions, and the network of the leftist parties' relations. This analysis will indulge itself in the history of these forces in order to understand their current realities.

The Palestinian Left forces emerged out two major streams. The first is the traditional Communist stream which claims that its roots date back to the creation of the Palestinian Communist Party, which was founded in 1919. The second is the Arab Nationalist Movement and its extensions, which includes the leftist Palestinian resistance factions.

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16 Some organizations became independent from the mother organization and were transformed from a sectoral mobilization tool into institutions with a professional nature. The Palestinian Medical Relief Society is one example of this transformation. There are also some women's organizations that have witnessed the same transformation, but some of them kept relations with the mother organization. However, they changed their roles and functions, and they became dependent on the implementation of programs funded by foreign donor organizations. In addition, the Palestinian Youth Union and others have witnessed similar transformations.

## The Traditional Communist Stream

### The Palestinian Communist Party

The Palestinian Communist Party was founded in 1919 in the circles of the Jewish settlers' community in Palestine. Among its members, there were Arabs. The tensions in the ranks of the party on national backgrounds led to the break up of the party into the Palestinian Communist Party for its Jewish members, and the League of National Liberation which was born in 1943 for communist and leftist Palestinians. In the wake of the Nakba in 1948, the League of National Liberation disintegrated. Members of the League in the Palestinian territories occupied in 1948 (Israel) re-united with the Communists Jews in the framework of the Israeli Communist Party (Rakah). In regards to the Communists who were present in the West Bank, these united with some leftist circles in Transjordan and formed the Jordanian Communist Party, led by Fouad Nassar. Some of the communists in the Gaza Strip re-established the Palestinian Communist Party in the mid 1950's, which was led by the poet Mueen Bsaisu.

After the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip in 1967, the communist Palestinians in the West Bank carried the name of the Palestinian Communist Organization (under the umbrella of the Jordanian Communist Party). Later on, they united with the communists in the Gaza Strip and in the Diaspora and formed the Palestinian Communist Party in 1982. The party used the term "re-establish" to describe this process, stressing that it is an extension of the communist heritage in Palestine, which began in 1919. The party witnessed a split in 1983 and the group which walked out established the Revolutionary Palestinian Communist Party, led by Arabi Awwad. The party re-considered its name in its second congress held in 1992, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, and named itself the "Palestinian People's Party." Bashir al-Barghouti became the head of the party's general secretariat since its creation, and he remained in his position until he retired due to illness. A general secretariat was formed of three persons in the third congress held in 1998. In its fourth congress held in 2008, the party re-established the position of the secretary general, which has been occupied by Bassam al-Salhi since 2008.

At the end of the 1970's, a group of Palestinian communists expressed its unwillingness to continue to work under the name of the Jordanian Communist Party and initiated the formation of the Palestinian Communist Party under the leadership of Mahmoud Saadeh. This group still bears this name. The Palestinian Communist Party became a member of the PLO in 1983. It is represented in the Executive Committee by Hanna Amira. However, the other communist parties acknowledge that the PLO is the representative of the Palestinian people, but they are not represented in its leadership.

## Left-Wing Resistance Factions

The Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) was formed from various organizations of the Palestinian Pan-Arab Movement, some other Palestinian factions (such as the Palestine Liberation Front led by Ahmed Jibril), and independent personalities in the late 1967. It was led by George Habash, who served as the secretary-general of the Front until the year 2000, when he stepped down from his position. This position was then occupied by Abu Ali Mustafa, who was assassinated by Israel in his Ramallah office in 2000. Currently Ahmad Saadat, who has been detained in an Israeli prison since 2006, is the secretary-general of the front. He was kidnapped from a US-British guarded Palestinian Authority prison facility in Jericho in 2006.

In October 1968, the Popular Front-General Command, led by Ahmed Jibril, which rejected the movement's adoption of Marxism, walked out. In February 1969, a large group of the movement's leaders and cadres split on the grounds that the structure of the Popular Front does not allow it to change into a Marxist-Leninist party. The group which split, called itself the Democratic Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (later on the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine), with Nayef Hawatmeh serving as its secretary-general since its inception until today. The Popular Front witnessed other subsequent splits, but those who walked out could not form any new movements and were not able to form permanent organizations.

In 1990, Yasser Abed Rabbo, the Assistant Secretary-General of the Democratic Front, led a split against the Front after the escalation of political and organizational conflicts in the ranks of its Central Committee. In the beginning, those who split named themselves the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine-Renewal and Democracy. They later on changed this name and called themselves the Palestinian Democratic Union-FIDA after restructuring themselves in agreement with other leftist forces. Three persons have held the position of secretary general of FIDA since its inception. These are Yasser Abed Rabbo, who resigned and was followed by Saleh Raafat, and today, Zuhayra Kamal holds this position. Zuhayra Kamal is the first woman in Palestine to hold such a post.

The Popular Front, Democratic Front, and FIDA are members of the PLO factions and are represented in its different leadership bodies. Each faction is represented by one member in the PLO Executive Committee. The Popular Front is represented by Abdul Rahim Mallouh-Deputy Secretary, and the Democratic Front is represented by Taysir Khaled, a member of the political bureau, while FIDA is represented by Saleh Raafat, Deputy Secretary-General and former Secretary-General.

The Palestinian Popular Struggle Front was founded in July 1967, immediately after Israel's occupation of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Bahjat Abu

Gharbiyeh became its General Secretary and represented it in the PLO Executive Committee until 1972. His successor in these two posts was Samir Ghosheh, who continued to occupy this position until his death in 2009. Today, these two positions are held by Ahmad Majdalani, Minister of Labor in the Palestinian Authority. In 1992, Khaled Abdel Majeed left the Front together with a group of its cadres and members. Two Fronts carrying the same name emerged, one under the leadership of Samir Ghosheh, the former Minister of Labor in the Palestinian Authority, who resides in Ramallah, and the second under the leadership of Khaled Abdel Majeed, who resides in Damascus.

This historical review shows only one side of the Left path, namely the fragmentation side. In some cases, this fragmentation was associated with bloody conflict and the exchange of accusations, which still pose an obstacle to sustainable joint actions. This fragmentation process was accompanied by tense competition which has expressed itself in forming alliances between these forces against each other. In some cases, parties even formed mini alliances within the Left against other leftist groups in order to claim an "authentic" Left, but in reality all it did was exasperate tensions.

There is another side of the Palestinian Left. This alternative path shows different experiences in joint work and attempts at unity. There are some very important experiences in the sphere of political unity between leftist parties. First, the joint command formed between the Popular Front and the Democratic Front, which was declared in 1993 under the impact of the Oslo Accords. This experience was the most courageous in the field of unity in joint actions between the Left factions. Despite the presence of a joint command, this command was unable to move forward with joint actions between the two fronts' constituencies and take it to the field. Before this experience, there was the Democratic Coalition experiment, which was formed after the division witnessed by Palestinian factions in the wake of the Israeli invasion of Lebanon, the departure of resistance fighters from this country, and after the split in Fatah, which was backed by the Syrian and Libyan regimes. This coalition was composed of the Popular Front, the Democratic Front, the Palestinian Communist Party, and the Palestine Liberation Front.

In the wake of the creation of the Palestinian Authority, there was a growing sense among the Palestinian Left on the importance of joint work, especially when many social issues became added to the agenda of the Palestinian internal situation in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Among the most important experiences is that of the Democratic Gathering which was supposed to form a joint front framework to gather Left forces, but it failed in overcoming issues that set these forces apart. The second experience is the Left Front, which was formed after the Palestinian political divide between Hamas and Fatah. This front was formed of the two fronts, the Popular Front and the Democratic Front, as well as the People's party. However, the Front was not fully committed to the initiative and instead tried to increase its individual power base and form

an opposition in the government, all by itself.<sup>17</sup> Its activities were limited to issuing some statements in the reconciliation process, or taking stances with regard to some internal issues. This state of impasse reflects the absence of a political will among Left forces to push towards the building of an active Left and confirms the entrenched exclusionist work mentality.

It could be said that the Palestinian political and societal arena have witnessed many fluctuations in regards to the joint action of the Left. It is an arena which is influenced by the day to day developments and by the place where competition or consensus is taking place. This was evident in the course of the professional union elections and the Palestinian universities' student council elections. There are no unity formulas for all these events and alliances. For example, the democratic pole was a pioneering experience in joint unionist action of the of Birzeit University leftist students, but this experience did not last for more than two election cycles, i.e., the 1997 and the 1998 elections after which the Left started to compete against each other.

The path of the Palestinian Left, as shown above, has been characterized by fragmentation, competition among its factions, polarization, and by attempts to develop forms of joint action. Today, there are calls demanding the development of joint work mechanisms among the Palestinian Left in an expression of both the depth of the crisis felt by the Left. They must find ways to deal with it by developing joint actions or a left-wing front in order to expand their influence and actually reach Palestinian society.

## The Changing Role of the Left in National Politics

Although all active leftist organizations are represented under the PLO umbrella (hence they accept the PLO program), the contradictions of the Left appear in their vision of how to manage the conflict with the Israeli occupation. The contradictions between the Left are sometimes highlighted when it comes to the perception of the Arab-Zionist conflict. In fact, the difference in the perceptions on how to resolve this conflict exists even within the same organization, such as the conflict over which solution to seek, the one or two-state solution.

In the same context, some of the Left forces partnered with the PLO's leadership in the Oslo Accords and the negotiations that have followed. For

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17 Tayseer Aruri reviewed the unity experiences of the Palestinian Left after the Oslo Accords in a paper presented to the leaders of the left. He presented the following conclusions as derived from the different experiences. There is an absence of political will among the Left forces in considering the issue of unity as a direct, fundamental, and strategic option for the Left forces. They need to address relations in the party and from the party to constituents, and the left has been neglecting changing conditions and working within the same framework it has been for decades, which has greatly hindered development. Jamil Hilal also reviewed in his book *The Palestinian left: Where to?* some of these experiences and the interpretations made by the cadres and members of the Left for the failure of these experiences.

example, Yasser Abed Rabbo and Hassan Asfour, leftists, who were among the negotiators in Oslo, and two of the godfathers of the Oslo Accords. Abed Rabbo was the secretary general of FIDA at that time, and Asfour was a leading member of the People's Party when the two participated in the secret negotiations that led to the Oslo Accords. While this was going on, other forces considered that the Oslo Accords and the negotiations contradicted Palestinian interests and that resistance was the only option to occupation (specifically the the Popular Front and the Democratic Front believed this). The two fronts were members of the ten factions alliance in Damascus, in addition to Hamas and the Islamic Jihad, which opposed the Oslo Accords. In the beginning, the two fronts took a very critical stance in regards to the Oslo Accords, including the boycott of the 1996 presidential and legislative elections. In 1998, the two fronts withdrew from the opposition forces alliance after they were used by Hamas as a false witness in its conflict with Fatah and the PLO.

At the practical level, FIDA and the Popular Struggle were part of the Oslo team and the two have maintained their presence in the Palestinian government since the creation of the Palestinian Authority until the last government (the al-Hamdallah government, which was formed in June 2013). For the first time ever since the creation of the Palestinian Authority, FIDA has chosen not to participate in this government. As for the Democratic Front, its stances were indecisive regarding the Oslo agreements. It had boycotted the first legislative elections and participated in certain sessions, especially in the Fayyad governments after the Hamas takeover of Gaza. The Democratic Front stresses that its participation in the government comes in the framework of its opposition to the Palestinian Authority's policies and the Oslo Accords, and that it has chosen to participate in the government to influence its policy from the inside. The Democratic Front declares that it does not fully agree with the policies of the government, and it stresses that it struggles from within the government to defend the interests of the people and the marginalized groups.<sup>18</sup> It refused to participate in the al-Hamadallah government in Summer 2013. For its part, the People's Party considered that the creation of the Palestinian Authority as a national achievement and said that its participation in this government depends on its programs and policies. The party maintained its presence in most of the governments that were formed, including governments which were headed by Abu Ammar (Yasir Arafat). However, the party did not participate in any government formed after Hamas took control of Gaza. When one of its leaders participated in the government, the party said that the leader participated in his own personal capacity, and he did not represent the party in the government.

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18 In its 6th Congress, the Democratic Front defined itself as an opposition organization despite its representation in the government with one minister (Fayyad government).



However, the Popular Front continued to refuse to participate in the Palestinian government, and chose to stay as an opposition party. It also refused to participate in the national consensus government which was formed in the wake of the 2006 elections and which was headed by Ismail Haniyeh. Unfortunately, it changed its stance of resisting the creation of the Palestinian Authority and its boycott of the presidential and legislative elections and participated in the second elections. Moreover, a number of its cadres occupied high-ranking positions in the different ministries (director general and director positions).

At the same time, the Left factions maintained their membership in the PLO's Executive Committee, considering it the reference body of the Palestinian Authority, and they formed a cover for the various political decisions taken by the Palestinian leadership (the leadership of Fatah), despite their severe criticism of the way this leadership administered the file of negotiations. They limited their role to criticism, which is more of a reproach rather than criticism. Even when the Popular Front stepped up its rhetoric against the decision to return to negotiations and froze its membership in the Executive Committee, it soon abandoned this position.

In general, the stances of the Left factions, in regards to the Palestinian Authority and its policies, are characterized by severe confusion. On the one hand, they are, in one way or the other, a part of the reality which has been shaped by the Oslo Accords, and most of them are participating in the government, and on the other, they all tend to stress that they are opposition parties that stand against the government's policies. This behavior could very well be one of the reasons behind the decline in the popularity of these forces and the erosion of their credibility.

## **Soft Criticism of the Government's Economic and Social Policies**

The documents of the Left parties contain different levels of criticism of the Palestinian government (the Palestinian Authority's institutions) social and economic policies, especially those of the governments formed after Hamas took control of Gaza. At certain times, these parties have organized demonstrations against some of these policies, such as organizing workers' protests against poverty and increasing prices. However, they did not fight any serious battle for any social issue in defense of equality and social justice, or against corruption. One of the significant issues to be mentioned in this regard is that the Basic Law which contains a paragraph which emphasized the desire for a market economy and privatization.

There have been no critical stances taken by the Left against the policies of the Hamas government nor any serious confrontations against Hamas for its

Islamization policies in Gaza. In this regard, the Left parties have had different views about the violent control of Hamas over power. While FIDA and the Popular Struggle tend to side with Fatah, the Popular Front and the Democratic Front took the role of mediators between the two parties and “criticized” some internal procedures, such as assault on public freedoms, or the ban of certain activities of the Left. However, the two organizations did not make any radical and comprehensive criticism of Hamas’ public policies.<sup>19</sup>

In general, Left parties compete among each other in criticizing the economic policies, which they describe as “neo-liberal,” although most of these parties are participating in the government which is implementing these policies. Moreover, the NGOs affiliated with these parties play an important role in attacking government policies and opposing them from a common national perspective. It is a kind of criticism that does not offer any alternative that could be implemented on the ground. Even when there is an alternative offered, this alternative remains on a preaching level rather than on a program level.<sup>20</sup>

It is important to draw the line between criticizing the economic policies and criticizing the social policies. The Left discourse is clearly different from the liberal and the neo-liberal discourse, which emphasizes the pivotal role of the private sector in economic development and on the free market, while the Left discourse sees in it a source of evil as it only brings poverty, inequality, and unemployment. On the social level, the discourse of the Left is not much different from the liberal discourse. It is enough to review the plans and strategies of the Palestinian government (governments headed by Fayyad) in regards to the different social groups, or the different social issues to discover the absence of any actual reflection of their adoption of the equality, equity, and social justice. This is the same discourse used by the Left, especially when the NGOs associated with it started to play an important role in the development of these plans, or in its criticizing them.

The Left factions were the pioneers in the field of mobilizing the masses and organizing workers, women, young people, and professionals in popular organizations in the West Bank and Gaza Strip during the late 1970’s and 1980’s. The activities of the Left have contributed to the creation of a discourse which supports their rights. However, these popular organizations became NGOs which depend on external funding, and this has changed the nature of relations between these organizations and the parties themselves, on the one hand, and changed their role and their relations with their constituencies on the other. The NGOs have become a source of funding for the parties and in some

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19 There were no serious objections voiced by the Left on the Hamas government Education Ministry’s instructions or on the proposed Education Act, which is being discussed by the legislative council of Gaza and which aims at giving education a religious foundation. However, some human rights organizations have only objected to violations of general rights, such as the Palestinian Centre for Human Rights or the Mizan Center.

20 For example, the critical stance of the Bisan Center for Research and Development, of the Palestinian government in Ramallah.

cases they became equal to or even stronger than the parties themselves. These NGOs changed their relations with their constituencies into a clientele service providing services. External funding has also led to the disappearance of voluntary work in these NGOs and made them employers and a means of subsistence. The continuity of the organization has become a goal in itself, and this naturally weakens the communication channels and mechanisms between the parties and their constituencies.

## **Between Symbolic Religious Observance and Secularism**

In the context of stressing their secular identity, all Palestinian left-wing parties stress in their documentation, albeit with varying degrees of clarity, the respect of freedom of belief. At the same time, many of their cadres and members practice symbolic religious rites as a formality to ensure communication with the local community, or to deny their atheism. There are also the leftists who resort to exaggeration of their rejection of religion. However, there is no clear stance in regards to religion in either of its expressions, the popular religiosity and the political religiosity, and the social role of religion which serves as the basis for educating the partisan base, specifically in facing the distortion campaign against secularism and the Left by Political Islam.

In the search for rules to build the Palestinian political system, the sources of legislation and the way to deal with the Islamic Sharia are issues that need to be tackled. Despite their importance when the issue of a civil state is discussed, the Left did not give this topic the importance it deserves when laws based on fundamental individual rights were discussed and when it sought to strengthen the transformation towards building a secular system. In its internal discourse, the Left stresses secularism, and this has been highlighted by these leftist parties in their major documents. However, this issue, on the level of practice, is still subject to improvisation, and there is no clarity and specificity when confronting it. This may be attributed to the tendency to appease the cultural and intellectual hegemony of Political Islam.

## **The Palestinian Left, Arab and International Relations, and Stances Related to the Arab Revolutions**

The collapse of the Soviet Union and the socialist camp was a blow to the Palestinian Left network of relations with international forces, and this has made it lose an important ally. The Left parties are not accepted among the official Arab networks, which are dominated by conservative Arab Gulf states after the disappearance of Arab regimes that were sympathetic to the Left

such as Iraq, Libya, Algeria, Syria, and Democratic Yemen. Moreover, the “anti-imperialism” mumanaa stream, which is politically closer to the left, is characterized by its religious identity and allies such as Hezbollah and Iran, and thus building relations with these parties has become a priority for the Left forces. On the other hand, some left-wing parties such as the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine are classified as ‘terrorist’ in American and European terrorism lists. One of the manifestations of this weak network is their inability to utilize their current relations or broaden them towards joint activities or in building mutual support. Perhaps their weakness on the local level contributes to their low chances of actually benefiting from their network of relations with Arab Leftist parties or the European Left. These forces heavily rely on the PLO umbrella in building their relations. The Left parties classify themselves as supporters of peoples’ causes and rejectionists of “globalization” (in its savage capitalist expression), and many of their members participate in the anti-globalization world social forums which resist the current expressions of globalization. Left-wing parties focus on the Palestinian national cause, and hence, they do not see globalization as a direct challenge that needs to be resisted. However, the unclear stances of the Left makes the criticism of this Left closer to calls of reform within the existing ceiling of the capitalist system and the prevailing globalization system.<sup>21</sup>

Regarding the position of the Left parties with respect to Arab revolutions, it is important to note that the Left have greatly welcomed and sympathized with the Egyptian and Tunisian revolutions, but these revolutions have deepened the marginalization of the PLO, and its leftist streams in particular. This is especially true in the case of Syria which has seen a strain of relations with leftist Palestinian factions because of their stances on the rebels. Therefore, the stances of the Palestinian Left remain within the framework of analysis and observing the result of these transformations in the region and within each country. There is no unified leftist position with respect to the situation in Syria, even at the level of each organization. The position in regards to the ongoing conflict in Syria is greatly influenced by political geography, on the one hand, and by external interventions on the other. However, it seems that most of the Left is relieved by the position of the PLO leadership, which calls for neutrality.

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21 For example, programs to empower women offered by women’s organizations affiliated with these parties, and which are funded by the United Nations organizations, within the orientations of the international organization to help different countries to implement the guidelines established in the international conferences on women’s rights, and based on a human rights discourse that does not criticize the economic system in these countries.

## The Decline in the Popularity and the Effectiveness of the Palestinian Left

We have two types of data that allow us to measure the popular weight of the Left. First, there are the second Palestinian legislative elections held in 2006, which were conducted according to a mixed system combining the proportional list, where the votes of the electoral list on the national level are added to the votes of the list on the district level where voting is on an individual basis. Therefore, the votes won by the different electoral lists are an objective and accurate indicator of the size of each electoral list. However, this type does not allow us to see the change in popular support of these parties because these elections are not held on a regular basis. The Palestinian Left competed in these elections in three lists, the Popular Front list of Abu Ali Mustafa, the al-Badeel list which represented the alliance of the Democratic Front, the People's Party and FIDA, and the Popular Struggle Front list. One can also add the student council elections at Palestinian universities as an indicator of the Left's weight. The second type of data is of opinion polls, which allow us to monitor the change in the weights of the various forces. In the new polls, a question on voting for the lists which have competed in the second legislative elections was introduced.

A total of 68,201 voted for the Left lists in the 2006 legislative elections, 7.9% of total valid votes. These votes were distributed as follows, 2.92% for al-Badeel list (an alliance of three organizations), 4.25% for the Popular Front list, and 0.72% for the Struggle Front list. Hamas won 44.4% of the valid votes and Fatah 41.4% of the votes. Based on these results, all combined Left parties won five seats out of sixty-six eligible seats which were distributed among the lists.<sup>22</sup> In the districts, the Left did not win any seat. This is a very modest result (five members of a total of 132 members) for a Left which is proud of its legacy and its historic role in the national struggle.

Opinion polls<sup>23</sup> suggest a further decline in the electoral weight of the Left. According to opinion poll No. 47, which was carried out by the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research in March 2013, the Left is expected to win 6.3% of the votes if elections are held during the poll's period, while Hamas would win 29.2% and Fatah 40.5%. The results of opinion polls show

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22 The Central Committee of the Palestinian Elections, [http://www.elections.ps/portals/30/pdf/plc2006-resultsvotesnoforlists-distlevel\\_ar.pdf](http://www.elections.ps/portals/30/pdf/plc2006-resultsvotesnoforlists-distlevel_ar.pdf).

23 The Democratic Front had its reservations about the results of the polls, saying that "the Front does not pay much attention to what opinion polls' centers and institutions say on political parties' popularity indicators because we know that many of these centers and institutions are politically biased and their working methods are professionally weak in surveying, testing samples, and extracting results." The Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine, 2012, *Al-Hala al-Filastiniya: fi Jamahiriyyat al-Hizb wa Munathamatihi al-Dimocatiya* (The Palestinian Case: The popularity of the party and its democratic organizations), a document submitted to the Sixth Congress of the Democratic Front. These reservations form a negative indicator on how the Left deals with its crisis, and the motive is most probably to generate complacency.

the erosion of the Left's popularity since 1994. The expected popularity of the Left fell from 17.3% (the Popular Struggle Front is not included in the poll) in late 1993 (higher than the percentage reached by Hamas, which at that time was about 13%), to 9.7% by the end of 1994. In March 2000 (the last opinion poll carried out by the Research Center in Nablus), the popularity of the Left fell to 4.5%.<sup>24</sup> The popularity of the Left has settled in the range of 6-7%. If we take into consideration a margin of error, it becomes clear that the percentage of those who vote for the Left is still weak, and it is not consistent with its long political history.

The student council election results in the West Bank universities confirm the marginal weight of the Left among this youthful and educated sector of the society. At Birzeit and Jerusalem universities in 2013, the Left won six seats out of a total of 51 seats. In an-Najah University the Left won five seats out of 81 and in Bethlehem, it won 13 seats out of 31 (Hamas did not participate in these elections). In the Technical Palestine University-Kadoorie, the Left won two out of a total of 33 seats. These results reflect the critical popular weight of the Palestinian Left.

In terms of the impact of the Left on public policies, the role of the five members of the Legislative Council (the Legislative Council which came after the 2006 elections) is very limited because the work of the council has become frozen since 2007. The Democratic Front occupied an important service providing ministry in the Fayyad government, namely the Ministry of Social Affairs (Majida al-Masri, a member of the Front's Political Bureau). This has helped the Front to influence assistance programs for the poor, as well as social services programs. We must remember that the financial position of the Palestinian Authority as a whole is critical, especially the social transfer budget, which depends on the donors' commitment, especially the European Union, the main funder of cash programs. FIDA occupied the Ministry of Culture, which is a marginal ministry in terms of its effectiveness, its budget, and its role. Two members of the People's Party Political Bureau occupied the positions of Minister of Agriculture and the official government spokesman (Director of Government Information Office). These two positions are important positions. The secretary-general of the Popular Struggle Front has been the Minister of Labor since 2007. It is worth mentioning that the Democratic Front defines itself as an opposition force despite the fact that it participated in the Fayyad government, and criticized in its sixth Congress (held in February 2013) the economic policies of the government, which it described as failed policies and

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24 Center for Palestine Research and Studies, opinion polls dated 11/11/1993, opinion poll issued in December 1994, and an opinion poll issued in March 30, 2000.

called for an alternative strategy. The same applies to the People's Party, which also sees itself as an opposition party.<sup>25</sup>

The Left was indistinct in the way it dealt with tensions resulting from the deterioration of the economic situation. During the year 2012, a series of demonstrations and strikes erupted on the backdrop of rising prices and the deterioration in the living standards of people. In recent years, there haven't been any serious demand battles in the Palestinian street, where the Left has played an important or a leading role.

The role of the Left in the PLO popular unions is the direct result of the quota system (women, labor unions, writers, etc.). There were competitive professional unions and journalists union's elections which the Left had competed in within democratic blocs composed of democrats and leftists, and it plays a better role in these unions compared to its performance in other frameworks.<sup>26</sup>

While the Left has acknowledged the importance of strengthening its influence among youth, women, and workers, its work methods did not develop in a way which ensures closer relationships between NGOs, parties, and constituencies. Some leftist parties expressed their interest in young people and women through giving them representation in the governing bodies according to a certain quota, as did FIDA.

In general, the left organizations recognize the importance of the transition to effective mass parties. The activation of the inner party life in these parties, which are now working in the open, could perhaps form the entry point for reaching this purpose. It is not acceptable anymore for these parties to freeze democratic life in their work and to develop systems of transparency and accountability mechanisms.<sup>27</sup> It is important to examine the content of

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25 This strategy is based on the mobilization of available resources and directing them towards stimulating economic growth which aims at tangibly addressing the problems of poverty and unemployment. The main pillar of this process should focus on supporting and encouraging small and medium labor-intensive enterprises whose close links with the society's needs and resources would provide them with enough protection against the developmental impact of Israeli restrictions and procedures. These enterprises depend on local production sources such as labour and raw materials and are geared towards satisfying the needs of the local communities. The Congress affirms that sustaining the growth of national production, with the use of the specifications mentioned, will allow gradual reduction of dependence on foreign aid, which is one of the main goals of the alternative economic strategy (new) (The Democratic Front, a communication on the work of the Sixth Congress of the Front, February 2013).

26 There is no accurate data on the size of the Left in the trade unions. With the exception of a few independent trade unions with a leftist nature where there are periodic elections, other official unions (affiliated with the Palestine General Federation of Trade Unions of Palestine, or Palestine Workers' Union) do not have democratic elections, and Left parties occupy leading positions in these unions in accordance with the quota system. In regards to the professional unions, with the exception of the journalists' union in which the Left made modest results compared to Fatah, in other unions, the Left competed in elections in alliance with Fatah.

27 The Popular Front has held six conferences since its creation in 2000, the Democratic Front held six conferences, the most recent one was held in 2013. According to the Democratic Front, it has renewed 35% of its leadership and the representation of women reached 23%. However, the secretary-general of the front has occupied his position since the creation of the front in 1969. Moreover, the first rank leaders (historic leaders of the front) still occupy the same positions too. FIDA held three conferences, the most recent one was in 2011. In this conference, youth and women were represented according to a quota system. FIDA is the party that has changed its secretary-general through elections held during the conference. The People's Party held four conferences, the last one was in 2008.

democratic life in these parties and not just formalities, including the renewal of the governing bodies or the representation of youth and women. The presence of these sectors, in itself, is not enough if this presence is not accompanied by giving them opportunities to participate in decision-making and follow-up on the implementation.

## Current Major Challenges Facing the Left

The main challenges facing the Palestinian Left can be summarized under the following headings:

**First:** The challenges facing the Palestinian Left-wing parties are linked to the characteristics of the Palestinian political, economic, and social realities experienced by the Palestinian communities. This means Left parties must carefully balance the tasks and functions of national liberation and societal democracy, including endeavors to improve the quality of services provided to people (education, health, social security, etc.), and improving the work of institutions responsible for performing these tasks. It goes without saying that the extent of the success of the Left parties in strengthening their role is linked to their ability to generate activities and work mechanisms capable of creating permanent interaction with the targeted masses in line with their intellectual and ideological identity. Revolutionary rhetoric is worthless if it is not associated with societal actions that embody the leftist identity of these parties.

**Second:** Among the important aspects which reflect the presence or absence of the Left's influence is its role in addressing the geopolitical divide lived by the Palestinian people, especially in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The importance of the issue arises from the specificity of the Palestinian situation where the identity and entitativity of the Palestinian communities are facing a daily challenge of being abolished or suppressed. Therefore, the re-building of the PLO on a democratic basis should be a priority for leftist organizations. They should shoulder this responsibility by coming up with creative proposals that take into consideration the diversity of the Palestinian people and their dynamics, and should be capable of dealing with the changes in the balance of power within the Palestinian political landscape.

**Third:** The unity of the Left is no longer an option that can be dealt with in comfortable circumstances. The joint work of the Left may constitute a rescue mission in the current critical circumstances. The continuation of a marginal Left will only contribute to further erosion, not only in its election weight, but also in its social role. This is specially urgent because the Left in particular does not have sustainable or guaranteed relations with the sources of funding, as is the case with Political Islam or with the central stream of the PLO (Fatah). It is important to take advantage of past joint action experiences and create joint



actions with programs. It is possible to agree on joint actions within alliances on a specific issue, such as education for all, improving health services, confronting settlements, the fight against poverty, women and workers' rights, and the fight against unemployment and poverty.

**Fourth:** The Left must regain its predominance in resisting the occupation. This struggle has dramatically decreased in the last decade.

**Fifth:** Left parties must define their relationship with NGOs. In justifying their ineffectiveness, these organizations focused on the issue of limited financial resources as a main reason. In fact, the limited financial resources can be dealt with as a reason for the weakness in the effectiveness of the party, and at the same time a manifestation of this weakness, or an indication of it. The party who succeeds in building its communication tools with the people is the party that is keen on developing its financial resources, and its popular influence appears in the form of increased support and endorsement of its activities.

The dependence on external funding, especially funds coming through the party's NGOs, or through regional or foreign countries, makes the party and its institutions at the mercy of this funding, and it may affect its priorities and the way it manages its activities and its events. This has resulted, in many cases, in an unhealthy relationship between the party and the NGO, and in some cases, the party found itself in competition or conflict with its organizations. In some cases, the organization is the most important interface for the party, and perhaps more important than the party itself. This has resulted in a third dimension of a distorted relationship between the party, its constituencies, and its popular base by the creation of a utilitarian-clientele relationship. Therefore, the supporter of the party expects that the party's political stances shall bring him direct financial benefits such as financial resources or job opportunities. It is logical that the party finds itself in a closed circle. In order to be able to develop its role and increase its influence, it needs to increase its financial resources, and to attract financial resources it needs to increase its effectiveness and influence. On the other hand, the building of leftist alliances or the unity of the Left, may serve as a factor in improving the efficiency of the work of the Left and its financial resources, and it may enhance the chances of correcting the relationship between parties and their popular organizations and NGOs with leftist ideologies.

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# The Jordanian Left: Today's Realities and Future Prospects

\* Musa M. Shteiwī

## General Background on Jordan

The Emirate of Transjordan was established in April 1921. Since that date and until today, many political parties, movements, and groups have been established, not only as a reflection of the social structures of the Jordanian society, but also of the regional and global conditions in general. The first parties that emerged in the Emirate of Transjordan held political orientations beyond Jordanian realities. Their ambition was to liberate Syria from French occupation and to create an independent Arab state composed of the historic Syria with its current borders, namely present day Lebanon, Jordan, and Palestine.

The year 1927 marked the official initiation of national political parties emanating from the realities and aspirations of Jordanian society. The political life started mass mobilization by the Jordanian People's Party, which was founded in March 1927, and which was able to fill the political vacuum created by the absence of the Arab Independence Party.<sup>1</sup> The partisan movement was also affected afterwards by regional events as manifested in the collapse of the British influence, the rise of the Arab national movement in the 1950's, the emergence of the Arab-Israeli conflict, the emergence of the Palestinian armed struggle in Jordanian land in the 1960's, and the complexity of the priorities and objectives of building the Jordanian state and the Liberation of Palestine. This period saw the emergence of most of the civil society organizations, such as political parties and trade unions. In the 1950's, the public political activism was disrupted, and it entered into a long phase of underground activism until the year 1989, but legally speaking until the end of 1992, the year that was marked with the revival of partisan life in Jordan. This period was also marked with important global transformations, as reflected

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1 The Press and Publications Department, Al-Ahزاب al-Siyasiya al-Urduniya: al-Nashaa wa Marahel al-Tatawor (The Jordanian political parties: Their emergence and their development phases), the Press and Publication Department website, (2012), available on the following link: <http://www.dpp.gov.jo/2012/2.html>

by the collapse of the Soviet Union and later on the classic Communist ideology, which had a significant impact, especially on leftist parties.

With the political transformations witnessed by the region, specifically after the Tunisian and Egyptian uprisings in 2011, partisan life in Jordan flourished once again and many popular political movements (hirakat) have emerged. This period has also witnessed labor-related strikes and movements which reflect the ideological and intellectual orientation of existing political parties<sup>2</sup> and which form an important drive for political parties, including the Left. The evolution of political life in Jordan can be divided into the following stages:

### The First Phase: The Pre-Emergence of the Emirate until 1945

At this stage, the emergence of political parties was associated with political leanings beyond the Jordanian realities. Transjordan at that time was the base of underground political parties and political groups fighting against the French occupation to liberate Syria and Lebanon, unite them, and declare one independent state with Transjordan. These parties include the Arab Independence Party who joined with patriotic Syrians and Jordanians, taking the initiative to change the emerging emirate into a base for the Liberation of Syria. The party was present in the army and in the state institutions, but Britain was able to expel it from these institutions in the mid 1920's.<sup>3</sup> In addition, there was the Arab Covenant Party (al-Ahd al-Arabi) whose members came from Syria to Amman. The party was founded in early 1921, and its members did not join the Independence Party. Its aim was the independence of all Arab countries and was under the leadership of King Hussein Bin Ali and his sons.<sup>4</sup>

The number of Jordanian political parties during the period between 1921 and 1945 reached approximately 14, most of which were nationalist parties established by intellectuals and professionals who had studied abroad in Western universities. A few of the parties created during this time include, the Mother of Villages Party (Umm al-Qura-1921), the Jordanian National Conference's Executive Committee Party (1929), the Jordanian People's Party (1927), the Jordanian Workers' Party (1931), the Jordanian Solidarity (1933), and the Party of National Brotherhood (Hizb al-Ikha al-Watani -1937).<sup>5</sup> During this

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2 Musa M. Shteivi, Political Parties in Jordan, in "Building Democracy in Jordan, Women' Political Participation, Political Party Life and Democratic Elections," International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA), (2003).

3 Imad Abu Wandy, Al-Ahزاب al-Siyasiya al-Urduniya: Nashaat wa Tatawur al-Ahزاب al-Urduniya, (Jordanian political parties: The emergence and evolution of the Jordanian parties), al-Hiwar al-Mutamaden website (The Civilized Dialogue website), 2009, available on the following link: <http://www.ahewar.org/debat/show.art.asp?aid=174720>.

4 Ahmad Ziad Abu Ghanniyeh, Malameh al-Hayat al-Siyasiya fi al-Urdun (The Features of Political Life in Jordan), D. N., Amman, 1998.

5 Inad Abu Wandy, <http://www.ahewar.org/debat/show.art.asp?aid=174720>.

phase, there was no special law which regulated the work of political parties. Parties were registered according to the Ottoman association law. It should be noted that during this phase there was an absence of leftist orientations within the Jordanian political parties, with most of them having national and pan-Arab ideologies.

## The Second Phase: Post-Independence 1946 to 1967

This phase forms the beginning of the true emergence of political parties in Jordan. The Arab-Israeli war of 1948 and the Zionist movement's control of most of Palestine had a significant impact on changing the population demography in Jordan. All these changes required the introduction of reforms to the Jordanian political system, and the development of a new constitution in 1952 which provided for the freedom of political action and the freedom of forming political parties. This resulted in the passing of the first political parties law in 1955. This period also witnessed the birth of dogmatic religious streams and parties such as the Muslim Brotherhood, in addition to the emergence of liberal, reform-oriented, and pan-Arab groups, and paved the way for the emergence of a leftist stream or what was then known as "communist cells."<sup>6</sup> Some of these parties (that were mentioned earlier) were actually established before the passing of the political parties law in 1955 and some of them did not get a license to operate as political parties (before the enactment of the political parties law), but had significant popular and organizational presence in the political arena which enabled them to have their direct and indirect impact on the country's public policies.

The number of Jordanian political parties in the mid-fifties reached 15, representing different political and ideological orientations. Some of them were popular parties engaging different social sectors of the society, such as the middle class, professionals, workers, and tribal members. In this "golden" period, the opposition parties were able to win a parliamentary majority at the end of 1956 and had succeeded in forming a national coalition headed by Suleiman al-Nabulsi for the National Socialist Party, but this first experience in the formation of a party-led government did not last long. The government was toppled after the first year of its formation because of disagreements between its orientation and the orientation of the head of state, King Hussein, at that time. In effect, the authorities dissolved the existing parties, prosecuted the opposition, and banned partisan work (with the exception of the Muslim Brotherhood). During this period too, the so-called anti-communism law was

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6 Inad Abu Wandy, <http://www.ahewar.org/debat/show.art.asp?aid=174720>.

enacted. Despite that, this period witnessed a growing popularity of pan-Arab and leftist parties alike.<sup>7</sup>

### The Third Phase: 1967 until 1989

In the 1960's, the region saw a dramatic change after Israel conquered the West Bank, Gaza Strip, Golan Heights, and Sinai peninsula during the war of 1967. This was the period that gave rise to the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), the Palestinian resistance movement, and the growing armed struggle against Israeli occupation.

At the end of the 1960's, political parties established armed movements to resist the Israeli occupation. Many of the existing parties reformulated their Jordanian political programs in a way which would serve the liberation of Palestinian lands which were occupied in 1967. These parties (movements), with pan-Arab, Marxist, or Palestinian national aspirations, made Jordan a key base for their struggle. However, their armed presence remained modest compared with the PLO, which was composed of political parties and organizations. These events were followed by the Black September which led to expelling the Palestinian armed resistance from Jordan, and this led to the weakening of the Jordanian political life and the demise of the political parties.<sup>8</sup>

During the 1970's and 1980's, new political parties emerged along with the Jordanian Communist Party. Most of these parties emerged from the Palestinian resistance movement, with their number reaching seven parties. Together with the Leftist and pan-Arab parties, these parties formed the main body of the opposition during the period 1973-1991. Among these parties are the Palestinian Communist Workers' Party (1975),<sup>9</sup> the Jordanian Popular Movement (1976), the Popular Liberation Movement (1979), and the Organization of the Popular Front in Jordan (1982).<sup>10</sup> As a result of the absence of legal partisan activities, political parties became active in licensed institutions such as trade and professional unions, and these institutions became a major space for partisan work. During this period, leftist and pan-Arab parties were able to dominate the activities of these unions.

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7 For more information on this period (1949-1967) see the Arabized version of Amnon Cohen's book: *Al-Ahزاب al-Siyasiyah fi al-Dafa' al-Gharbiyah fi Thili al-Nitham al-Urduni 1949-1967* (Political Parties in the West Bank Under the Jordanian Regime, 1949-1967), Cornell University, (1982), translated by Khaled Hassan, Qadisiyah Press, Jerusalem, 1988.

8 Musa M. Shteivi, Political Parties in Jordan, in "Building Democracy in Jordan, Women's Political Participation, Political Party Life and Democratic Elections," International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA), (2003).

9 The Palestinian Communist Workers' Party was established in 1975 in Beirut. The activity of the party used to cover Lebanon, Jordan, the occupied territories in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Most of its leaders were based in Lebanon. Among its founders are: Dr. Abdul-Rahman al-Barqawi, Arab Lutfi, and others.

10 Inad Abu Wandy, *Al-Ahزاب al-Siyasiya al-Urduniya: Nashaat wa Tatawur al-Ahزاب al-Urduniya*, (Jordanian political parties: The emergence and evolution of the Jordanian parties), al-Hiwar al-Mutamaden site 11/6/2009, (Civilized Dialogue), available on the following link: <http://www.ahewar.org/debat/show.art.asp?aid=174720>.

This period had also been marked by severe hostilities between the political parties on the one hand and the Jordanian state on the other and had resulted in the systematic repression of political opposition parties which were aspiring to change the political system in the country. Moreover, the partisan work was also affected by the continued Israeli occupation of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, and this had made the liberation of Palestine the major program of the various political parties in the country. The partisan work in Jordan was directly affected by the Cold War and the conflict between the capitalist and socialist camps. This conflict not only impacted on the programs of these parties, but also on their relationship with the Jordanian state which had sided with the Western camp while most of the political parties had sided with the Eastern socialist camp.<sup>11</sup>

### The Fourth Phase: 1989 and Beyond

The year 1989 saw the return of parliamentary life in Jordan, which was followed by the return of partisan life. This transformation came as a result of the severe economic and political crisis which had led to high poverty and unemployment rates. At that time, the government started to implement an economic reform program under the supervision of the World Bank, which had resulted in a popular uprising which began in south Jordan and spread to other areas of the Kingdom. The parliamentary elections were a means which the government used to escape from its economic and political crises as it allowed political parties and party members to participate in the elections. During this period, the government, political parties, and national figures reached agreement on a "National Charter," which in turn paved the way for the issuance of a political parties law in 1992,<sup>12</sup> thus legalizing the actions of political parties which started to work under the umbrella of the law.<sup>13</sup>

This political transformation opened the door for political parties to work in the open for the first time since the 1950's. Tens of religious and ideologically based political parties of pan-Arab, Leftist, and Islamic orientations emerged, in addition to non-ideological parties. These parties participated in the different successive elections and some of them were able to secure seats in the parliament. However, the role of these parties remained very limited during the past two decades, which have also witnessed amendments to the political parties and the election laws. Some parties boycotted the elections more than

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11 Oraib al-Rintawi, Qanun al-Ahزاب al-Siyasiyah al-Uruniyah – al-Jadal al-Aam (The Jordanian political parties law – a public debate), Al-Quds Center for Political Studies (17-03-2006), available on the following link: [http://alqudscenter.org/arabic/pages.php?local\\_type=128&local\\_details=2&id1=3518&men](http://alqudscenter.org/arabic/pages.php?local_type=128&local_details=2&id1=3518&men).

12 For more information on the law, see Ahmad Ziad Abu Ghanmīyeh, *Malameh al-Hayat al-Siyasiyah fi al-Urdun* (The features political life in Jordan), (D.N) Amman, (1998). p. 298.

13 For more information on the provisions of the Jordanian National Charter 1991, see the following link: The Jordanian prime ministry site. [http://www.pm.gov.jo/arabic/index.php?page\\_type=pages&part=1&page\\_id=80](http://www.pm.gov.jo/arabic/index.php?page_type=pages&part=1&page_id=80)

once, and all parties were unable to effectively participate in political life during this period. However, the regional political transformations that have occurred after the Tunisian revolution have given the political parties and streams, especially the Leftist and pan-Arab parties, a new opportunity to participate in political life. These transformations provided political parties with ample opportunity to re-emerge and to become more active. Moreover, new youth groups and movements, with leftist-leaning, appeared, such as the Popular Unity Youth,<sup>14</sup> the Thabahtuna Student Movement,<sup>15</sup> the National Progressive Current,<sup>16</sup> the Jordanian Social Left Movement,<sup>17</sup> and others.

## A Conceptual Overview of the Jordanian Left

The Jordanian Left emerged with the formation of the Jordanian Communist Party, which was founded in April 1951 (after the Palestinian Nakba in 1948). It is considered the mother of the Left in Jordan although it witnessed many splits due to internal and regional factors which made the Jordanian Left very weak.<sup>18</sup> In addition to the Communist Party and the parties that have emerged from it, there are two leftist parties with historical, ideological, and political roots in the PLO. First is the Jordanian Democratic People's Party (Hizb Al-Sha'ab Al-Dimuqrati Al-Urduni), abbreviated HASHD, formed in 1989 when the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine separated their branch in Jordan to become a separate party. Second is the Jordanian Democratic Popular Unity Party (Hizb Al-Wahdah Al-Sha'abiyah Al-Dimuqratiyyah Al-Urduniy) which was formed in 1990 when the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine separated their branch in Jordan to become a separate party when the PLO left Jordan and when partisan life was restored in the early 1990's. In addition, there are some pan-Arab left-leaning parties, such as the Arab

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14 The Youth of the Popular Unity Party is a youth movement emanating from the Popular Unity Party. It has actively participated in the popular movement in the past two years (2012 and 2013) in Jordan. This assembly adopts the principles and the ideas of the Popular Unity Party. For more information on the youth activities of this party visit the youth office of the Unity Party at the following link: <http://www.wihda.org/?cat=14>.

15 The National Campaign for Student Rights, Thabahtuna Movement, is a youth movement created in 2007. It is a national students' campaign which demands a reduction of university fees in Jordan to become accessible to citizens according to their financial means. It defends the rights of students to express their opinion and to establish a General Union of Jordanian Students. It also refuses all repressive laws and regulations in the Jordanian universities, and it is currently headed by Dr. Fakher Daas.

16 The creation of the National Progressive Current was announced with the launch of Arab revolutions by a group of intellectuals. It holds leftist ideology, and it has had an active presence during the popular movement. It is currently headed by Khaled Ramadan.

17 The Social Left Movement is a Jordanian political organization operating in Jordan with the aim of challenging neo-liberal policies. It is one of the leftist movements which opposes capitalist globalization. The movement was founded in 2007 by a number of Jordanian leftist activists who walked out of the Jordanian Communist Party for various reasons. The Secretary-General of the Jordanian Social Left Movement is Dr. Muhammad al-Kafawin. Among the most prominent party activists and its former Secretary General is Dr. Khaled Kalaldeh.

18 Sohail Sabah, Al-Yasar al-Urduni: Juthur al-Maazaq wa Aselat al-Mustaqbal (Jordan's left: the roots of the impasse and questions about the future), al-Quds Center for Political Studies (2003), available on the following link: <http://www1.alqudscenter.org/ar/activities/view/3184>.

Socialist Ba'ath Party, the Progressive Baath Party, and the Direct Democratic Nationalistic Movement Party.<sup>19</sup> Although some of these parties are classified as part of the national stream, their stances in regards to some issues are bound by the leftist ideology, especially regarding economic issues, political stances, and overall Arab issues.

During the last ten years, Jordan has witnessed a remarkable growth in the number of groups, which in their entirety can be described as having leftist leanings. These groups, more than other traditional leftist groups, have played a role in understanding and comprehending the components of the Jordanian society and its current issues, in addition to the ability which these groups have demonstrated in communicating and connecting with the new leftist discourse. Among these groups are the National Progressive Stream, the Social Left Movement, and the Thabahtuna Students Movement, in addition to other youth movements which have emerged from leftist parties and become engaged in the Jordanian political life, such as the Popular Unity Party's Youth and the Jordanian Democratic Youth Union, which is considered a Leftist independent organization that has emerged from the ranks of leftist activists of the popular movement and from the traditional as well as the new Leftist forces.

It could be argued that intellectuals and middle class employees, such as professionals, craftsmen, engineers, and lawyers, in addition to the workers and low-income people, are the social classes which the Jordanian Left represent and whose interests they seek to protect. This explains their historic presence in the frameworks and institutions representing these groups such as trade and professional unions, student bodies, women's federations, and unions.

With the collapse of the Soviet Union and the socialist camp, and the decreased influence of the traditional communist thought, the leftist ideological discourse did not remain unified. Many conflicting streams have emerged. Some of these streams continued to adopt the historic ideological discourse of the Communist Party, while some adopted the pan-Arab thought but with a socialist ideology, and others adopted a national discourse on the political level but continued to adopt social principles in the broad sense of socialism. Accordingly, the left-wing parties and the movements emanating from them adopted a discourse based on the principles of Arab national liberation theory with a mixture of socialist, anti-capitalist, and anti-imperialist perspective.

The Jordanian political scene has been characterized by the engagement of parties and movements' leaders in the political activities at the popular, as

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19 A study: *Dawr al-Ahزاب fi al-Hayat al-Siyasiyah* (The role of political parties in the political life), Center for Strategic Studies, 2012, the center's publications, Jordan University.



well as at the official levels. These leaders were present in the demonstrations witnessed by the Kingdom since the start of the "Arab Spring." In addition, they have been active in their political participation in the recent parliamentary elections in the Kingdom as streams, as well as individuals. Among the most important actors at the level of left-wing parties are the Jordanian Communist Party, the Jordanian Democratic Popular Unity Party, the People's Democratic Party (HASHD), as well as some other streams and political movements such as the National Progressive Current and the Social Left Movement. Additionally, there are some other leftist personalities such as Nahid Hatter, a famous writer, and some leftist activists who have had their active presence at the official level.

## A Historical Background and the Current Stances of the Jordanian Left

The roots of the Left in Jordan date back to the 1930's when the Marxist cells formed the nucleus of political action. These cells were formed by Jordanian students who were studying in Arab universities such as Damascus, Baghdad, and Beirut. Most of them were from middle class families whose financial means allowed them to send their children abroad to study. In addition to these students, some junior state employees joined these cells.

In spite of the fact that the Jordanian Left was born outside Jordan, specifically in Palestine, it arrived in Jordan at a mature stage, i.e. after the 1948 Nakba and the unification of the two banks (the eastern and western banks of the Jordan River). The Leftist cells started to grow and to reach many cities until they were able to form, in cooperation with the Palestinian National Liberation League, the Jordanian Communist Party in 1951, which is considered the first left-wing party in Jordan covering both the east and west banks. The party formulated its programs and plans, and became politically active in the Kingdom's cities in secret, as well as in public.<sup>20</sup>

The 1950's saw a growing number of political parties and trade unions and the formation of the General Federation of Trade Unions. This became possible because Jordan entered a new phase of its history with the unification of the two banks of the river, which led to a change in the demographic, social, and cultural structure of the country, as well as the political agendas. Jordan started to witness the emergence of a middle class composed of professionals including doctors, engineers, pharmacists, lawyers, teachers, and public and private sector employees. In addition there were a number of craftsmen and

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20 Fouad Dabbour, A memorial service for Dr. Nabih Rshaidat, the Jordanian Communist Party website, (26-9-2009), available on the following link: <http://www.jccp.org/>

workers from among the Palestinian refugees who after the Palestinian Nakba conditions became strongly involved in politics at a very early stage.<sup>21</sup>

In the fall of 1956, fair parliamentary elections were held with the participation of most of the Jordanian political parties, including the National Socialist Party,<sup>22</sup> the Communist Party, and the Ba'ath Party. It was then suggested that these three parties should compete in the elections with one joint list of candidates under the "National Front" name. However, the leadership of the Ba'ath Party refused this suggestion because it thought that it would be able to win more seats if it competed alone. According to the election results, the National Socialist Party won 13 seats, the National Front 3 seats, and the Ba'ath 2 seats. Accordingly, King Hussein appointed Suleiman al-Nabulsi, the Secretary General of the National Socialist Party, to form a parliamentary coalition government. As a result of the regional conditions and the Cold War, disputes started to appear between the al-Nabulsi government and King Hussein. These tensions increased after the coup attempt and the involvement of the Free Officers in the coup. King Hussein did not know who exactly opposed the coup and who supported it. Moreover, Jordan's options were limited after the announcement of the Eisenhower Doctrine in January of 1957. The government tended to develop relations between Jordan and the Soviet Union when the US government was providing financial and military aid to countries that were resisting the Soviet influence and "communist penetration." This prompted King Hussein to dismiss the government in April of 1957, declare martial law, and prosecute the opposition, as well as to impose severe restrictions on trade unions and existing parties. Since then, political parties entered a long period of underground activity with the exception of the Muslim Brotherhood, which was not registered as a political party and was an ally of the regime. This political phase continued until late 1989 and legally until late 1992.<sup>23</sup>

The emergence of the Palestinian fedayeen movement in Jordan between 1967-1970 was a catalyst for the Jordanian opposition parties, especially the Communist Party. Most of these parties, including the Communist Party, started to form armed organizations to resist the Israeli occupation, and most of the political parties amended their own political programs for Jordan in favor of liberating Palestinian land programs. These movements, which had combined the pan-Arab, Marxist and national ideologies, made Jordan a major base for their struggle. However, resistance operations from these parties was very limited. After Black September and the departure of the PLO and its

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21 Ali Mahaftha, *Dirasat fi Tareekh al-Urdun al-Maaser: al-Nukhab al-Siyasiyah wa al-Ahزاب* (Studies in the contemporary history of Jordan: The political elites and political parties), Al-Urdun al-Jadeed Study Center, (2010), pp. 48-50.

22 The National Socialist Party was created in 1954. A large number of the founding members were members of the third parliament, which was dissolved on 22 June 1954. Hazza Barakat al-Majali was the first secretary general of the party before Dr. Suleiman al-Nabulsi became the party's secretary general in 1954.

23 Ali Mahaftha, *Dirasat fi Tareekh al-Urdun al-Maaser: al-Nukhab al-Siyasiyah wa al-Ahزاب* (Studies in the contemporary history of Jordan: The political elites and political parties), Al-Urdun al-Jadeed Study Center, (2010), p 59.

resistance factions from Jordan, political parties entered a new phase which was characterized by weakness, divisions, and disintegration.

During the 1970's and 1980's new parties, of a Palestinian nature, appeared along with the two opposition Communist and Ba'ath parties. These parties, together with other Leftists and pan-Arab parties, formed the main structure of the opposition during the period extending from 1973 and until 1991. These parties include the Jordanian Communist Party (1951), the Leninist Cadre (1971) which split from the Jordanian Communist Party, the Arab Ba'ath Socialist Party, Fatah "Jordan Affairs" (1971), the Democratic Front Organization in Jordan (1974), the Palestinian Workers' Communist Party (1975), the Jordanian Popular Movement (1976), The Jordanian Revolutionary People's Party (1972), the People's Liberation Movement (1979), and the Organization of the Popular Front in Jordan (1982).<sup>24</sup> It should be noted that most of the leftist parties that have emerged after 1967 are extensions of Palestinian movements and organizations who started to become politically active after the end of guerrilla action in Jordan as a result of the armed clash with the state in September 1970 (Black September).

With the return of elections and with the issuance of the political parties law in 1992, 34 political parties were licensed in Jordan, as well as a number of parties that have emerged, dissolved, and merged within the contexts of the local political partisan movement. The communist/leftist stream was represented in three parties. In addition to the Jordanian Communist Party, there were two political organizations which were extensions of the Palestinian Left. They were represented by the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine, and the Jordanian Democratic Left Party, which was formed of members who were previously engaged with the resistant Palestinian Leftist movement and who have opted to embrace a democratic/liberal option, in addition to a number of gatherings, personalities, and forums who adopt this ideology.<sup>25</sup>

## Historical Jordanian Leftist Personalities

Among the most prominent personalities in the history of the Jordanian Left is Fuad Nassar, who played a central role in the history of the Jordanian Communist Party. He was an activist and a leading communist in Palestine.

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24 Inad Abu Wandy, Al-Ahزاب al-Siyasiya al-Urduniya: Nashaat wa Tatawur al-Ahزاب al-Urduniya, (Jordanian political parties: The emergence and evolution of the Jordanian parties), al-Hiwar al-Mutamaden site, 11/6/2009, (The Civilized Dialogue), available on the following link: <http://www.ahewar.org/debat/show.art.asp?aid=174720>.

25 Oraib al-Rintawi, Qanun al-Ahزاب al-Siyasiyan al-Urduniyah – al-Jadal al-Aam (The Jordanian political parties law – a public debate), Al-Quds Center for Political Studies (17-03-2006), available on the following link: [http://alqudscenter.org/arabic/pages.php?local\\_type=128&local\\_details=2&id1=351&men](http://alqudscenter.org/arabic/pages.php?local_type=128&local_details=2&id1=351&men).

He was the Secretary General of the Arab Workers Conference in Palestine in 1945, and the Secretary General of the League of National Liberation in 1948, and he drafted its first program within the Jordanian Communist Party after the annexation of the two banks. He was jailed in Jordan and was released in 1956. He continued to be active in Amman as a leader of the Communist Party until his death in 1976.<sup>26</sup>

Dr. Nabih Rshadat is one of the most prominent personalities of the Jordanian Left. He started his political career in Irbid and then in Damascus. He fought against the French occupation of Syria until he finally settled as a doctor in his clinic, which became famous in Damascus and especially in the Rukn al-Din area, because of his special relations with his patients, especially service to poor people. He also played an instrumental role in the establishment of the Jordanian Communist Party and especially in the formation of Marxist cells in Transjordan which formed, with the Palestinian National Liberation League, the Jordanian Communist Party. He also played a role in the formation of the National Front in Jordan.<sup>27</sup>

Among the historic leading personalities of the Jordanian Communist Party is Dr. Yacoub Zayadin, who joined the Communist movement in the 1940's while he was studying in Beirut. He joined the Communist Party and started to occupy high-ranking positions until he became the secretary-general of the party, occupying this position for many years. He is considered one of the most prominent students of Dr. Nabih Rshadat.<sup>28</sup> He nominated himself in the 1956 elections and won the Christian quota seat allocated for Jerusalem although he was born in the city of Karak. He even wrote a very famous book entitled "al-Bidayat (The Beginnings)."<sup>29</sup>

Issa Mdanat is another prominent communist personality. He was active in the mid 1950's in the general elections of 1956, in the popular uprising in the two banks against the Baghdad Pact, in the formation of the al-Nabulsi government, and in the activities of political parties, including those of the Communist Party. This eventually led to his imprisonment when martial law was declared. He remained imprisoned from 1958 until 1966, after which he was exiled to Moscow. He returned to Jordan upon a personal invitation from King Hussein in 1968 and continued leading underground activism in the

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26 Shamekh Badra, "Fuad Nassar: heroism and sacrifice," the Palestinian People's Party, (29-9-2009), available on the following link: <http://www.palpeople.org/atemplate.php?id=1517>

27 Fouad Dabbour, A memorial service for Dr. Nabih Rshadat, the Jordanian Communist Party website, (26-9-2009), available on the following link: <http://www.jccp.org/>

28 For more information on Yacoub Zayadeen, see the chapter entitled "Qiraah fi Muthakarath Shakhsiyat fi al-Muarada: Doctor Yacoub Zayadeen (The memoirs of opposition figures: Dr. Yacoub Zayadin), pp. 147-149," in Ali Mhafitha book, *Dirasat fi Tareekh al-Urdun al-Maaser: al-Nukhab al-Siyasiyah wa al-Ahزاب* (Studies in the contemporary history of Jordan: The political elites and political parties), Al-Urdun al-Jadeed Study Center, (2010).

29 Yacoub Zayadeen, *Al-Bidayat (The Beginnings)*, Ibn Khaldun Publishing House, Beirut, (1981).

Communist Party. Madanat was able to win a seat in the 1989 parliamentary elections when parliamentary life was resumed and after a secret struggle that had lasted for decades.<sup>30</sup>

Abdul-Fattah Tolstan is another activist of the Communist Party. He finished high school in Amman and became a teacher. He joined the Jordanian Communist Party in 1954 and grew to occupy high-ranking positions until he became a leading member of the Party's regional Committee in the capital city of Amman. He continued his activism until he was arrested in 1962. Tolstan died in one of the Jordanian prisons as a result of torture.<sup>31</sup> Despite the importance of party leaders in the Jordanian Left movement, it is noted that no new leaders have emerged with the same weight and impact as the historic leaders of the Communist Party, or the Leftist movement in general.

## Current Stances of the Jordanian Left

Most leftist parties and movements have in principle the same stances with regard to the key issues in the internal, as well as external levels. Most of the leftist parties and organizations have adopted standard Marxist-Leninist ideology with a focus on socialism as a model for governance.<sup>32</sup> Below are detailed some of the key issues tackled by the leftist parties.

## Political Parties' Perception of Internal Issues

Most of the leftist political parties in Jordan share the same overall goal of building a socialist society in Jordan. All the Jordanian Left agree that the best social system capable of solving the economic, political, social, and cultural problems is the socialist system, which should prevail as a historic and humanitarian alternative to the existing capitalist system which is based on greed and exploitation through the use of political and economic repression.

At the political level, all leftist parties agree that it is important to rid themselves of the repercussions of the martial law era. They all agree that it is important to abolish all laws that hamper political activities, especially political parties,

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30 Mahmoud al-Rimawi, "Issa Mdanat Ramz al-Yasar wa makhzoun al-Afkar (Issa Mdanat, the symbol of the left and wealth of ideas," *al-Sijil Newspaper*, (6-3-2008), available on the following link: [http://www.al-sijil.com/sijil\\_items/sitem1156.htm](http://www.al-sijil.com/sijil_items/sitem1156.htm)

31 The Social Left Movement, *Al-Shaheed al-Batal Abdul-Fattah Tolstan (The hero and martyr Abdul-Fattah Tolstan)*, the Social Left Movement website, (2012), available on the following link: [http://www.yasarjo.net/?name=historyofleft&content\\_id=1410](http://www.yasarjo.net/?name=historyofleft&content_id=1410).

32 A study: *Dawr al-Ahzab fi al-Hayat al-Siyasiyah (The role of political parties in political life)*, interviews and a special survey were prepared to measure the orientations of political parties and their stances, Center for Strategic Studies, 2012, the center's publications, Jordan University.

and the laws that suppress the freedom of speech and press. They all demand the adoption of the constitutional amendments and the passing of the needed laws to maintain and achieve the principle of public and political freedoms in the various fields in line with the strengthening of democratic life. Their demands also include the changing of the role of the security services and defining their role in defending the homeland. They all agree that these forces should be under civil control. Leftist parties have adopted a progressive stance in regards to women's issues, and they consider them as national issues. All leftist streams support women's active participation in the different social, economic, and political fields, as well as personal freedoms. They also demand the abolition of all forms of legal and social discrimination practiced against women.

In the economic sphere, most of the Leftist parties and movements seek to build an independent national economy in the industrial, financial, agricultural, and commercial fields. Most of these parties have general economic programmes based on demanding laws and legislation which protect the national economy and limit the dumping/flooding of the national market with imported foreign goods. The leftist movement in Jordan stands against the economic policies pursued by the successive governments, especially the privatization process, the selling of government shares in the public sector, and the restructuring process, which has resulted, according to the Left, in the marginalization and impoverishment of citizens, leaving them without social protection. Leftist parties and movements demand the issuance of a new progressive tax which is proportionate with levels of income and profits, and which is just for the working class, craftsmen, and the poor.

Perhaps one of the most important demands of the Jordanian Left is the achievement of social justice for workers, the poor, and the middle class in a way which protects these sectors from the globalized capitalism, which has led to huge gaps between the different social classes. According to this logic, the concept of citizenship occupies a big part of the Left's literature. They believe there should be laws which should govern the relationship between the citizens and the state and between the citizens themselves. They believe citizens should elect their representatives and rulers and that citizens have a direct impact on legislation to protect marginalized sectors of society.<sup>33</sup>

In general, leftist parties and streams in Jordan have adopted democracy as their desired form of civil governance. They demand policies that help in

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33 For the stances of the different Leftist parties and movements, see the following links:  
Social Left Movement: <http://www.yasarjo.net/>  
Progressive National Stream: <http://al-tayyar.org/>  
Jordanian Communist Party: <http://www.jocp.org/>  
Jordanian People's Democratic Party (HASHD) <http://www.hashd-ahali.org>  
Jordanian Democratic Popular Unity Party: <http://www.wihda.org>

building a national economic base which leads to independent economic and political decision making, and they oppose economic globalization policies at the ideological level and call for social justice.

## The Leftist Parties' Perception of External Issues

The stances of the Jordanian Left regarding external issues are based on opposing capitalism, the call for Arab unity in order to achieve development, and opposing imperialism, which seeks to loot the wealth of the Arab countries and to keep them in a state of underdevelopment and fragmentation. All leftist parties and movements agree that the basic task is to disengage from the subordination to the West and to get out of the orbit of Western policies, which are based on the control of big capital and free market economy, which leads to the weakening of the state and prevents it from providing equitable development programs. The Left therefore is aware that it is not possible for Arab countries, by themselves, to resist the political and economic project, but this becomes possible within the framework of a united Arab project.

The Palestinian cause occupies a large part of the Jordanian Left's discourse and literature. According to the Left, the liberation of Palestine is a necessity that should be achieved in support of the historic rights of the Palestinians and in confrontation with the Israeli apartheid colonization project. The leftist forces support the achievement of the national rights of the Palestinian people, particularly the right of return, self-determination, and the building of an independent Palestinian state with Jerusalem as its capital. The leftist movements consider the Palestinian issue an internal issue for all Arab countries in general and Jordan in particular. It is important to note that the stances with regard to the Palestinian cause are not only based on the ideology embraced by the leftist movement, but also on the historic relation between these parties and the Palestinian cause.

Leftist forces in Jordan agree that Western countries (the United States and the European Union) have interests in the Arab countries, and therefore reject the discourse of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund based on privatization and open market (neo-liberal) economy.<sup>34</sup> It should be noted here that despite the fact that the leftist parties and streams in Jordan were very active during the "Arab Spring" period, specifically during the year 2011, there were several sharp disagreements within the Left in regards to internal as well

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34 For the stances of the different Leftist parties and movements, see the following links:  
Social Left Movement: <http://www.vasarjo.net/>  
Progressive National Stream: <http://al-tayyar.org/>  
Jordanian Communist Party: <http://www.jocp.org>  
Jordanian People's Democratic Party (HASHD) <http://www.hashd-ahali.org>  
Jordanian Democratic Popular Unity Party: <http://www.wihda.org>

as external issues. This is despite attempts to reunite the Left within the scope of a common intellectual agenda, but this did not prevent the continuation of conflicts at the level of parties, movements, and personalities.

Signs of splits began to appear in late 2011, when it became clear that there were certain blocs of parties and movements standing against other blocs and movements. This is especially true in regards to the split within the Popular Unity Party, which is comprised of some youth movements such as Thabahtuna against the Liberation Party of Nahid Hattar, who is a well-known writer, in addition to Muwaffaq Mahadin, who is also a writer. The old/new dispute revolved around the consolidation of the national identity of Jordan, considering it a legitimate entity from which the concept of national identity can be derived and even further than this by theorizing that it is possible to implement a real liberation project in Jordan.<sup>35</sup> In addition to differences in the perception of the ongoing conflict in Syria and its external parties, these conflicts erupted between the different political streams and have had their impact on the popular participation in the protests and the various activities. While there was an overwhelming consensus on the legitimate rights of the Syrian people to revolt to change their regime, some of the traditional communists and the pan-Arab leftists believe that Syria is exposed to a regional and international conspiracy because of its stances which support the Lebanese resistance movement and the Palestinians.

The year 2013 saw attempts to bridge the gap and divisions in the left movement in Jordan by launching an initiative to unite these streams. Although some Leftist streams did not participate in this initiative, the so-called Union of Jordanian Communists was launched with the participation of the following political parties and leftist forces, the Jordanian Communist Party, the Social Left Movement, the Jordanian Communist Gathering, and independent communists. The Union aims to unite the will of the Jordanian communists, structure their work, and organize a dialogue between them.<sup>36</sup>

## The Impact of the Jordanian Left and its Pressing Challenges

The political transformations in the Arab world, particularly the Tunisian and Egyptian revolutions as well as the Jordanian popular political mobilization,

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35 Hisham Bustani, *Al-Awham al-Qutriyah lil Yasar al-Ijtima'i al-Urduni* (The nationalistic illusions of the Jordanian Social Left), *al-Akhbar* Newspaper website (30-6-2008), available on: <http://www.al-akhbar.com/node/117618>.

36 Jordan News Agency, *Ishhar Itihat I-Shuyueyou al-Urduniyou* (Announcement of the birth of the Jordanian Communist Union), (29-3-2013), available on the following link: [http://petra.gov.jo/Public\\_News/Nws\\_NewsDetails.aspx?Site\\_Id=2&lang=1&NewsID=105260&CatID=13](http://petra.gov.jo/Public_News/Nws_NewsDetails.aspx?Site_Id=2&lang=1&NewsID=105260&CatID=13).



have posed an opportunity and a challenge for all political parties, especially the Jordanian Leftist parties. This period saw the emergence of leftist movements with a clear presence on the official and popular levels. Leftist parties and streams have had the opportunity to re-introduce their ideas and perceptions within the so-called wave of the "Arab Spring." They have benefited from the levels of popular anger at the successive governments' policies in Jordan, the deterioration in the economic conditions of the people, and the high rates of poverty and unemployment. These movements and parties have begun to fully incorporate into various spheres of influence in Jordan. There is no doubt that the motive behind the participation of the left and other political forces in the official frameworks at the political mobility phase was to confront the Islamists, who boycotted the entire political process, and to give a signal to internal, as well as external actors, that not all opposition means a boycott of the political process.

The various Left parties have had a significant presence during the political and youth mobilization phase witnessed by Jordan during the last two years (2012 and 2013). Most of the leftist political parties and streams were working under the umbrella of the National Reform Front, headed by Ahmad Obeidat and the membership of most of the opposition parties. However, with the passage of time, conflicts and disagreements started to surface among the members of the Front. The most significant conflict was related to participation in the parliamentary elections. Most of the leftist parties took a decision to participate in the elections while the head of the Front and the Muslim Brotherhood were against this participation. However, political activism was an opportunity for many young people to become introduced to politics and to get to know leftist ideas.

In relation to the presence of Leftist movements in the official national politics, especially in the government and the parliament, left-oriented personalities began to exert their influence in various facets of Jordanian life. Among the examples of such political participation is the National Dialogue Committee in which Mounir Hamarneh, the secretary-general of the Jordanian Communist Party, had participated in his personal capacity as an individual. Despite such individual representation, Mounir and others were able to relay the perceptions of the leftist movement and put their ideas in relation to economic, social, and political policies, and as well as communicate their ideas regarding the election law. However, the negligence of these recommendations weakened their confidence in the importance of their participation and the trust of the leftist base which they represent in Jordan in the reform process. This has made these movements seek to directly influence policies through unofficial means, namely through demonstrations and strikes. In addition, there was the representation of Abla Abu Ilbeh, the secretary-general of the HASHD Party, and who is a former member of parliament. She participated in the National Dialogue Committee and gave suggestions which represent the political

aspirations of the party from a leftist perspective, especially in regards to the election law.<sup>37</sup> The official presence of these movements on the governmental and parliamentary levels was limited and temporary, and does not signify a long-term alliance.

In the last ten years, the presence of the Left in the parliaments and the government was very limited, as is the case with most of the other political parties. This presence was limited to some left-wing personalities who enjoy the respect of the political elite and who often adopt popular demands. Among these is Bassam Haddadin, the former Minister of Political Development, who was a member in more than one parliament and one of the most prominent members of the al-Nsour government political team. He was able to bring about a rapprochement between the state and the Jordanian Left because he adopted the project of replacing the Islamic Action Front Party with the Left. However, his success was limited and temporary through the participation of some leftist parties in the parliamentary elections.

## The 2013 Parliamentary Elections

When the 2013 parliamentary election day was announced the government launched a campaign to encourage the participation in elections on the partisan as well as the popular levels. On the one hand, the government started to promote the forthcoming elections in the context of guarantees for their integrity and transparency in the presence of an independent election commission for the first time ever in Jordan to organize and supervise elections. On the other hand, the government held meetings with the opposition parties who had announced that they would boycott the elections to discourage them from boycotting. Among the most prominent of these meetings is the one which brought together the prime minister with the six leftist parties in the house of the former Leftist minister Bassam Haddadin. At the end of 2012, the six leftist parties gathered and five of them decided to participate in the elections. These are the Progressive Arab Ba'ath Party, the Socialist Ba'ath Party, HASHD, the Communist Party, and the National Movement for Direct Democracy. However, the Popular Unity Party insisted on its stance previously taken to boycott the elections.

Several weeks after this announcement, the government took a decision to lift subsidies on fuel, just one month before the election day. This decision was received with lots of reluctance. It raised the wrath of the general public and

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37 For the names of those who participated in the committee see: Ammon newsletter, Majlis al-Wuzaraa Yushakel Lajnat al-Hiwar al-Watani bi Musharakat al-Islamiyeen (The Council of Ministers forms the National Dialogue Committee with the participation of the Islamists), Ammon news website (14-3-2011) on the following link: <http://www.ammonnews.net/article.aspx?articleNO=82666>.

it embarrassed the parties that had agreed to participate in the parliamentary elections. In effect, the Left parties decided to suspend their participation in the upcoming parliamentary elections to protest against the increase in fuel prices. Unfortunately, when things relatively calmed down, four parties abandoned their decision to boycott, with the exception of the Communist Party and the Popular Unity Party, who were boycotting the elections anyway, and announced that they would participate in the parliamentary elections.<sup>38</sup>

To sum up, there was a leftist mobilization calling for the participation in elections, such as the Liberation Party,<sup>39</sup> which participated through a national list under the "Sons al-Harathin" name,<sup>40</sup> and the HASHD Party, which participated through the "Democratic Advancement" list. However, the two parties did not win any seats in the parliament. Furthermore, the People's List,<sup>41</sup> headed by Mustafa Shnaikat, was able to win one seat. Some personalities, considered as leftists, participated in the local district elections and a number of them were able to win seats. Among them are the head of the teachers' union, Mustafa Rawashdeh, Mustafa Hamarna, Jamil al-Nimri, Jamal Qamoh, and others. Unfortunately, in the final analysis, despite its important role in parliamentary life,<sup>42</sup> the presence of the Jordanian Left in the Parliament remains limited, although it has managed to form a bloc under the "Democratic Gathering Bloc" name which is composed of most of the leftists.

## The Left and the Popular Movement

Since the start of the "Arab Spring," Jordan has witnessed more than ten thousand demonstrations, sit-ins, and protests.<sup>43</sup> These were started by the many protests organized by day laborers before the Arab Spring. The case of these laborers raised the cases of more than twenty thousand government workers working for different state institutions in a big number of different sectors.

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38 Akhbar al-Urdun (Jordan's News), al-Ahzaab al-Yasariyah wa al-Qawmiyah Tualeq Qarar al-Mushaaka fi al-Intikhabat (The leftist and nationalist parties suspend their decision to participate in elections), Akhbar al-Urdun website, (2012), available on the following link: <http://www.jo24.net/print.php?id=18632>

39 The Social National Liberation Party of Jordan is a new party, composed of a group of leftists, trade union activists, popular figures, and youth who played a prominent role in the popular movement since the spring of 2010. It has established revolutionary links with workers, teachers, retired army members, and popular committees in the provinces. The discourse of the party utilizes three ideologies, mainly, national radicalism, social radicalism, and cultural liberalism. This political and intellectual synthesis is in line with the dominant political ideologies among the toilers' sectors in the provinces. Among its most prominent representatives is Nahed Hatter, a writer.

40 It is a symbolic name which refers to workers and toilers.

41 The list was composed of the most important leftist personalities, most prominent are: Dr. Mustafa Shnaikat, Hazim al-Uran, journalist Sami al-Zubaidi, and others. It did not emerge from a certain gathering or a particular party.

42 The Independent Electoral Commission, "Election results 2013", IEC website (2013), available on the following link: <http://www.entikhabat.jo/Public/EntDayAr.aspx?id=2013&type=results>.

43 This information and statistics were obtained from the General Security Directorate.

During this phase, the Jordanian Left movement was able to restore the national, political, and social discourse of the Jordanian Left and was able to achieve a distinctive presence in the circles of youth, workers, and popular classes, a presence which the Left had lacked for a long time. The Jordanian Left benefited from the popular discontent over government economic policy, which it used to attack in the past, by creating a common ground within the new sectors of society, which participated in the popular movement. It should be noted here that the participation of the Left in the popular movement was clearly through emerging youth groups that have had an active and a clear presence, rather than through party leaders. Among those who were present are the Progressive Current, the Social Left Movement, and the Thabahtuna, and Popular Unity Youth.

It is difficult to judge the impact of the Jordanian Left on the popular movement because the Left is present in all popular movements throughout the various provinces, in addition to the presence of major partisan organizations such as the Muslim Brotherhood. Although there are no intersecting points between the programs of the Muslim Brotherhood and those of the Left, the Left was engaged with the Muslim Brotherhood in the coalition of the opposition parties and later on in the National Front for Reform headed by Ahmed Obeidat. In general, the Leftist parties could not distinguish themselves in the popular movement. Their participation and organization of a large number of sit-ins and protests were in cooperation with other different political frameworks.

This issue is not confined to leftist parties. All political parties in Jordan, regardless of their political, ideological, and intellectual backgrounds, do not enjoy the support of the Jordanian masses and do not have popularity among individual Jordanians because of many historical reasons, which cannot be covered in this paper. One of the surveys conducted in 2012 revealed that only 1.2% of the Jordanians have joined at any time of their lives any of the existing political parties.<sup>44</sup> In terms of the extent of how much the people know about the presence of existing parties in Jordan, participants were asked about the names of the political parties which they had heard about or those which they knew about. The result was that leftist and pan-Arab parties received very low percentages in regards to the question that asked if respondents knew about these parties. The only exception was the Communist Party, which was relatively known by the Jordanian population. The study showed that 7.7% of the sample knew about the Jordanian Communist Party, 4.7% knew about the presence of the HASHD party, and only 2.8% knew about the presence of the Democratic Popular Unity Party. This percentage doubled when the names of the parties were mentioned for those who did not know the name of the party

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44 A study under print, *Dawr al-Ahزاب fi al-Hayat al-Siyasiyah* (The role of political parties in the political life). There were interviews conducted and a special questionnaire was designed to collect information on the orientations of political parties and their stance. Center for Strategic Studies, (2012), the Publications Center at the University of Jordan.

by themselves (see Annex 1).<sup>45</sup> The survey also showed that only 1% of the citizens would consider voting for the leftist stream, 1% only for the national stream, and 15% for the Political Islam stream. However, the national political stream received 38%, as shown in Annex 2. In summary, it is clear that the Jordanian Left, like other Jordanian parties, with the exception of the Political Islam based parties, does not have popular support. However, the status of the leftist parties is derived from their intellectual and political influence through their presence in unions and civil society organizations, in addition to different cultural and intellectual structures, and their strong presence in previous historic phases of Jordan's development.

## Challenges Facing the Jordanian Left

The Jordanian Left faces a number of challenges that limit its abilities in the current phase of its history to influence the course of political life in Jordan. The most important challenges facing the Jordanian Left can be summarized as follows.

**The first challenge** is associated with the weak economic and social base of the Left. In its social base, the Marxist ideology with its different interpretations, depends on the working class and some sectors of the middle class. However, the structure of these two classes in Jordan does not provide fertile soil for the growth of leftist streams. The Jordanian working class suffers from fragmentation and division on several grounds such as the weak industrial structure in Jordan, the concentration of the bulk of employment in the service economy, tourism, and small enterprise sectors that do not allow the development of a clear class consciousness in the direction of leftist and socialist ideas. Moreover, among the ranks of the working class in Jordan, there is a large number of migrant, non-Jordanian workers who are estimated at more than one third of the labor force, and specifically, half of the size of the working class. These structural distortions in the economy and the Jordanian labor market are among the most important challenges facing political parties in general, and leftist parties in particular, which limit their ability to create incubators for their ideas and social programs.

As for the middle class, its composition also does not constitute a fertile soil for leftist streams because historically the biggest percentage of this class has been the public sector employees, followed by small traders and property owners. Perhaps the professional sector of the middle class, composed of doctors, engineers, and lawyers, has been the historic incubator of the

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<sup>45</sup> To view the detailed results and percentages see Annex 2: Can you mention the names of political parties that you have heard about? A study on the role of parties in the political life," Center for Strategic Studies, (2012), the Publications Center at the University of Jordan.

Jordanian Left. However, it is in this sector that the Left has lost most of its positions and ranks because of the rise of the Islamists and the historic competition between the Left and the pan-Arab groups.

**The second challenge** has its historical and ideological roots, and it is associated with the historical background of the leftist movement which was exposed to several shocks that have weakened it as a result of the repression suffered by these movements. This has made people reluctant and fearful of joining in political life, and this fear continues to be deeply rooted in peoples' consciousness from the 1990's until today. The collapse of the Soviet Union and the decline in the role of the socialist movement globally was another strong blow to the Jordanian Left, especially the traditional stream. Therefore, the leftist streams were faced with three options. The first was to join the liberal streams and the second is to hold on to their previous Marxist ideology. These two options are not realistic for the Jordanian Left because the first option distances it from its core values and the second option has been bypassed by history and is no longer possible. Therefore, the only option for the Jordanian Left is to re-establish the popular movement to face and challenge liberal capitalism and the Islamic militant groups.<sup>46</sup> The third option is the closest ideologically to the Marxist heritage and entails continuing to struggle to protect and advance the working class and marginalized sectors of Jordanian society.

**The third challenge** is associated with the structure of the Leftist parties. The crises witnessed by the leftist parties have resulted in many splits among the leadership ranks, especially after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The international crisis of the leftist parties has reflected itself in the realities of the leftist parties in Jordan which were cognitively and revolutionarily linked to this system. However, the traditional leftist parties did not consider the new realities and how to deal with them, but instead they maintained their rigidity of thought which they had adopted before the collapse of the Soviet Union.<sup>47</sup> Added to this is the fact that some leftist parties, which have historically emerged from the PLO factions, could not form a pure Jordanian discourse despite their organizational disengagement from the mother organizations. Their discourse is still characterized by a lack of clarity or by ambiguity regarding the identity of the state and issues of citizenship. The Jordanian Left also faces a key challenge regarding its ability to re-establish an effective leftist movement that has political weight within a formula of common stances. This is necessary so that it can be able to build on socialist and leftist experiences in Europe, and the

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46 Khalid Kalaldeh, Raddan ala al-Bustani wa ghayrihi: Lughz harakat al-Yasar al-Ijtima'i al-Urdini (Responding to al-Bustani and others: the puzzle of the Jordanian Social Left Movement), Rum news agency (2008), available on the following link: [http://www.rumonline.net/more.php?this\\_id=5664](http://www.rumonline.net/more.php?this_id=5664).

47 Ibrahim Hijazeen, Azmat al-Yasar fi Biladina wa Afaq al-Khuruj Minha (The crisis of the left in our country, and horizons of getting out of it), al-Hiwar al-Mutamaden (The Civilized Dialogue), (16-10-2009), available on the following link: <http://www.ahewar.org/debat/show.art.asp?aid=188191>.

experiences of the Left in Latin America, instead of adhering to an old thesis which rejects capitalism and political liberalism, and which it considers as one of the formulas of the "bourgeois democracy."<sup>48</sup> The renewal of the Jordanian Left requires that it moves forward instead of focusing exclusively on the past. They must move on from their rigid ideology and develop economic, political, and social programs which actually address fundamental issues facing the Jordanian society and which contribute to the development of a national vision based on the fundamental principles of the global left, such as freedom, social justice and democracy.

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48 Sohail Sabah, Al-Yasar al-Urduni: Juthur al-Maazaq wa Aselat al-Mustaqbal (Jordan's left: the roots of the impasse and questions about the future), al-Quds Center for Political Studies (2003), available on the following link: <http://www1.alqudscenter.org/ar/activities/view/3184>.

# Appendices

**Annex 1:** Can you mention the names of political parties that you have heard about?

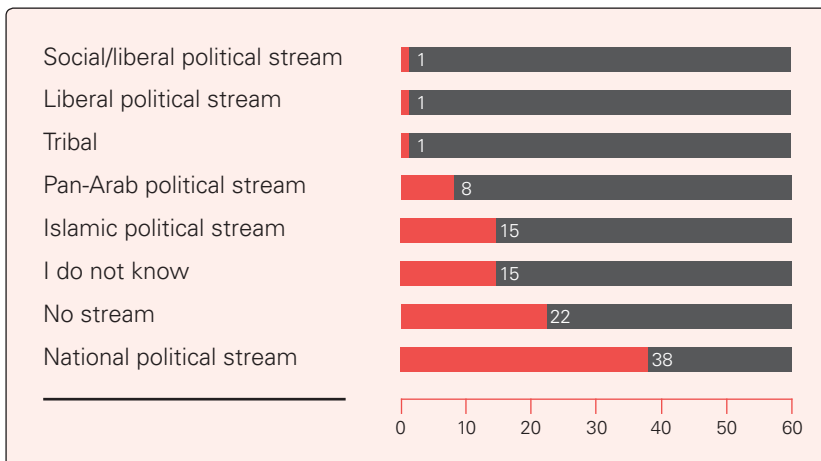
Party Name		Knowledge of parties' existence			Reviewing the objectives of the parties they knew about
		Instantly knew about it	Knew about it after reminder	Did not hear about it even after reminder	
1	Direct Democratic Nationalistic Movement Party	2.7	7.3	90.0	24
2	The Jordanian Communist Party	7.7	18.0	74.3	18
3	The Jordanian Arab Baath Socialist Party	6.7	12.9	80.4	21
4	People's Democratic Party (HASHD)	4.7	9.4	85.9	22
5	Democratic Popular Unity Party	2.8	6.9	90.3	25
6	Arab Baath Progressive Party	2.9	7.7	89.4	23



7	Arab Islamic Democratic Movement – Doaa	2.4	8.7	88.9	25
8	National Constitutional Party	6.7	13.9	79.4	21
9	Islamic Action Front Party	30.1	23.1	46.8	22
10	Islamic Wasat Party (The Islamic Centrist Party)	7.3	12.0	80.7	24
11	Al-Risala Party	2.8	7.0	90.2	23
12	Jordanian National Party	5.4	10.6	84.0	24
13	The Jordanian United Front Party	1.8	7.6	90.6	24
14	Welfare Party (al-Rafah Party)	2.5	7.2	90.2	22
15	Jordanian Life Party (al-Hayat Party)	2.2	6.1	91.7	27
16	The National Current Party	9.7	13.7	76.6	22
17	Justice and Development Party	2.3	8.5	89.2	22
18	Party of Freedom and Equality	2.0	9.8	88.2	21

19	Jordanian National Union Party	2.4	8.2	89.4	23
20	The Jordanian National Youth Party	2.7	8.1	89.2	23
21	Jordanian National Action Front	2.4	7.6	90.1	21
22	Justice and Reform Party	3.1	8.9	88.1	23
23	Reform Party	4.2	8.0	87.8	25
24	Muslim Brotherhood	29.0	-	-	26

**Annex 2:** Assuming that today a decision is taken to conduct parliamentary elections and that you have decided to participate in these elections, which of the following political streams are you likely to vote?



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# The Lebanese Left: The Possibility of the Impossible

\* Hussein Yacoub

## Foreword

The Lebanese left,<sup>1</sup> defined as parties opposing the sectarian quota system in Lebanon since the end of the Lebanese civil war in 1990, has been facing a crisis of presence and influence in the local political map. The absence of the left can largely be attributed to the country's political system, which is governed by sectarian quotas from the day of Lebanon's independence in 1943 and until present day. This system, which attempts to balance out religious balances in the country between, Muslims and Christians, completely shapes all aspects of Lebanon's government. This sectarian political system gives Christians a numerical majority (Fifty percent plus one) to Muslims in all state functions. This power structure was a leading contributor to the civil war which engulfed Lebanon for fifteen years between 1975 and 1990. Although the war started under the slogan of abolishing the sectarian system, in fact the war further exasperated sectarian divides in the country and created much more animosity between the various groups. In addition, it has further enhanced the numerical parity between Muslims and Christians which has given predominance to national and Islamic political parties with radical orientation and who are allies of the Syrian regime.

The Lebanese leftist parties, since the formation of the first party with social leftist ideas in the first quarter of the twentieth century under the name of the "People's Party"<sup>2</sup> and later under the "Lebanese Communist Party," up to the present day, were and still are struggling to change and topple the sectarian political system of the country. Unfortunately, the Lebanese Communist Party, for a plethora of reasons detailed below, has started to confuse the specificity

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1 The "Lebanese left" is a term used to indicate all leftist parties, movements, and groups. When necessary, the name of the party, movement, or group will be directly used.

2 The Lebanese Communist Party was officially founded on 24 October 1924, in the town of Hadath, south of Beirut. The first meeting was made up of union workers, scholars, academics, writers, and journalists who were active in their speeches and writings in promoting the ideas of the French Revolution: liberty, equality, and fraternity, and who were familiar with the writings of Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, and others and with the Russian Revolution of October 1917 led by Lenin and its first achievements.

of Lebanon, in terms of its sectarian composition, and the party's regional and international alliances. The Lebanese left has remained restricted by the idea of dependency on socialist countries and their course of action, which was often been incompatible with internal national interests of Lebanon. This first started with the party's support of the Popular Front government in France in the mid 1930's. Through its support it gave blind approval to the annexation of the Iskenderun region to Turkey. In addition, like other leftist parties, it gave blind obedience to the Soviet Union, even after the Soviet Union had approved the partition of Palestine into two states and was found out to be funding many various detrimental groups in the Lebanese Civil War.

This policy has made the Lebanese left, as opposition forces protesting the Lebanese sectarian political system throughout its long years, torn between various burdens, the most important one being a geographic one. Lebanon is geographically stuck in a turmoil fueled region which has seen many dozens of coups and military dictatorships since the second World War. This has made relations with neighboring countries tense, hostile, and temporal due to changes in internal alliances. Moreover, it has made the sectarian and ethnic groups that make up the fabric of the Lebanese society live in a state of permanent anxiety and fear. The second most important burden is the sectarian nature of Lebanon's governing system with sects sharing power based on constitutional and electoral customary practice. This has made it very difficult for left-wing, non-sectarian, and secular parties to work in all the Lebanese areas.

## The Left from its Beginnings and Until the Civil War

Lebanese factions were well acquainted with Marxist-Leninist ideology and international communism in the early phases of its modern history starting from the emergence of the modern Lebanese state in the 1920's and throughout the various phases of state development before and after independence. The experience of the left in contemporary Lebanese political life can be divided into three phases. The first phase began with the emergence of Lebanon during the French mandate period and beyond up to the civil war in 1975. The second phase was the Lebanese civil war (1975 - 1990), and the third is the current phase, which began following the announcement of the cessation of hostilities between the contending parties and the start of the implementation of the National Accord Document [The Taif Agreement] in 1990<sup>3</sup>.

Communist and socialist ideas started to emerge in Lebanese political life during the establishment of the state of Lebanon in 1920. Similar to most

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3 Farid al-Khazen, a joint work, "Tajribat al-Ahزاب al-Siyasiya fi Lubnan," (The experience of political parties in Lebanon)," The Lebanese Foundation for Permanent Civil Peace in collaboration with the Konrad Adenauer Foundation, October 1995 (Beirut).

Middle Eastern countries, the process started off as a natural result of the movement taking shape among intellectuals who were shaping what became a renaissance movement. The first stages involved some of the most important Lebanese and Syrian intellectuals such as Ahmad Fares al-Shidyaq, Farah Anton, Shibley al-Chmayel, George Jabbour, Nicola Haddad, Abdul Rahman al-Kawakibi, and Khairallah Khairallah.

The Lebanese left, specifically the Lebanese Communist Party (LCP) during the first phase, worked on the basis of trade union politics, seeking change by peaceful means. It fought a number of hard battles to achieve some social gains for the working class and the poor. The LCP was able to establish a number of trade unions, which were able to pass the first labour legislation, the Lebanese Labor Law, following the 1946 trade union strike.<sup>4</sup> The party also contributed to the establishment of the Lebanese University, and participated in the parliamentary elections of 1943, 1947, 1953, 1964, and 1972 which was the last one to be held until 1996 because of the Civil War. After the war, the LCP participated again in the elections but was not able to win any parliamentary seats because of the sectarian nature of the electoral system. In 2005, the Communist party won a single seat when the candidate of the Democratic Left, Elias Attallah, who nominated himself on the state's lists, became a parliament member. It was then that the left parties and the secularists started demanding a proportional and a non-sectarian election law in order to break the hegemony over the parliament by sectarian parties.

The sectarian system played a major role in pushing Lebanon into a civil war<sup>5</sup> because of key powerful political actors who were insisting and persisting on retaining and maintaining the sectarian quota system. It is for this reason that the Lebanese left, together with other parties and organizations of the National Movement<sup>6</sup> became engaged in the Civil War. There were other reasons for the Civil War as well, including the growth of exploitative capitalism,

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4 Muhammad Dakrub, "Juthur al-sindiyyana al-Hammaa, Hikayat Nushu'al-Hizb al-Shuyouei al-Lubnani (The roots of the red oak tree, the story behind the emergence of the Lebanese Communist Party), Dar al-Farabi, Beirut, 1984.

5 For more information on this issue see: Theodor Hanf, *Co-Existence in Wartime, Lebanon, Decline of a State and Rise of a Nation*, (London: The Centre for Lebanese Studies in Association with I.B. Tauris & Co Ltd Publishers) first editions 1993, Ahmad Baydoun, *Ma'alimtum wa-dhuqtum: Masalik fi al-harab al-Lubnaniyah*, Arab Cultural Center, first edition 1990, (Beirut; Samir Kassir, *The Lebanon War (Dar al-Nahar, Beirut) 2009; Samir Khalaf, Lubnan Fi Madar Al'Unf (Arabic Version of Civil and Uncivil Violence)*, (Dar al-Nahar), second edition 1998.

6 The Lebanese National Movement (LNM) was a front of socialist, pan-Arab, and leftist parties and organizations formed in 1969, but its actual start date was 1973. It is based on a joint program calling for political and economic reforms, as well as a clear stance in regards to Lebanon's Arab identity. The front, headed by Kamal Jumblatt, was composed of the Progressive Socialist Party (PSP), the Lebanese Communist Party, the Communist Action Organization, the Syrian Social Nationalist Party, a Syrian-led Ba'ath Party branch and an Iraqi-led Ba'ath Party branch and the Independent al-Nasiriyeen Movement. At the beginning of the Lebanese Civil War in 1975, LNM allied itself with the umbrella Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), and made many military achievements by that time which enabled it to control 70% of Lebanon's territory. Soon, the LNM witnessed divisions on the backdrop of conflicts with Syria. The LNM received big blows from the Syrian military intervention in June 1976 and the assassination of Kamal Jumblatt in 16 March 1977. Walid Jumblatt, who became the head of the LNM after the murder of his father, presented himself as a partisan and Druze leader and sought to improve his relations with Syria. Later on, the LNM lost its role and in June 1982, the Movement was virtually dissolved after the Israeli invasion of Lebanon.

the deteriorating conditions of the middle class, student and labor protest movements, rampant price rises, and the emergence of new progressive social forces who saw in social change a remedy for Lebanon's conditions and problems. In addition, there were many armed Palestinian groups who had taken control of various parts of the country and were causing many problems for the Lebanese population.

Thus, the Lebanese left, with all of its parties and organizations, became engaged in the Lebanese civil war. It fought throughout the war utilizing its many capabilities and networks, and it participated in the battles like other Lebanese parties and organizations. Leftist parties and organizations saw their participation in the Civil War as an expression that armed struggle is the best form of national struggle. At the same time, the Lebanese left considered itself a defender of the Palestinian resistance against the ruling power.<sup>7</sup>

## The Civil War and its Aftermath

It was only natural for the leftist parties, by joining the civil war, to change the organizational and partisan methods and working techniques that had prevailed ever since Lebanon's independence. As a result, various leftist parties started to focus on mobilizing young people who could carry arms and participate in street battles. This led to a change in the structures of the left-wing political parties from trade union politics to military populism, and they became heavily influenced by the tactical rhetoric of various military leaders.

Quickly, the Lebanese Civil War took a new dimension. Although it began under the slogans of toppling the sectarian system and changing the social and economic realities, the fighting in the streets took a different path with the emergence of real militias benefiting from the war system, the internationalization of the crisis, and the intervention of foreign armies such as those from Syria and Israel. These forces had their own soldiers and militias who obeyed their orders. Therefore, after the first two years, the war over the shape of the political system became a sectarian civil war with the right-wing and left-wing Lebanese parties, which raged on another 15 years. The left did not understand, even after the end of the first two years, that the war it had fought under progressive titles and slogans was no longer a progressive war. Due to this, the left parties could not return to its pre-civil war status, and it remained during the 1980's, a prisoner of the National Movement idea and its alliance with the Palestinian resistance, despite the collapse of both of them on the organizational as well as on the program level, after 1982.

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7 In the beginning of the Lebanese civil war, the term "Isolationist Lebanese forces" was widely used by the National Movement to describe Christian parties: the Phalangists and the National Liberal Party (al-Ahrar).

The Lebanese left, especially after the PLO withdrawal from Lebanon in 1982, had tried with all possible means to limit its role to resisting the Israeli occupation in Beirut and in south Lebanon and kept some military skirmishes here and there with other militias. In this area, the Lebanese left carried out a big number of military attacks against the Israeli occupation forces and the South Lebanon Army (SLA)<sup>8</sup> during the years 1982-1985. However, internal in-fighting between the different militias was growing. This caused the Communist Action Organization in Lebanon,<sup>9</sup> a militia participating in the war in the mid eighties, to call for an end of the war for the first time since its eruption and called it a "futile war." It also called for holding a national conference to stop the war and solve the dispute through diplomacy and dialogue. It started organizing demonstrations with the trade unions and the Lebanese Communist Party to help erase the sectarian lines which were exacerbated by the war. Unfortunately, when the Syrian army entered Beirut in 1987 after fierce fighting between militias, the organization stopped its activities, started to demobilize its members, and then paid compensation until it gradually stopped its activities and ceased to exist. By doing so, the Communist Action Organization was the first party to announce that it had abandoned the war and was the first one to apologize to the Lebanese people for participating in it.

## Regional Transformation and the Changing Roles of Lebanese Actors

In the early 1980's, the Lebanese left, specifically the Lebanese Communist Party and the Communist Action Organization, became resistance parties against the Israeli occupation. However, this change conflicted with local and regional transformations and the emergence of Hezbollah on the internal military front. Hezbollah was implicitly tasked to exclusively resist the Israeli occupation but the communist party was not able to well-understand this strategic transformation led by Syria and Iran. It continued to be obsessed by the idea of resistance without developing its methods and rhetoric with regard

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8 The South Lebanon Army (SLA) or the Lahd Army was a militia formed with the support of Israel from southern villages and units which split from the Lebanese army. This militia was established in 1976 by members of the Lebanese army in the city Marjayoun. The majority of its Lebanese members were Shiite Muslims and Christians who had had problems with the Palestinian resistance factions, who seized control over southern Lebanon at the time. After the Israeli invasion in 1978, known as the Operation Litani, the area controlled by this militia – formed of Israel's agents - expanded because of Israel's field control over these areas. This militia fought against Israel's enemies, i.e., the PLO, the Lebanese resistance, the Lebanese communist party, the Murabitoun Movement, and Hezbollah, the new enemy.

9 The Communist Action Organization in Lebanon is a Marxist political party formed in 1970 through the merger of the Organization of Lebanese Socialists and Socialist Lebanon, whose members are affiliated with the nationalist- leftist stream, and the Arab Nationalist Movement. The organization played an important role in the Lebanese National Movement because its secretary-general, Muhsen Ibrahim, was the secretary-general of the movement. Its militias, together with the Movement's militias, fought many battles against the Lebanese Front at the beginning of the Lebanese Civil War. It maintained close relations with the Palestinian organizations with similar ideologies. It was among those who wrote the communique on the formation of the "Lebanese National Resistance Front" after the Israeli invasion of Lebanon and it has participated in its operations. Today, it has no presence in the Lebanese politics.



to the Lebanese situation and this has made the party, after the cessation of hostilities against Israel, susceptible to splits and disintegration.

At the beginning of the 1980's, while the Civil War was at its peak, the Middle East was changing and new ideologies were emerging. Iran, which did not have an active role at the beginning of the Lebanese war, became a key player when it emerged as an Islamic Republic after the 1979 revolution.<sup>10</sup> Shiite Iran started in the late 1970's, after the success of the Islamic revolution, to establish a Lebanese Shiite force loyal to Iran and was able to penetrate the Shiite "Harakat al-Mahrumin" (the Movement of the Deprived) and the Amal Movement, founded by Imam Musa al-Sadr in the mid-seventies to stop the leftist tide within the Shiite community. This community, during the reign of President Fuad Chehab, was slowly integrated and employed in the Lebanese state institutions. For the first time, Chehabism was able to integrate wide sectors of Shiite citizens, who had been marginalized in the Lebanese political equation since the country's independence because of their diminutive middle class and weak bourgeoisie and political representatives. This move led to the expansion of the Shiite middle class and its members became a party in the Lebanese political equation through leftist parties and other secular forces during the 1970's.

Shortly after the success of the Islamic revolution, Iran was able to penetrate the Lebanese political landscape through the formation of Hezbollah as an Islamic resistance movement. The formation of the party coincided with the Israeli withdrawal from Beirut in 1982 and under conditions of armed resistance to the Israeli occupation which invaded Lebanon in the summer of 1982. As for Syria, which was a party in the Lebanese internal conflict, it became an important focal point for its future policies and its regional role in the region. As a result, it agreed to support Hezbollah, supply it with weapons, and re-draw the map of power in Lebanon in harmony with Syria's vision of the international and regional transformations. As a result, Syria contained or marginalized, through a series of procedures, most of the Lebanese national forces (leftist and nationalist) which at that point had an active role in resisting the occupation since the early 1970's. The marginalization of these forces was further strengthened by cutting down material and military supplies and by preventing them from exercising any military resistance to the occupation without the pre-approval of Syria. Moreover, many of the left's party symbols such as Hussein Mroweh, Mahdi Amel, and others were assassinated. The isolation of these forces was further enhanced by the al-Taif agreement in

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10 The revolution was unusual for the surprise it created throughout the world, the profound and rapid changes it produced, and the leading role of religion in the revolution. It was thought that the regime was well-protected by the army and the security apparatuses, on which it had spent huge amounts of money. It lacked many of the customary causes of revolution such as defeat at war, a financial crisis, peasant rebellion, or disgruntled military. Among the reasons for the revolution were the Shah's relations with the West and with Israel, rampant corruption, and the increase in inequality in the country. The outcome was an Islamic Republic under the guidance of an 80-year-old exiled religious scholar, supported by interrupted but popular demonstrations according to reports on this topic.

1990 which stated that all militias, with the exception of Hezbollah, should give up their weapons.

## The Lebanese Left at the End of the Civil War

When the war ended in the early 1990's, the political and moral popularity of left-wing parties, especially the Communist Party and the Communist Action Organization, were at their nadir. The slogans they raised had fallen and the programs they adopted before the outbreak of the war were completely ignored by most of the population. The Communist Action Organization and the Lebanese Communist Party had become absent from the political scene because they had not gained a parliamentary seat in 1992 according to the al-Taif Agreement despite their participation in the national dialogue conference. The status of the Lebanese left, as represented by the Lebanese Communist Party in the post-civil war era had become, to a large extent, a party representing the Druze community in the state. Secondly, they became a part of the Ba'ath Party which became more of an intelligence party allied with the Syrian regime. Their roles can be summarized as follows:

**First:** After the Taif Agreement, which was sponsored by major powers and which Syria was supposed to implement on the political and security levels, the Lebanese left parties, had not been given any real role in the post-war political arena. In fact, they had been prohibited from exercising their role in resisting the Israeli occupation, a role which was initiated by the left forces in 1982. Their role has been strictly controlled and their weapons were confiscated together with the rest of the Lebanese militias' weapons. The resistance role was exclusively given to Hezbollah.

**Second:** The collapse of the Soviet Union and the Eastern bloc played a major role in the decline of the Lebanese left-wing parties' influence and the disappearance of many of them for good. The Lebanese Communist Party, since its inception and in the different phases of its development, had adopted the Soviet intellectual and organizational orientation and had established Marxism as its desired structure of governance. Moreover, the left-wing parties, by adopting Marxist-Leninist party organizational formula, deprived itself of political pluralism and democracy. Thus, the Lebanese left parties were deprived of the opportunity of creating a party more capable of dealing with the Lebanese situation specifically. As a result, the collapse of the Soviet Union has had a disastrous impact on the Lebanese left-wing parties because it was the sole model for their brand of Marxism and they lost much credibility by not having said model to point to.

**Third:** The involvement of the Lebanese left and its organizations in the Civil War has played a significant role in placing it under the mercy of regional actors who

were providing financial and logistical aid to them. This has contributed to the militarization and the bureaucratization of the leftist organizations. Indeed, the involvement of the Lebanese leftist parties in the Lebanese National Movement, while each has kept its special relations with socialist countries and some Arab countries, has liberated these parties from the responsibility of providing resources for their organizations' activities by relying primarily on party members as well as parties' private investments. This has given party leaders a wide degree of independence from the party's base, and it made these parties deal with their popular base on the basis of a semi-rentile mentality (the leadership provides for its popular base and its cadres). This involvement also made parties employ full-time staff until it became difficult to find any party member who was not a full-time employee. This shift has created a "bureaucratic class" which has its own interests and visions for the future. There is no doubt that the involvement of the left parties in the Lebanese Civil War has contributed to the militarization of their organizations and to the inflated size of their military, security, administrative, organizational, and media apparatuses. Moreover, it has contributed to the consolidation of military and bureaucratic structures under which democratic practices cannot grow.

**Fourth:** With the end of the civil war, internal conflicts started to emerge within the remaining left-wing parties, namely the Lebanese Communist Party, on the party's future orientation. Some had wanted to transform the Communist Party into a resistance party against the Israeli occupation in southern Lebanon, and others wanted it to become an opposition party to the Syrian regime which was dominating Lebanese political life and to demand the implementation of the al-Taif Accords.

**Fifth:** The Lebanese authorities, after the al-Taif Agreement, refused to allow the Lebanese left to participate in power. Therefore, the left was not within the formation of the Lebanese parties who participated in the government similar to the other national movement's organizations such as the Progressive Socialist Party, the Syrian Social Nationalist Party, and the Arab Ba'ath Socialist Party, which are all secular parties. Instead, they became part of the power structure along with Hezbollah and the Amal movement and took their share in public institutions and in the parliamentary, ministerial, and official departments.

**Sixth:** The Lebanese left was negatively affected by the repercussions of the Civil War with regards to the division of the official Lebanese University, which had played a significant role in the education of large segments of the Lebanese society's poor who could afford private universities' fees. The dominance of the de facto forces on the university's campuses led to vast restrictions being put in place on leftist student activities, who before enjoyed an open and robust community to express their views.<sup>11</sup>

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11 Sana al-Jak, "Harb Ahliya Saghira wa Kabira dakil al-Hizb al-Shoyouei al-Lubnani" (Small and big civil war within the Lebanese Communist Party), *Al-Sharq al-Awsat* Newspaper, 8 February 2003, issue no. 8838.

**Seventh:** One of the most important factors which has weakened the Lebanese left during the Civil War is the consolidation of sectarian attitudes in Lebanese society. This has created feelings of antipathy among Christians towards the left parties, which sided with the national forces (i.e. Muslim forces at that time) and supported the Palestinians against the Christians. Unofficial boundaries that divide Lebanon along sectarian lines have made it difficult for the leftist cadres to operate freely, mobilize people, and to clarify their positions on key issues to their opponents. Thus, the presence and activities of leftist parties during and after the war, have remained restricted to Muslim majority areas.

As a result, most leftist parties left the Civil War in an extremely vulnerable state and unable to recruit new members due to the entrenched sectarian divides in Lebanon. All leftist parties, and especially the LCP, have seen depleted membership and trust bestowed upon them. Unfortunately, time has not done much to alleviate this situation for leftist parties as a whole.

## The Mid-Nineties and Signs of the Emergence of a New Left

The post-war political system was formed by two main factions. First, a Syrian faction which took over the administration of Lebanon militarily and politically, and a Saudi faction, represented by the Saudi Lebanese businessman Rafik Hariri, who served as prime minister and handled the economic and reconstruction issues. The two factions administered the country through negotiations and understandings reached between them. The Syrian regime had fully handled the security and political process throughout the post-war period and created a police state which no one dared to challenge. It has supported the strengthening of the security forces and helped them in imposing their control on public and political life. It has also protected al-Hariri's economic policies from accountability or opposition. The forces in power, which were allied and protected by the Syrian regime, worked hard to fragment the trade unions and control them through imposing parties and forces loyal to them.<sup>12</sup> They had established phantom unions, arrested some trade unionists and opposition figures, and stopped them from exercising their

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12 The General Confederation of Lebanese Workers (CGL) was established on 25 April 1970. Its creation was considered one of the most important achievements of the labor movement in the 1970's and 1980's. During this period, the trade union movement fought a hard struggle which covered all productive sectors. However, when the Civil War started in 1975 and continued until 1990, it had a negative impact on the trade union movement. Sectarian divides and civil strife have deeply affected the trade union movement and reduced its role and effectiveness in a clear and tangible way. The situation remained unchanged even after the end of the war because the ruling system, after al-Taif, was aiming at achieving a major objective and that is the halting of the trade union movement, subjugating it, putting it under the control of sectarian leaders, making it completely unable to operate and ending its effectiveness. The state exercised an organized policy in this field by creating new unions on sectarian basis and which have no labor members to interfere in the CGL's elections and to impose their candidates. It has restricted the struggle of the labor movement and suppressed its movement freedom. The trade unions battle for freedom and preservation of their independence became a central issue during this phase.

trade union activity<sup>13</sup> after they formed active forces to oppose Prime Minister Rafik al-Hariri's policies.

Opposition to the ruling system in the mid 1990's was growing and signs of an emergence of a new leftist stream were becoming clear. The General Confederation of Lebanese Workers (CGTL) during this period was still struggling against the dominance of parties backed by the Syrian security apparatus and was trying to mobilize people against al-Hariri's policies. MP Najah Wakim, head of the People's Movement,<sup>14</sup> began to attract young people because he was strongly against al-Hariri's policies and has accused him of implementing a US oriented project in Lebanon. At private universities, some independent leftist groups started to emerge such as the "No Frontiers Group" at the American University of Beirut (AUB), the "Pablo Neruda Group" at the Lebanese American University (LAU), the "Tanyous Shaheen Group" at Saint Joseph University, and other groups in other universities. The Communist Party was moving along the sidelines of the CGTL's movements and was preparing its members for the 1996 elections. Some intellectuals and academics started to take another path, the civil society path, and they established the "Lebanese Association for Democratic Elections" to monitor the election and ensure its integrity. Nineteen ninety-six was a landmark year whereby numerous leftist groups and parties started to show their potential. In that year, Lebanon witnessed another Israeli aggression. Tens of thousands of people living in the villages of south Lebanon fled their homes to safe areas to escape the violent Israeli shelling of the border villages and the southern suburbs of Beirut. People volunteered with relief agencies to help affected southerners as did the young leftists who joined the "People's Relief Foundation," a leading association in the health field founded by leftist and communist doctors at different stages of the civil war to fill the vacuum in health services in the south. This younger group formed the nucleus of leftist and student youth groups formed at a later stage.

The 1996 elections produced a political map which fully supports the guardianship system of the Syrian regime because most of the opposition Christian forces were reluctant to participate in the parliamentary elections. None of the candidates of the forces opposing the ruling system won in these elections. After the elections, there were some voices calling for the implementation of the al-Taif agreement and putting an end to the Syrian regime's hegemony over Lebanon. This opposition was positively received by some of the leftist students and youth groups from among those who saw that it is important to distance the military from politics. During this newly created

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13 In 1997, the army and the security forces did not allow unionists to enter the CGTL premises on the day set for electing a new CGTL leadership.

14 The People's Movement is a Lebanese political party founded by former MP Najah Wakim in 2000 together with a number of leftist and pan-Arab figures.

atmosphere, the other part of the country was witnessing the crystallization of the Christian Aounist youth, which opposed Syrian presence in Christian areas. This leftist student and youth environment was able to combine economic, social, and security issues and its supporters considered these issues to be completely interrelated. This is contrary to the approach of the Communist Party and Najah Wakim, who opposed al-Harir's policies without approaching the dialectic relationship between al-Hariri's economic project and the Syrian guardianship system.

At this same phase, conflicts between the members of the Lebanese Communist Party flared up. The conservative stream, which was against the renewal and development of the party's structure, controlled the partisan committees and was against any change in the Party's internal and external policies. However, the "reformist" stream was demanding proportional representation which would allow representation of different streams and accept them in the party's structure. The group also demanded an end to the party's leadership interference in the active partisan sectors' affairs (students, professional and trade unions) and the abolition of "democratic centralism," which gave the Party's political bureau the right to interfere in the sectors' policies. For example, the political bureau was interfering in universities' elections and was attempting to control the various parties through political pressure. In addition, the party leadership refused to engage in a battle with forces allied with the Syrian guardianship system which sought to control the trade unions and the CGTL. Some of the unionists refused to yield to the party's decisions and they were fired (this has happened to a number of trade unionists who had tried to put an end to the dominance of these forces over the CGTL but their fate was dismissal).<sup>15</sup>

The Communist Party's Reform and Democratic Forces,<sup>16</sup> and independent leftist groups, were among the first groups to advocate the departure of Syrian troops from Lebanon and to call for an end to the security and intelligence control over the public political life. With time, reform and democracy forces, together with some youth and student groups, started to call for the creation of a new left-wing party which would give the issues of sovereignty, the state, democracy and the rule of law priority. This call was met with great acceptance and enthusiasm by the vast left-wing sectors. Some of these actors were members of the Communist Party, some had quit their political activism some time ago and some were leftist intellectuals who were tempted to join a new partisan experience. The call voiced by these groups was not a new one. It came as a result of lots of hard work in the opposition and conflicts within the

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15 Adib Abu Habib, a trade unionist and the former president of the General Confederation of Trade Unions (CGTL) in Lebanon, an exclusive interview with him in 2012 - see the full text of the interview in the "Yasar Lubnan" (The Lebanese Left) book by Hssein Yacoub, Rosa Luxemburg (Ramallah), 2013.

16 The communist party's reform and democracy forces is an opposition group that has worked from within the party's structure and it was the nucleus of the Democratic Left Movement.

Communist Party. The seeds of the “Democratic Left Movement” date back to the sixth National Congress of the Communist Party, which was held in 1992. Discussions were initiated on a number of issues such as the democratic path within the party, the need for critical review of the party’s experience, its regional relations, its internal stances, and its political programs.

This stream became more crystallized when it called for integration within the party’s ranks and later on when it called for introducing proportional representation in the party’s elections. It is for this reason that a working document was presented to the seventh Extraordinary National Congress bearing the signatures of nine party members. This document, in its content, was not different from other documents drafted by the leadership of the party and submitted to the Seventh Congress except in the “tactical differences in views with regard to the Lebanese-Syrian relations,” and the “proportional representation in the party’s leadership bodies.” It is for this reason that this document was closer to “a statement expressing disagreement with the party’s political and organizational approach” than anything else.<sup>17</sup>

The stream’s features have further crystallized in the political document presented to the Eighth Congress in the name of the “Democratic Left Movement” in October 1997. This stream clarified its opinion with regards to the party’s experience after the sixth congress and called for the deepening of democratic reform because it is the only entry point to solve the party’s impasse. It also called for making the eighth congress a founding congress. In February 2003, the “Democratic Left” stream presented a draft action plan on behalf of the “democratic reform forces of the Lebanese Communist Party” in order to address various issues. It announced its presence as a political framework outside the structure of the party in a document signed by the “Democratic Left Movement in Lebanon” in 2004. On the basis of this declaration, it held its founding congress on 17 October 2004 in the Estral Theatre in al-Hamra Street in Beirut.<sup>18</sup>

## The Left and the Collapse of the Regional and International Consensus

On February 14, 2005, former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik al-Hariri, who represented international and regional consensus, was assassinated. However, the regional and international consensus that ruled Lebanon for fifteen years (1990 to 2005) disintegrated and turned into clashes after al-Hariri’s assassination.

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17 See Shaukat Ashti, “Al-Hizb al-Shyouei al-Lubnani, al-Mawrooth Thaqeel wa al-Waqea Aleem wa Masar al-Dimocratiyah Aseer” (The Lebanese Communist Party, a heavy legacy, a painful reality and a difficult path to democracy,” on different websites: <https://groups.google.com/forum/#!msg/fayad61/1CIG0WWSPe0/autCrDH76f4J%5B1-25%5D>

18 Ibid.

His assassination was a declaration that the national reconciliation phase had ended and Lebanon had entered a new civil and sectarian conflict phase. Rafik al-Hariri, as described by Amro Abdel-Rahman, an Egyptian writer, "did not only represent the international consensus on Lebanon's ruling system, but also the international political and economic developments which have dominated the world since the early 1990's. Al-Hariri came to power with the end of the Lebanese Civil War, the collapse of the Eastern bloc, and the start of a new wave of capitalization. This approach was characterized by states' interventionist tendencies in the production and distribution processes and in the whole social engineering."<sup>19</sup>

Lebanon provided the ground for this transformation. On the one hand, it had emerged from the Civil War with the help of Gulf capital, and it was this capital that has allowed the re-production of a Lebanese bourgeoisie class which is a strong supporter of this new wave. From the geopolitical perspective, Lebanon basically became the only country confronting Israel because almost all other Arab actors in the Middle East had adopted a peace option with Israel. This is not to mention the specificity of the Palestinian presence in Lebanon. Ideologically, Lebanon had become the place for one of the Islamic ideology conflicts with the West through confrontation between Israel and Hezbollah, which is supported by Iran.

In this sense, the new Lebanon which was coming out of a civil war, was partly built in a neo-liberal way. The Lebanese state was required to revert back to sectarian, regional, and tribal groupings. Due to this, it was difficult to properly regulate and advance the economy for the benefit of the working class. During the two decades of the Civil War, there was no state in the traditional sense of the word. Political parties and sects were in control of the country's economy and this has continued during the postwar phase. There were no investments made in necessary sectors of the economy and this has continued to plague Lebanese society. As a result, corruption and cronyism have become normal in Lebanon. Everybody is responsible for this result, including the Shiite parties and Hezbollah, the party which has monopolized the representation of the Shiite community since the beginning of the 1990's. Civil groups established their businesses, which depended on the cross-border capital, and did not enter into confrontation with the militias. They dealt with them as a reality which further advanced corruption, and one of the pillars of these processes is the understanding between former Prime Minister Rafik al-Hariri and Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah. This reflects the state of regional understanding as a whole.<sup>20</sup>

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19 Amr Abdel-Rahman, "Al-Azma al-Lubnaniyah wa Khatibat al-Yasar al-Masri: Aselat al-Imperialiyah wa al-Muqawama wa al-Taharur al-Watani" (The Lebanese crisis and Egyptian left discourse: Questions of imperialism, resistance and national liberation), al-Busala magazine, 18 October 2009.

20 Ibid.



Internally, the assassination of al-Hariri has had a negative impact on Lebanon. After the assassination of Hariri, the country became divided into two parties. The first party accused the Syrian regime of being involved in al-Hariri's assassination. Among the strongest advocates of this accusation were the traditional Christian forces rejected by the state since the end of the Civil War, such as the Phalangists, the Lebanese Forces, and the Aounist groups who found in the assassination an opportunity to return to the political arena. These were joined by the Sunni masses which Prime Minister al-Hariri belonged to, as well as the Progressive Socialist Party led by Walid Jumblatt, a prominent Druze leader. The second party is composed of forces close to the Syrian regime such as the Ba'athists, the Pan-Arabists, the Syrian Nationalists, the Shiite Amal movement, and Hezbollah, led by its Secretary General Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah. Hezbollah during this time had much support from various sectors of the Lebanese populated due to its strong fighting against Israeli occupation which ended in 2000, mostly due to Hezbollah resistance operations. In addition, Hezbollah is primarily backed by Iran and Syria.

The conflicts and divisions within the Lebanese left continued even after the assassination of al-Hariri. The Lebanese Communist Party and the People's Movement did not change their rhetoric. They kept repeating that the priority should be given to resisting the "neo-liberalism" of Rafik al-Hariri and supporting the resistance and protecting its weapons. For them, the assassination was a conspiracy against the resistance and an opportunity to accuse the resistance movement of the assassination. The other left, such as the Democratic Left and some intellectuals, were convinced that al-Hariri's neo-liberalism cannot be resisted without the restoration of Lebanese sovereignty which was stolen by the Syrian regime, the withdrawal of its military forces, the implementation of the al-Taif Accords, and the removal of security forces from internal politics. This other left was convinced that the assassination of al-Hariri occurred because he opposed the Lebanese and Syrian security services' control over the state, and it accused the Syrian regime of masterminding the assassination.

Thus, conflicts between the leftists, who suffered from a vertical split, culminated in the creation of the Democratic Left Movement. The Lebanese left held many different opinions regarding many heated internal and external issues. They did not agree on political orientations and they charged each other with treason, betrayal, and perversion against class struggle. These differences have made each party a very heated affair. The Communist Party and the People's Movement, with its pan-Arab orientation, tended to support Hezbollah because they were convinced that it is important to protect the resistance and its weapons against Israel and the West. On the other hand, the democratic left, independent leftist groups, and communist opposition<sup>21</sup> within the

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21 Even after the creation of the Democratic Left, some opponents of the Communist Party's leadership continued to exist within the party such as the "Salvation Movement" and some student and youth groups.

Lebanese Communist Party and some leftist intellectuals demanded an end to the “military rule,” and the redeployment of the Syrian army in accordance with the al-Taif Agreement. This left began to coordinate with March 14 forces, especially with young people and students. Student and youth movements, for the first time since the pre Civil War era, started to take place in coordination with independent leftist groups, Aounist (those affiliated with Michel Aoun who joined March 8 after 2005) students, and the Lebanese Forces.

## Conclusion

When the beginning of the Arab Spring in Tunisia and Egypt, the Lebanese left as well as other Arab leftist parties, who were subjected to arrest, exile, and who were not allowed to participate in any political activities during the reigns of the ousted regimes in Egypt and Tunisia, all welcomed the uprisings. Once the protests reached Syria and became vulnerable to regional and international interventions, the Lebanese left became divided again. One can also say that the Arab leftist parties have also become divided. Once the US and its allies in the region announced their support for protests demanding the overthrow of the Syrian regime, the traditional leftist forces, such as the Lebanese Communist Party and some pan-Arab leftists, said that popular protests in Syria are fabricated and they are an indication that there is a conspiracy against “resistance.” The remaining democratic left and some journalists and intellectuals felt that “if the revolution in Syria is plotted, we agree with this plot.” By taking the regime’s stance, the Lebanese leftists repositioned themselves according to the 2005 lines and the subsequent divide on interpreting the situation and taking stances.

With their interpretation of the current Syrian crisis, the two leftist groups were not able to distance themselves from the impacts of the al-Hariri assassination crisis and its repercussions on the Lebanese political scene. The left, as represented by the Communist Party, the Peoples’ Movement, and some radical leftist groups did not move away from their traditional view that Rafiq al-Hariri was part of the American project and his assassination is nothing but a conspiracy to end the resistance and disarm it in order to serve Israel and undermine the Syrian regime’s resistance to the West. The other left, the “Democratic Left,” sided with the rebel forces in Syria and the Lebanese intelligence services. The Democratic Left Movement joined a broad alliance to demand the disarmament of Hezbollah and to find al-Hariri’s assassins and hold them accountable. For the first time in the history of the Lebanese left, the Democratic Left was able to win a single parliamentary seat by listing the name of its candidate and the secretary-general of the movement, Elias Atallah, on the March 14 forces’ list in the city of Tripoli. This parliament seat

would not have been won had it not been for the efforts made by Samir Kassir,<sup>22</sup> a writer and historian, who called the March 14 Forces to list the name of the movement's candidate on its lists. The Movement has been able to present to March 14 its candidate as a military commander who resisted the Israeli occupation in the 1980's. In other words, March 14 accepted the Democratic Left Movement's candidate to reward it for its role in the independence uprising of 2005 and because of the history of some of the movement's members in resisting the Israeli occupation. It did so to challenge Hezbollah and the March 8 forces accusations that the March 14 forces are agents of the United States and Israel.

Thus, the Lebanese leftists sided with the March 14 and March 8 groups although conflict between these two March movements had taken a sectarian dimension from the first moment of the assassination of Hariri and during the subsequent increase in sectarian incitement. As a result, two leftist groups emerged, the resistance left which supports March 8<sup>23</sup> and the modest left which supports March 14 forces.<sup>24</sup> The two left groups were not able to come up with a real political project which moved beyond sectarian lines.

The Communist Party continued with its romantic discourse, and continued to use its slogans of "resistance," "anti-imperialism," and other terms but without translating their discourse into concrete political practices. This is the case of the Communist Party. The remaining members have become nostalgic for resistance and the Civil War era. This means that the Communist Party today is facing a multifaceted crisis. It has lost its aim, it has disintegrated, and its leaders continue to say that it is an independent non-sectarian and democratic party which seeks to bring about change. This seems to be an attempt by the leaders to assert that the Communist Party is still an active and relevant force in Lebanese political life today. Critics of the Lebanese Communist Party say that it suffers from the burden of having to make decisions and taking a leadership role. It seems as if the goal of the party is to let time pass in order to preserve its current fragile status on the national forces and parties' map. It

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22 Samir Kassir (1960–2005), a Lebanese journalist and professor, was born to a Palestinian father and a Syrian mother. He was a history professor at Saint-Joseph University, and he also taught at the Sorbonne University in Paris. He is one of the preachers of democracy and an opponent of Syrian intervention in Lebanon. He carries French nationality. In 2004, he participated in the establishment of the Democratic Left Movement. On 2 June 2005, he was assassinated by a car bomb and the perpetrators are still unknown.

23 The term "Axis of Resistance" was used to describe countries that oppose the US policy in the Arab world and support Arab national liberation movements. This axis includes Syria, Iran, and some resistance movements such as Hezbollah in Lebanon and Hamas in Palestine (Hamas has now joined the axis closer to Egypt, Qatar and Turkey). There are many parties that oppose this axis and different opponents have different reasons for their opposition. Most of the opponents of this axis believe that this axis, extending from Tehran to Beirut, wears the mask of resistance to conceal other aims. They believe that Hezbollah and Syria, supported by Iran, are entities acting to achieve the interests of the Iranian leadership. Some of the opponenets believe that there are sectarian and ideological reasons behind the existence of this axis. They believe that this axis was created to confront the Sunni Muslims, spread Shiism, and restore the glories of the Safavid dynasty. There are also those who oppose this axis because they line up behind the moderation axis supported by the US and Western countries.

24 The term "Axis of Moderation" was given by the United States to Arab states which oppose Iranian policies. These include Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Jordan, and the Gulf states. These countries have excellent relations with the West and the US in particular. They call for a peaceful solution to the Palestinian cause and for an end of the Iranian intervention in the Arab region.

was not able to develop its leftist ideology to accommodate the global change in a manner consistent with the Lebanese situation, much like other leftist forces in the world.<sup>25</sup>

This is how the Lebanese Communist Party developed. The Democratic Left Movement, on the other hand, did not succeed in maintaining its organizational structure for more than two years (2004 to 2006), although it still exists by name. The Democratic Left movement, even before its inception in 2004, when it was an opposition movement within the Communist Party together with some youth groups, had two demands. First, the liberation of the south from Israeli occupation which was later achieved by Hezbollah in 2000. Since then, the Democratic Left has been unable to provide any distinct solutions for the Lebanese crises other than its support of participation in the meetings of the "General Secretariat of the March 14 forces." This participation means nothing to the Lebanese people. In addition, after the July 2006 war, the movement split between those who accuse Hezbollah of fabricating the war and those who supported resistance and opposed the movement's blind submission to the March 14 forces. Ever since then, the Movement has become completely absent in political life. The presence of the movement's MP in the parliament could not give it any momentum, and in fact, it might have done harm to the movement. The final blow to the Democratic Left Movement came when it approved the nomination of another member, Amin Wehbeh, to the parliament on the condition that he nominate himself on the lists of the Future Bloc, led by Saad al-Hariri. By doing so, the movement disappeared and did not exist any more except in name. This movement, which many of the Lebanese left saw as a model of a new left capable of coping with global, regional, and local changes, has not been able to accomplish anything tangible. On the contrary, it has contributed to the disintegration of some youth and student groups who have worked hard since the mid 1990's against the neo-liberal reforms and the rentier economy, as represented by al-Harirism.

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25 Sana al-Jak, "Harb Ahliya Saghira wa Kabira dakhil al-Hizb al-Shoyouei al-Lubnani" (Small and big civil war within the Lebanese Communist Party), *Al-Sharq al-Awsat* Newspaper, 8 February 2003, issue no. 8838.

There are some emerging civic groups and trade unions such as the “My Nationality is a Right for me and My Family Campaign,”<sup>26</sup> and “the Civil Campaign for Electoral Reform”<sup>27</sup> with a semi-leftist agenda, but these groups work in separate sectors and do not complement each others’ work. From time to time they try to highlight some of the legal issues, such as women’s rights, an issue of concern to many civil society institutions and associations, and the right to work and to form associations, an issue highlighted by the Trade Union Coordination Committee (TUCC).<sup>28</sup> Today, TUCC is fighting fierce trade union and labour battles against the government, and there is solidarity among its members. It has tended to keep a distance from political parties. There are also some leftist youth and student groups, which are still working in universities and in their areas but without coordination among them. Under the prevailing conditions, these groups have not, until now, been able to provide a framework for their activities within an integrated opposition that coordinates between all of its components to come out with a clear working paper which specifies the mechanisms of action for the next phase.

Dalal al-Bizri, a Lebanese sociologist, wrote about the makeup of the Lebanese leftists under the title: “Leftists and Former Leftists.”<sup>29</sup> The article came as a response to a call launched recently by Walid Jumblatt, one of the Lebanese sects feudal leaders and the head of a left-wing party. On the occasion of the Arab revolutions in general and the Syrian revolution in particular, Jumblatt called for the revival of the Lebanese left. In her response al-Bizri raised the

26 “My Nationality is a Right for me and My Family” Campaign grew out of a previously implemented program linking gender and information. It is a regional initiative launched in 1999, aimed at capacity building in the field of gender analysis through training transformational (envisages events change), research, communication, and advocacy. The main objective of the campaign is to contribute to the achievement of full citizenship for Arab women through the reform of citizenship laws and the full implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).

27 Civil Campaign for Electoral Reform is an alliance of civil society associations concerned by the electoral reform. They were founded in 2006 ahead of the draft electoral law proposed by the National Electoral Commission headed by former Minister Fouad Boutros. Today, it includes more than 85 associations spread all over Lebanon. It has been working on reforming the electoral systems, namely the parliamentary and municipal elections. Since 2006, the Civil Campaign for Electoral Reform has been able to introduce the electoral reform concept into political life. It was capable of influencing the general debate on reforming the last municipal and parliamentary election laws. The Campaign lobbied for the adoption of a large number of reforms within the parliamentary election law 2008/25. In addition, it was seeking to amend the municipal and lkhtiyary election law. It prepared a comprehensive draft law and submitted it to every minister and MP, urging the Parliament to adopt it. The campaign, since its inception, organized a large number of meetings with the various age groups in all Lebanese areas, especially with students and young people where it worked to spread awareness of the election in their classrooms to help put pressure on political parties and forces in the approval and adoption of reforms.

28 The Lebanese Trade Union Coordination Committee (TUCC) is composed of six trade unions, namely: the private school teachers trade union, the public secondary school teachers trade union, the public elementary school teachers trade union, the vocational education teachers trade union, the Lebanese University professors trade union, and the public sector employees trade union (which includes all state departments). Today, the TUCC constitutes the most prominent trade union movement, and it has almost become the single movement after a major split with the CGTL. TUCC continued for a long time to work within the framework of the CGTL but decided to walkout because of the CGTL did not abide by the wage ceiling agreed upon when negotiating a raise in the minimum wage in the private sector with the government this year. This divorce between the TUCC and CGTL took place after several battles which they have fought side by side against the the various governments, regardless of their affiliations. Politics has always been able to manipulate trade union movements, but today it stands powerless while confronting a coherent committee that works on demand away from the political pressure to demand the approval of the wage scale.

29 Al-Mustaqbal newspaper, Sunday, 29 January 2012, Issue No. 4241.

following question, "Who is the leftist today? What does it mean to be a leftist today?" She added by saying that "leftists are a human 'repertoire,' nothing holds its members together other than personal hatred. They are a group that lacks any party solidarity spirit or any kind of fraternity or similarity. As for their ideology, it lacks harmony and everyone has his interpretations of it... It is a failed doctrine, especially when it comes to its actual implementation be it in the form of Putinism (relative to Putin, the Russian leader), savage capitalism led by the one-party, or the lack of answers by the Europeans on the challenges of financial capitalism. The spoils, dominating the minds of the people, is close to zero, especially with the start of an Islamic era supported by the masses' enthusiasm. Thus, no party spirit, no doctrine, and no spoils. So what do we have? Some nostalgia for the good old days of youth... But also a legacy, an accumulated cultural modernity legacy which under its banner many personal and collective experiences have been fought and these need to be reviewed now by those who are preoccupied with what is happening now. It is a revolution. And the revolution should be also against what was in the past a revolution and today became flabbiness and aging but not an early one."

With all these aforementioned issues, one easily concludes that the Lebanese left is facing a multifaced crisis. There is no clear agenda for nation-building practices or how to integrate various sectors into a left movement. This is further exasperated by regional and international circumstances which make the Lebanese state very fragile. Lastly, sectarian divides have only become worse since the end of the Civil War and these plague Lebanese life across all spectrums.

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# An Analysis of the Realities of the Syrian Left

\* Akram al-Bunni

## Preface

Syria is one of the countries that has followed the Soviet model of a centralized ruling system in regards to state-building and in leading the society. This was reflected in the dominant role played by ideology, the guardianship of a leading party, which fully monopolizes the political life and tries to derive its legitimacy from national and pan-Arab rhetoric. This also includes utilizing severe repression instead of formulating healthy relations with the society based on gaining peoples' trust by guaranteeing their political and economic rights, as well as advancing development. The state is also keen on concentrating the wealth, national resources, and capital of the people into the hands of a totalitarian authority dependent on a large bureaucratic civil and military establishment. The civil and military bureaucracy have monopolized most of the economic activity, control health and educational services, dominate the sphere of force, and control the population through a sophisticated police state. The main methods for their control of the state include violence, ideology, and state-controlled media to ensure hegemony over the society, the economy, and all political life.

Privatization, market liberalization, and the decline in the social role of the state have led to a deep political, economic, and social crisis reflected in blatant discrimination between citizens, diminishing values of efficiency, integrity, fairness and equality and in the encouragement of family ties and values of cronyism. It has also led to tangible deterioration in the country's living standards and a striking decrease in the size of the middle class and its diminished presence because of the increase in the society's disparities between rich and poor. Some studies have estimated that 66% of Syrians live below the poverty line and that there is a high rate of unemployment, reaching about 25% of the labor force, as well as a high population growth rate, considered one of the highest worldwide, reaching up to 3.5% per year.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Arab Human Development Report, UNDP, New York, 2012.



The policies of the ruling regime, its disregard of multiculturalism and minority rights, particularly the Kurdish ethnicity, have weakened national feelings and led to the erosion of national unity and social ties between the various components of Syrian society. Instead, sectarian tensions have increased among the Syrian people, and this has encouraged them to embrace pre-national, sectarian, tribal, familial, and regional affiliations. The so called family funds, which support needy persons who belong to one family or the other, especially health needs, have re-emerged in Syria. Moreover, the role of religious centers, such as mosques and churches, has increased and these places have become a haven for needy members of different sects. Furthermore, the role of the tribal councils, which provide care for members of the same tribe, have become more prominent. The situation has further deteriorated since the government monopolized the public space and closed off the possibilities of dialogue between those who hold different ideas and programs after realizing the danger of opening up during the short period of openness which coincided with Bashar al-Assad's ascent to power, a phase which was believed to be the "Damascus Spring." All this has led to the weakening of the country's political institutions and trade unions.

## Two Years after the Outbreak of the Popular Uprising

After more than two years of the popular uprising, the current Syrian political landscape looks divided along two factions, a regime with an illusion that its military option is capable of ending the revolution and an opposition with a political wing living outside the country and a military wing controlling large areas of the country and trying with its available capabilities to administer them. Under these conditions, there are increasing numbers of Syrians who have become deprived of their right to live a normal life because of violence, displacement, and blockade. It is not surprising that the United Nations admitted that "the Syrian crisis is the biggest challenge we face as humanitarian agencies worldwide." Today (mid-2013), more than half of Syrians are suffering different forms of destruction, tens of thousands have been killed, wounded and mutilated, there are thousands missing and detained persons, and there are huge numbers of fugitives and internally displaced people who fled to areas witnessing fewer acts of violence or to neighboring countries. This is not to mention the hundreds of thousands of Syrians who have now become homeless and the large numbers of Syrians who live in abject poverty after losing everything they have and after spending all their savings to escape the fighting.<sup>2</sup>

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2 Report: UNICEF's Humanitarian Action for Children 2012

This tragic situation becomes even worse with the deterioration of social and economic conditions in the country. The ongoing war and the military deployment have had their impact on agriculture and the transport of agricultural products to markets. The scarcity of raw materials, due to the absence of imports and weak marketing possibilities, have led to the collapse of the country's industry. Hundreds of factories were closed or reduced their production and thousands of workers were laid off as a result. The fate of the tourism sector was the worst. Today, its role has completely ceased to exist. There are no new investment opportunities and most of the investment projects that were started before the war have been disrupted. The roles of public and private banks in the economy shrank as a result of sanctions and the flight of much capital abroad.<sup>3</sup> The shortages of basic commodities, and their complete absence in some areas witnessing heated battles as well as the fall in the Syrian pound's purchasing power (the Syrian pound lost 70% of its value<sup>4</sup>), have all led to the deterioration in the living conditions of people. Moreover, there are many internally displaced people who have opted to leave the dangerous areas and move to safer villages, while some have simply chosen to completely leave the country in search of a haven.

It is important to note that the Syrian working class has witnessed a transformation in its realities and in its awareness of itself as a class governed by similar social conditions, demands, and common goals. The role of this class has also been kept afloat when the so-called unified labour law was passed and thus government employees became part of this working class. Political parties, presenting themselves as representatives of the working class, were subjugated and the independence of trade and professional unions was marginalized. This has only further been exasperated as the Soviet model of the state has seemed to completely fail Syria as it has little allies in which to conduct trade.

The challenges facing Syria today are of an exceptional nature. These challenges are not only those related to guaranteeing freedom of opinion and political activism but also improving the economic situation and ensuring citizens' rights and the provision of social safety nets for the needy. In addition, the state must find a way to end ongoing violence, end sectarian civil war, and move towards building a democratic state for all of its citizens. Lastly, it must protect itself against international intervention in Syrian national affairs, especially as the country is becoming an arena for regional conflicts.

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3 The presence and investment of Syrian capital witnessed a growth in the most important Turkish and Egyptian cities. Lebanon's Central Bank admitted that Syrian deposits during the year 2012 have doubled (Central Bank, Lebanon, 2012-2013).

4 The Syrian pound exchange rate for one (1) US dollar increased from 50 pounds / dollar in 2011 to 140 pounds per dollar in May 2013.

## The Development of the Concept of Left in Syria

In an approach to understand the concepts of the Left and by linking it to its basic meaning as proposed by the French Revolution,<sup>5</sup> it could be said that the Left expresses solidarity to the notion of working towards the advancement of poor people in the society, their rights, ambitions and future aspirations. That being said, when examining the Syrian Left, one must factor in the prolonged civil war and the dictatorial regime of the Assad family and their attempts to keep political mobilization at a minimum.

There is the Soviet inspired left, guided by the Soviet Union Communist International, which has linked the fate of the toilers in Syria with that of the socialist system and the outcome of its struggle against the colonial West. It has struggled to formulate its positions to be in line with those of the Soviet Union, and this has led to many pitfalls such as its position on the partition of Palestine, some pan-Arab issues, and the ideology of Arab unity. The adoption of the Soviet motion of non-capitalist development and the socialist orientation was the justification given by this non-critical left for the role of the petty bourgeoisie,<sup>6</sup> and for the ruling Ba'ath Party regime, as a national and anti-imperialist regime. It has ignored the regime's suppression, corruption, and the way it has transformed the state into a state-capitalist economy, very distant from the socialist orientation and social justice.

There are also other strands of the left in Syria. First, there is the reformist left, which was keen on giving priority to the concept of social justice, and it is very hostile towards the idea of private property. It sanctified social ownership and the guided administration of the economy through state directed intervention. It also focused on workers' demands in order to improve their living standards without giving much attention to the nature of the existing political system and the suppression faced by society. Next, there is the pan-Arab left, which has focused on the liberalization of society from external exploitation and on considering imperialism as the basis of peoples' plight. It heavily relied on the Vietnamese experience and the rise in the role of the Palestinian leftist organizations in devoting their energy in resistance against the occupation of land. It considered the struggle for Arab and Palestinian rights to be intertwined and that the failure of one was the failure of both.

When we talk about the left that has emerged after the collapse of the Soviet Union and monitor its reactions, we immediately recall the Marxist left, which sees in Marxism (very much associated with the Soviet experience) its most

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5 Historically, the term left wing dates back to the French Revolution and the seating arrangements in the French National Assembly. The representatives of the "common people," the Jacobins, the Robespierre, the Cordeliers Clubs, or as known then by the Third Estate name used to sit to the left of the King in the National Assembly which led in 1789 to one of the most important revolutions in history.

6 Intellectuals, teachers, technocrats, smallholders of artisans, farmers, and small traders.

coherent, consistent, and scientific intellectual foundation. The left, being the most ideologically affected and disintegrated as a result of the collapse of this experience, has witnessed abandonment and many leftists have left behind the socialist project and adopted an opposite path by embracing the liberalism economic ideologies. In fact, there were negative implications and repercussions felt when some parties and personalities, previously considered as communists, announced that capitalism and Western democracy are the locomotive of history. There were also other leftists who remained loyal to their past experience without making any revision or adjustments and considered that what had happened was nothing but implementation mistakes, such as the division in the Communist Party and the Trotskyist group that had in the past strongly criticized the Soviet leadership. There is also the left that has learnt the lessons of the Soviet Union's collapse and its impact on the conditions in their countries (such as the Marxist Left Gathering and the Communist Labor Party).

In other words, the concept of the left has witnessed many changes as it was clear that the defense of workers' rights and interests requires a critical review of past experiences. It requires liberating the left from its ideological blindness, pre-determined slogans created by self-desires rather than concrete realities, and the need to activate the role of critique to grasp realities, ideas, and concepts. Most importantly, leftist movements have begun to focus on political democratization as the most beneficial outlet for advancing the ideas core to leftist ideology.

## The Emergence of a New Left in Syria

In light of authoritarian rule, the political landscape in Syria has witnessed many political discussions and splits. The identity of the Left, with its two Marxist-communist and Pan-Arab factions, was reshaped based on its position with regard to the ruling regime as the main criteria. There has been a screening process among those who continued to support the ruling regime without making use of the lessons learnt from the collapse of similar models. These have tended to justify their position in regards to the ruling elite by exaggerating its claims about resistance to imperialism and by exaggerating memories of its old days when it faced traditional feudal structures and developed a strategy for development. The other left deepened its opposition to the ruling regime and started to new ways forward which combine the national and the democratic issue while keeping a focus on workers' rights and civil society. It has given the latter a clear precedence, and it revealed the real nature of the ruling regime as an authoritarian and capitalist regime. In addition, this is a regime built on the plundering of the national wealth and the wealth of the traditional feudal economy and capitalists in order to maintain its own hold on power instead of fighting these forces.

As a result of these revisions, a new left has emerged, a left that has based its judgments on the negative and unfortunate outcomes of long decades of communist, pan-Arab, and leftist struggle. These movements have realized the clear failure of regimes associated with the petty bourgeoisie. This new stream, which is the most important one, has relied on the shortcomings of the Soviet experience and the lessons learnt from its collapse. It started by eliminating the conflict between political and social democracy, and instead of focusing exclusively on Pan-Arab issues and their placement in the movement, the new left has put its focus on human and workers' rights. It is the left that has based its struggle on building a state of citizens who enjoy equal rights and duties, regardless of their religion, sect, gender, creed, or ethnicity. They believe that this path is indispensable in ending exploitation, oppression, injustice, and tyranny and in achieving free and dignified human life for all citizens. It has reached the conclusion that sacrificing political democracy will only produce tyranny, monopoly of power, authoritarianism, corruption, and the monopolization of wealth, which only benefits the narrow interests of the corrupt. According to this left, these practices would only lead to the weakening of the internal structure and to making it incapable of facing external threats and challenges.

## The Diversity of Left-Wing Streams in the Syrian Landscape

The Syrian left has been through some of the most dire of times in Syria. For example, the country was extremely shaken up after the loss of the June 1967 war, the collapse of the Soviet Union, and the current civil war engulfing the country. That being said, this section will highlight key parties and movements which make up the Syrian left. Furthermore, it will detail key ideology of the movement, as well as a brief history and where they stand now.

### The Syrian Communist Party

The Syrian Communist Party, which was founded in 1924, is one of the oldest left-wing parties in Syria. It participated in the revolution against the French Mandate in 1925 and participated in elections for the first time in 1954. Khalid Bakdash, its secretary general at that time, succeeded in winning a parliamentary seat and the party's popularity and influence increased significantly in years prior to unity with Egypt in 1958. Unfortunately, the party's dependency and connections to the Soviet Union ended up causing it much trouble. Its opposition to the Syrian-Egyptian unification was a reason behind the imprisonment and prosecution of its members and cadres. After that, the party changed its policy, which was based on criticizing the "petty bourgeoisie"

parties. Due to their swift stances of condemning the bourgeoisie, the party had opted to cooperate with the petty bourgeois parties when the Ba'ath Party ascended to power and initiated agrarian reform and nationalization policies and allied itself with the Soviet Union.<sup>7</sup> It agreed to participate nominally in what is known as the National Progressive Front (NPF) and to adapt its policies to become in line with those of the ruling regime after the Corrective Revolution of 1970. It justified this step by adopting the so-called "theory of non-capital evolution" and the "socialist orientation." This led to a severe shrinking of their popular base, which was further exasperated when the Ba'athists initiated social and educational reform. This opened the door wide for the disintegration of the Communist Party. The first time this happened was in 1972 because of political and program-related conflicts and as a result of real differences in viewpoints<sup>8</sup> on the party's position with regard to the ruling regime and national and pan-Arab issues. Under these conditions, the party split into two parties, the Khalid Bakdash wing which kept the party's name and the Riad al-Turk wing, known as the Syrian Communist Party-Political Bureau.

Divisions within the communist party have continued ever since. These divisions took the form of power conflict and many issues ended up being a personal conflict between members. Instead of focusing on issues and how to unite members, most members attacked personal aspects of members and left much mistrust. As a result, the Syrian left scene became flooded with a number of ineffective communist parties that have no real power. The most important division took place in 1978, led by Murad Yusuf, who created the Syrian Communist Party Base Organization. In 1983, another division took place, and it was led by Yusuf Faysal who kept the same name of the communist party. The result was a communist party with two wings, the wing of Wisal Farha Bakdash (the widow of Khalid Bakdash, the former secretary general of the party, who led the party after the death of her husband), which issues the "Sawt al-Shaab" (The Voice of the People) newspaper, and the Yusuf Faysal wing now led by Haneen Nimr and which controls the al-Nour (The Light) newspaper. The two wings remained members of what is known as the National Progressive Front, together with other pan-Arab leftist parties with similar composition and positions adhering to those of the ruling regime such as the Arab Socialist Union, the Unionist Socialists' Party, the Arab Socialist Movement, the Social Democratic Unionist Party, and the Arab Democratic Union. In 2005, the Syrian Social Nationalist Party, led by Josef Swaid, joined them. The parties found common ground in their defense of the

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7 The Communist Party, in the beginning of its activism, was in favor of supporting the bourgeoisie to achieve the democratic revolution. The program of the party which was approved by its second conference, held in 1944, and the explanatory booklet, written by the party's Secretary-General Khalid Bakdash, contained a critical position of these petty bourgeoisie parties such as the Ba'ath party, because they hastily started with the nationalization project and this opened the door for conflict with the bourgeoisie.

8 Qadaya al-Khilaf fi al-Hizb al-Shoyuei al-Souri, wa Mulahathat al-Rifaq al-Soviet (Issues of disagreement within the Syrian Communist Party and the Soviet comrades' Notes), Dar Ibn Khaldoun publications, Beirut 1972.

current ruling power. It should be noted, however, that none of them have any real or effective presence in Syrian society.<sup>9</sup>

This last division in the Syrian Communist Party became a reality on the organizational level in the year in 1986 when Khaled Bakdash's group held its sixth conference followed by the Yousef al-Faisal which also held its sixth conference. The reasons for the division were nothing more than accusations of loyalty to individuals and worship of leadership made by those who walked out. In 1991, the Yusuf Faysal Group held its seventh conference, which was meant to unite the party. One of its achievements was re-uniting some of the groups that had previously walked out such as the Murad Yusuf Group (the Base Organization), and the Yusuf Nimr Group (the Communist Union), which withdrew from the Communist Party-Political Bureau after the fifth conference in 1978. After that, the Bakdash wing witnessed a major split in the city of Damascus, and its nucleus was the Qasyoun Group, whose members were successively expelled from the party. This group formed the Unity of Syrian Communists under the leadership of Qadri Jamil.<sup>10</sup> In its statement, the group considered the then leaders of the party as "greedy heirs" and called for abandoning the tribal mentality and political feudalism which had led to the purging of the party cadres.

There is no doubt that the main reason behind the many divisions of the Syrian Communist Party is its inability to play the resistance role a communist or a leftist party is expected to play, and its subordination to the regime's policies. In some instances, the party witnessed unsuccessful attempts by some of its promising cadres to generate a different role to be played by the party. This new desired role was to be based on a clear program which aimed at reducing its subordination to the ruling regime, achieving democratic change, and aspiring to become the real, long-awaited alternative party capable of leading the struggle in order to achieve the goals of popular and disadvantaged classes of the society.<sup>11</sup>

The leftist nature of the Syrian Communist Party, as a defender of the interests of the poor and workers, ceased to exist. With the exception of the Riyad al-Turk wing, those who walked out did not do so to improve the conditions of the poor and the laborers but to further subordinate to the existing ruling system and to support its stances. The timid criticism of some internal flaws related to corruption, the deterioration of the living standards of citizens, the party's repeated warnings of a growing bureaucratic bourgeoisie which is depleting

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9 See the Charter of the "National Progressive Front," Damascus, March 1972.

10 Politburo member of the Syrian Communist Party and Secretary of Damascus region (Qasyoun) before announcing his defection and the formation of the Union of Communists in Syria.

11 Source: reports and documents of the Syrian Communist Party, Damascus, 1980.

state resources, and the regime's alliance with the parasitic bourgeoisie<sup>12</sup> did not change the above facts. While stressing these issues, the party continued to overlook democratic issues, the defense of the Syrian peoples' human rights, and the importance of enabling people to participate in determining their affairs.

## The Kurdish Democratic Party

The Kurdish political map in Syria has witnessed many of the same developments. There have been frequent divisions within the Kurdistan Democratic Party of Syria (KDPS) into numerous parties. Most of these new parties have been leftist, such as the Kurdistan Democratic Party, led by Nasr al-Din Ibrahim, and the Kurdish Leftist Party, led by Abdul-Hakim Bashar. Other important parties include the Kurdish Democratic Progressive Party, the Future Movement, the Azadi Party, and the Kurdish Democratic Equality Party.<sup>13</sup> These parties, most of them Marxist, have similar orientation and there are no important differences in their programs. This explains that the reasons behind the divisions witnessed in their ranks are of a personal, as well as organizational, nature. All these parties reject the national oppression of the Kurdish people, and they all believe that a state of justice, freedom, and equality should be built and that is why they formed two broad alliances, namely, the Kurdish Democratic Alliance and the Kurdish National Front, each composed of six parties with similar names, a result of splits within the same parties. Perhaps it is fair and just to say that the development of the national sense among the Syrian Kurds was never at the expense of their loyalty to their homeland of Syria. With the exception of a very few extremists who promote notions of independence and secession, the Kurdish political movement with its various parties, agrees on slogans which emphasize belonging to Syria and call for the lifting of ethnic-based oppression and persecution, the protection of public liberties, justice, equality, and strengthening the bonds of Arab-Kurdish brotherhood.<sup>14</sup>

## The Communist Labor Party

The attempt, which bore the name of the New Left, can be traced back to the small Marxist meetings. These meetings became frequent in 1979 in conjunction with the growing disputes within the Communist Party and the growing role of the Palestinian resistance and its effects. These meetings

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12 Non-productive bourgeoisie class which grew on the sidelines of the state economic role and its wealth from corruption and by looting public money. This class began to play a serious role in laying the foundations of the capitalist model.

13 A group of Kurdish leftist intellectuals with aspirations of overcoming regulatory and political problems that have defined the aging Kurdish parties.

14 Based on reports and programs of the Syrian Kurdish parties.



witnessed the participation of young cadres who came from various leftist, pan-Arab, and communist parties, and embraced Marxist ideology. They started their journey of research and dialogue in order to provide answers to urgent questions of concern to Syrians which would help in ending the complete absence of a workers' party. This phenomenon culminated in 1976 in the creation of the so-called League of Communist Action, followed by the Communist Labor Party, in 1980. Among the leaders of the party were Aslan Abdul Karim,<sup>15</sup> Fateh Jamous,<sup>16</sup> Akram al-Bunni,<sup>17</sup> Muhammad Miamar,<sup>18</sup> and Abdul Aziz al-Khair.<sup>19</sup> This party was characterized by its leftist ideology and its commitment to a transitional political and strategist program. They base this program on the mobilization of popular classes to challenge an authoritarian, bourgeoisie, and non-national bureaucracy, and to move towards a socialist revolution which starts with the completion of national and democratic tasks.

Unfortunately, this attempt, which has made a positive impact on the political scene, as attested by various political parties and intellectuals opposing or supporting the regime because of its resistance and vital critical, political and advocacy role, was soon aborted. Many of its members were arrested and prosecuted severely by security forces and the party members were strongly fought by the ruling regime which had launched mass arrests targeting most of its cadres in the 1980's, thus weakening the party and paralyzing its activities. In addition to this campaign by the regime, the party itself was inherently unable to develop its ideology due to its inability to properly explain the reality on the ground and what their platform was for changing it. Instead, they focused on slogans and calls for Arab unity without any tangible program to achieve it. This lack eventually led to its demise.<sup>20</sup>

In contrast, the Riad al-Turk wing of the Syrian Communist Party, became an opposition party and its outstanding performance in the formation of the National Democratic Gathering. It also publically denounced authoritarian violence during the Hama massacre, called to overthrow the regime, and introduced radical democratic changes. As a result, members faced massive

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15 From the city of Salamiyeh. He became Marxist after abandoning his religious background, and he was imprisoned for fifteen years. After his release, he continued his opposition activities through the Committees for the Revival of Civil Society.

16 From Latakia, he was a member of the Arab Socialist Movement. In the early seventies he joined one of the small Marxist groups at Aleppo University, and he was imprisoned for fifteen years.

17 From the city of Hama, he was one of the cadres of a big Marxist group formed by those who left the Arab Socialist Movement in the city of Hama and its countryside. He is the secretary-general of the National Council of Damascus Declaration for National Democratic Change. He was arrested several times.

18 From the city of Qadmous, he participated in one of the Marxist groups active in Damascus and Misayaf. He was imprisoned for fifteen years and he participated in the Committees for the Revival of Civil Society.

19 From the city of Latakia. He left the Democratic Ba'ath Party and joined the Communist Labor Party together with a group of his comrades in the late seventies. He was imprisoned for twelve years and was released in 2005.

20 A booklet entitled "Limatha Rabitat al-Amal al-Shouyouei" (Why Communist Labor Party) issued in 1978, and the booklet entitled al-Barnamej al-Istratigi wa al-Intiqali li Hizb al-Amal al-Shouyouei fi Sourya" (The strategic and transitional program of the Communist Labor Party in Syria), issued in 1978.

persecution for their activities. The General-Secretary of the party was imprisoned for 17 years and was only released, together with other members, at the beginning of the millennium after an amnesty was issued by Bashar al-Assad after he ascended to power. This release was associated with the so-called Damascus Spring, under which the party deepened its democratic option and held its sixth conference under this title, abandoning its communist name and changing it to the People's Democratic Party in Syria. Ever since then, the party has focused on the critical role of democracy in confronting external challenges and dangers, addressing the worsening crisis in the country and building the rule of law and a just society.

With the participation of the People's Democratic Party, the Syrian political map has witnessed the formation of a big leftist bloc. These parties have begun to finally formulate and adopt comprehensive programs which deal with issues of economic disparity, social justice, human rights, workers' rights, and women's rights.<sup>21</sup> The main active parties are, the National Democratic Gathering, composed of the Arab Socialist Union, led by Jamal al-Atassi, which was founded in 1964 by the merger of a number of Syrian political formations with Nasserite ideologies. This party had participated temporarily in the Progressive National Front formation but then it withdrew because of disagreement on Article 8 of the Syrian Constitution, which states that the Ba'ath Party leads the state and society. After taking this decision, the party witnessed another division and a part of its members remained in the Progressive National Front while Jamal al-Atassi's wing became an opposition party and continued to work within the framework of the National Democratic Gathering.

The gathering also included the Arab Socialist Democratic Ba'ath Party, which was founded in 1970. The founders added the word "Democratic" to distinguish the party from the rulers in Iraq and Syria. The party was formed by the political cadres who sided with Salah Jadid<sup>22</sup> and the former president Nour al-Din al-Atassi<sup>23</sup> in their conflict with Hafez al-Assad. There is also the Arab Socialist Movement, which was formed as a continuation of the pan-Arab approach of Akram al-Hourani,<sup>24</sup> a pan-Arab leader from Hama. This movement too underwent many strong ruptures. The remaining members, with their different opinions, were divided into two major groups, the Abdul-Ghani Qannout group,<sup>25</sup> which allied itself with the ruling regime and joined

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21 The political program of the National Democratic Gathering in Syria, Damascus, 1979.

22 The left-leaning Assistant Secretary-General of the Baath Party. He was considered the country's de facto ruler of Syria. He was arrested after the movement carried out by Hafez al-Assad and remained in prison until he died in 1993.

23 He was the President of the Republic but he was arrested when Hafez al-Assad seized power. After twenty-two years of imprisonment, he was released after the deterioration in his health condition. He died in 1992, just a few months after his release.

24 One of the founders of the Arab Socialist Party, which merged with the Ba'ath Party and formed the Arab Socialist Ba'ath Party. He was the Vice President of the Republic at the time of unity with Egypt but left the party and its ideology and reshaped the Arab Socialist Movement. He stayed in exile until he died in Amman, Jordan, in 1996.

25 The secretary-general of the Arab Socialist Movement in Hama city. He continued to support the ruling regime until he died in 2001.

the Progressive National Front, and the Abdul-Ghani Ayyash group, which remained as an opposition group<sup>26</sup> and joined the leftist opposition alliance.

In addition to the above parties and movements, there is also the Revolutionary Workers' Party, a political organization with a Marxist ideology, which is led today by Tariq Abu Hassan. This party was formed after the defeat in June 1967 and in response to the inability of communist and pan-Arab parties to come up with a revolutionary program. It is a continuation of the political and intellectual opinions and interpretations of the two intellectuals, Elias Murqus<sup>27</sup> and Yassin al-Hafez,<sup>28</sup> who were critical of the Communist Party because it did not stress issues related to democracy, modernity, Arab unity, and the Palestinian cause. This party also joined the National Democratic Gathering since its inception in 1979.

## Committees for the Revival of Civil Society

Along with these political leftist movements, and within the framework of the Damascus Spring and the relative freedoms witnessed by the country when Bashar al-Assad ascended to power, the Committees for the Revival of Civil Society emerged with the turn of the millennium. These committees were initiated by the educated elite who were members of the different left-wing parties, such as Michel Kilo, Abdul Razzaq Eid, and Hussein Awadat. They were characterized by their democratic identity and their ability to take initiatives aimed at activating the participation of democratic and national figures and their objective discourse aimed at releasing tensions and encouraging reform and change. With the passage of time, these committees became a safe space for all citizens.

This has led to a building of trust between the political forces whose relations were characterized by alienation and estrangement and helped in breaking the ice between Arab and Kurdish activists. Therefore, the committees became qualified to play a major role in uniting the leftists in Syria and in the issuance of the Damascus Declaration for Democratic National Change in 2005. The declaration was signed by the National Democratic Gathering, the Democratic Kurdish Alliance, the Democratic Kurdish Front, the Committees for the Revival

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26 The head of the Arab Socialist Movement which split from Abdul-Ghani Qannot group. He was a sacked officer from Hama city, and he died in 2010.

27 He was a prominent Marxist thinker. He withdrew from the Communist Party because of disagreements over the issue of nationalism and party organizational life. He wrote and translated many books and he contributed to the formation of the Arab Revolutionary Workers Party. He died in 1991.

28 A Syrian thinker and one of the most important Arab Marxist theorists. He contributed to the critique of Communist and Marxist left parties and founded the Arab Revolutionary Workers Party. He died in 1978.

of Civil Society, the Assyrian Democratic Organization<sup>29</sup>, the Communist Labor Party, the Syrian Society for Human Rights,<sup>30</sup> and independent figures.

## The Damascus Declaration

The Damascus Declaration was the first of its kind to be issued by opposition parties operating in Syria. Its first national council was held in late 2007 under the chairmanship of Fidaa Hourani and her deputies Abdel-Hamid Darwish and Abdul al-Khair, and the two secretaries Ahmad Tomeh and Akram al-Bunni. A statement was issued after the meeting calling for an end of authoritarian rule which has lasted for decades, the unity of opposition groups in order to be able to gradually, peacefully and safely accomplish democratic and economic reform, as well as develop a comprehensive plan for national unity and other issues.

A new executive leadership was elected and was composed of Riad al-Turk, Riad Seif, and others. In a wave of arrests, most of the leaders were detained and the Arab Socialist Union and the Communist Labor Party withdrew from the declaration. The declared reason for their withdrawal could be explained partly by what they have considered as a transformation towards a political democracy at the expense of democratic, national, and social issues. The undeclared reason, could be that they were anticipating that their own leaders and cadres would become targets of arrest. In fact, the Damascus Declaration was considered, as many would say, a qualitative and important step in the context of the development of left-wing opposition work, ideas, and political and organizational performance.<sup>31</sup>

In the context of its activities with the Damascus Declaration, the Communist Labor Party participated in the formation of a leftist bloc in the year 2007 under the name of the Marxist Left Gathering.<sup>32</sup> Some of the Syrian Communist Party members, under the leadership of Muhammad Rasas,<sup>33</sup> who left the Riad al-Turk group, joined the gathering. In addition, the bloc was joined by the Kurdish Left Party, and the Communist Syrians, the Democratic Marxist Gathering in Syria, as well as a number of Marxists. The bloc issued a

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29 A left-wing nationalist organization that defends the rights of the Assyrian minority in Syria. It participated in the work of the opposition and in the struggle against the tyrant authority.

30 An organization specialized in monitoring human rights violations in Syria. It has remarkable activities in monitoring arrests, acts of torture and the conditions of prisoners. It is headed by Haytham al-Maleh, an experienced lawyer from Damascus.

31 The Damascus Declaration for Democratic National Change issued on 16/10/2005, and the National Council's statement, issued on 4/12/2007.

32 The statement issued on the formation of the Marxist Gathering in Syria, 20/4/2007.

33 One of the Syrian Communist Party cadres, he was imprisoned for fifteen years. He disagreed with Riad al-Turk over organizational and policy-related issues, especially on the interpretation of the relation between nationalism and democracy. He left the party before its sixth Congress and formed the Syrian Communist Party-Politburo.

foundational document in which it announced its bias to the working class and its opposition to the imperialism, its resistance to tyranny and exploitation in all their forms, and its struggle against ethnic, religious, sectarian, and national discrimination among citizens. It also called on communists and Marxists, regardless of their positions, to rise and re-occupy their position as conscious resistance leaders and to work together to accomplish the democratic reform with national perspectives and tools. It issued a newspaper under the name “Tareeq al-Yasar” (The Path of the Left).

## The Popular Uprising and Left-Wing Parties in Syria

The Syrian Left map started to change radically with the start of the revolution on 15 March 2011. The popular movement (Hirak), with its presence and activities, has put leftist political parties and personalities under a test, examined the clarity of their democratic choices, and deepened their commitment to the interests of the people and their rights. It re-sorted them in a sharp manner into two categories, those who are still unable to bring about an epistemological break with the past and liberate themselves from the ideological mobilization, and those who began to be convinced that the current regime has been using hollow slogans to justify repressive and violent measures against a civilian population.

The popular uprising has re-categorized and resorted all left-wing parties acting in Syria according to their position with regard to the ruling regime. The official communist parties continued to support the regime and participated in the promotion and simulation of the official conspiracy theory propaganda that the revolution in the country is driven by conspirators and infiltrators who have a foreign agenda. The position of this left is based on the fact that it has been confronted with a broad “colonial” anti-regime alliance composed of the most important imperialist and anti-reform countries which are listed among its enemies.

## Popular Front for Change and Liberation in Syria

There are those who tried to ride the revolutionary wave, either as an expression of their opportunism or because they wanted to save what can be saved of a regime they felt was capable of initiating reform. An example of this group is the Popular Front for Change and Liberation in Syria, which was established in July 2011. The front gathers the National Committee of the Syrian Communists, headed by Qadri Jamil and the Ali Haydar wing of the Syrian Social Nationalist Party,<sup>34</sup> as well as a group of independent personalities. The founders of the

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34 The leader of the party defected from the Syrian Social Nationalist Party in early 2000. His group was named the Intifada and his political views were close to those of the political opposition. He opposes authoritarian tyranny and exploitation.

front called for comprehensive and radical reforms in Syria to maintain national unity and to face all forms of external pressure and interference. They said that they wanted their front to be the starting point for the formation of a broad popular gathering which provides the necessary conditions for protecting the country and to move Syria towards the path of accomplishing the aspired change and liberation. They also stressed the importance of drafting a new constitution which prohibits discrimination, emphasizes full citizenship rights, ends emergency laws, stresses the principle of peaceful transfer of power, and equally distributes the wealth of the state. The founders called for a comprehensive developmental plan which provides balanced development of all the Syrian national territory, especially in rural areas, and which provide employment opportunities and infrastructure development<sup>35</sup>. Two of the front leaders are today participating in the Syrian government, Qadri Jamil is the Deputy Prime Minister for Economic Affairs and Ali al-Haydar occupies the post of Minister for National Reconciliation.

## The National Coordination Committee for Democratic Change

The National Coordination Committee for Democratic Change Forces inside and outside Syria<sup>36</sup> is formed by a number of independent personalities, committees, and Syrian leftist parties. The first important party is the Democratic Arab Socialist Union, led by Hasan Abdul-Atheem, who became the leader of the party after the death of its founder Jamal al-Atassi. The next important party is the Communist Labor Party, led by Abdul-Aziz Khair, who was arrested in Autumn last year, immediately after his return from a visit to China and his fate remains unknown. Next is the Socialist Arab Democratic Baath Party, represented by Yousef Salman, who criticized the authoritarian and custodial methods of the regime. Next is the Marxist Left Gathering, represented by Muhammad Sayed Rasas; the Together for a Free and Democratic Syria Movement, represented by Munther Khaddam. Lastly, other various parties such as the Kurdish Leftist Party, the Democratic Union Party, and the Kurdish Democratic Union Party in Syria, joined as well.

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<sup>35</sup> See the founding statement of the Popular Front for Change and Liberation in Syria issued on 9/7/2011.

<sup>36</sup> The declaration on the formation of the National Coordination Committee on 6/10/2011 under the slogans of "No to violence, no to sectarianism, no to outside interference." The committee stressed its support for the peaceful revolution, the adoption of the demands of the popular movement, the overthrow of the regime with all of its symbols and building a democratic system.

## The Kurdish National Council

Kurdish parties in Syria, after the start of the revolution and under the pressure of the Kurdish and Arab popular movement, started to unite and formed the Kurdish National Council in the city of Qamishli in October 2011,<sup>37</sup> in a manner similar to the unification of Syrian opposition and the formation of the Syrian National Council. Ten parties participated in the Kurdish council, as well as some youth revolutionary coordinators, and some cultural and social actors. A final statement was issued expressing the council's vision of the future of Syria. The statement stressed the necessity for building a democratic state based on social justice and equality, the importance of finding a solution to the Kurdish problem based on the right to self-determination within the framework of the unity of the state, and the adoption of political decentralization in administering the state's affairs. At a later stage, the council was further expanded when four Kurdish parties and a group of the revolutionary coordinators joined in. In April 2012, the council held its first ordinary session and produced its transitory political program progress to achieve the greatest possible understanding among other opposition forces. Syria's Kurdish Democratic Union Party, which is close to the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), led by Saleh Muslim and which is a member of the National Coordination Body, did not join the council.

## Other Political Left-Oriented Groups

In addition to the above mentioned forces, a number of left-oriented political groups have emerged to support the Syrian revolution and correct its path. The main groups will be detailed below.

### The Coalition of Syrian Left

The coalition was created by leftist groups and individuals participating in the uprising with the aim of coordinating their activities and developing the *hirak*. It has issued a document in which it said that the reason why many sectors of the popular classes went to the streets is to demand change because economic exploitation perpetrated by businessmen has reached a limit which has made a big sector of these classes poor. It has led to high unemployment rates and created huge imbalances in the living standards of the lower classes because of low wages and the high cost of living that followed the completion of market liberalization. The coalition believes that the nature of the authoritarian regime, formed five decades ago and the tight grip of its security

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37 The declaration of the Kurdish National Council, October 2011.

services, combined with the absence of institutions and law, have formed the umbrella which allowed organized and dreadful looting of the efforts of the lower classes. Neo-liberalism, according to the coalition, was able to govern the society without any resistance because of the collapse of the opposition movement due to the cruelty of tyranny.

The statement went on to say that the participants in the coalition are defending the interests of the lower classes and that they seek for these lower classes to become the ruling class. It further stressed that participants want to create a modern state, solve the deep economic, education, and health crises and those deep rooted in the authoritarian state structure. According to the statement, these aims can be achieved through the drafting of a constitution which guarantees freedom, separates between powers, protects trade unions' freedoms, provides for popular control over the state activities, offers a civil law for personal status and guarantees equal roles for men and women. The statement stressed the importance of building a productive economy capable of addressing unemployment problems, acknowledging the right to work, maintaining a balance between wages and prices, and orienting economic development to reach all areas in Syria. The document also emphasizes the importance of liberating the occupied Golan and Palestine, and full independence from imperialism and the capitalist model. It further stressed the importance of bonding with all Arab revolutions in order to revitalize a new revolutionary and a libertarian project in the Arab world which stems from independence and aims at unity, development, and modernity, with the aim of realizing socialism.<sup>38</sup> The coalition is composed of Syrians who are activist members of the revolutionary movement. It is difficult to identify the members of this coalition or to reveal their names, but among them are Slameh Kaileh and Jalal Nawfal, who were both arrested but were recently released.

## Together for a Free and Democratic Syria Movement

This movement was declared by a number of left-wing Syrian intellectuals as a civil commission under establishment. The founding statement said that the movement is biased to the Syrian people and it supports the peaceful protest movement in Syria. In its activities, the movement is guided by the principles of supporting the peaceful struggle of the people for freedom, democracy, and the building of a civil state, and exposing violent repression. It is committed to the strengthening of national unity and resisting all forms of sectarian incitement. Lastly, it is committed to the promotion of a culture of diversity and acceptance of others and the dissemination and promotion of human rights, civil laws, and their democratic reform.<sup>39</sup>

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38 Statement announcing the birth of the Coalition of Syrian Left, Damascus, March 2011.

39 Statement announcing the birth of the "Together Movement", Damascus, June 2011.



## Building the Syrian State Movement

Emphasizing the importance of “adopting the objectives of the popular Intifada,” this movement was announced by left-wing Syrian opposition figures in September 2011. According to the vision of its founders, the movement aims at building a democratic civil state capable of enabling Syrians, especially the young people, to be effectively engaged in the political and public life of their country. Its founding statement indicates that it is a new political movement trying to build a democratic civil state capable, in partnership with all forces and social groups, of achieving social justice where all Syrians will be winners, regardless of their political or cultural differences.<sup>40</sup> This should be accomplished by focusing on democracy, good governance, sustainable development, poverty, economic democracy, and social justice. In addition, it wishes to redistribute wealth in the country with a focus on marginalized groups of society.

## The Syrian Democratic Platform

The platform is a civil democratic political forum founded in Cairo in February 2012. It is open to all individuals, groups, and forces engaged in the Syrian revolution, and it considers itself as a bridge between revolutionary forces. It aims at mobilizing and uniting the efforts of the different forces regardless of their backgrounds. It also provides field and political insight in order to develop the revolution and help it accomplish freedom, dignity, and social justice tasks. It has contributed to the transitional period and Syria’s future.<sup>41</sup>

Among the aims of the platform is empowering people politically and culturally to overthrow the regime and dismantle its structures and promoting democratic values, principles, and practices. It does not perceive itself as another formation to be added to the existing forces and forums but rather one of the tributaries of the revolution. It has sought to become a political bloc and held a meeting in Cairo in April 2013 to establish what is known as the faction or the Syrian Democratic Coalition. Among its leaders are Michhel Kilo, Samir Aita, and Fayez Sara.

## The Citizenship Movement

The Citizenship Movement was formed in February 2011 by left-wing intellectual elites who have experience in political activities and many of whom have been arrested at some point. It aims at supporting the revolution,

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40 The founding document of the Building the Syrian State Stream issued in Damascus, September 2011.

41 The founding statement of the Syrian Democratic Platform, Cairo on 18/2/2012.

adopting democratic and civil reforms, and protecting the unity of Syria's land and people against any ethnic, sectarian, or regional divides.<sup>42</sup> The stream also calls for supporting the legitimate natural-born rights of national and ethnic minorities. It is one of the forces actively working to prevent the revolution from falling into the pitfalls of extremism and sectarianism. Most activists of this stream are active in Syria with the exception of a very few individuals who, under condition of repression, were forced to continue their activism outside Syria.

### The Democratic Left Gathering in Syria<sup>43</sup>

The Gathering was founded by a group of Syrian intellectuals and economists with left-leaning ideas. It has issued its own vision on the Syrian political situation which focuses on two tracks, political freedoms necessary to activate the role of people and their participation, and social justice and improving the living conditions of the poor classes. The Gathering tends to reject violence and calls for peaceful transformation.

### The Syrian Left Alliance<sup>44</sup>

The Alliance was announced as a project in December 2012 by the Democratic Left Gathering, the Watan Coalition Movement, and the Syrian Communists Coordinators. Among the aims of the alliance is to re-build the state so as to emerge as a developed, civil, modern and democratic state based on pluralism, secularism, and the principles of citizenship. It also aims at guaranteeing social justice, balanced development, and popular supervision of the state's political and economic activities. The gathering pays special attention to the interests and rights of young people, stresses the importance of gender equality, and the passing of a civil personal status law.

### The Coalition of the Revolutionary Left in Syria

The Coalition of the Revolutionary Left in Syria is a Trotskyist group which defines itself as a left-wing and Marxist revolutionary group in Syria. The Coalition adopts the transitional program of the revolutionary left in Syria, and it works, through its engagement in the popular revolution, on the reunification of the revolutionary Marxist left<sup>45</sup> through its involvement in the ongoing popular revolution. Its political discourse contains immediate

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42 A statement introducing the identity of the Citizenship Stream, March, 2011.

43 The statement of the Democratic Left Gathering in Syria, April, 2012.

44 Draft document of the Syrian Left Alliance, December, 2012

45 The transitional program of the Revolutionary Left in Syria, Damascus, 2012..

transitory tasks such as the overthrow of the regime, the formation of a provisional revolutionary government to work on the dismantling of the state security structures, and it calls for electing a founding assembly on the basis of proportional representation to draft a constitution for a civil, democratic, and pluralistic state.

## Syrian Civil Youths' Gathering

The gathering was established in July 2011 and was initiated by youth elites with left-wing background or members of left-wing parties. It calls for supporting the revolution, establishing peaceful coexistence between the different components of society, and uniting the Syrian society. On the other hand, it stresses the importance of liberating the occupied Golan.<sup>46</sup> The work mechanism of the Gathering is based on the principles of democracy, pluralism, and citizenship as means to bring Syria out of its current totalitarian system in a way which protects the society from tribal, ethnic and sectarian allegiances.

In addition to the above mentioned leftist groups, it is worth mentioning that there is another leftist gathering for Syrians living outside Syria. This gathering held its meeting in Brussels in March 2013, under the name of "The First Forum of the Syrian Marxist Left in Europe." It introduced itself as a revolutionary left party taking part in the revolution against the dictatorial regime, its symbols, and institutions. It said that it is biased to the lower classes of Syrian society and that it has firm stances against sectarianism. It also refuses all forms of imperial, reactionary, and regional interventions of countries allied to the regime or from those who claim to be friendly to the Syrian people. It also acknowledges the national legitimate rights of the Kurdish people and all other ethnic components. In addition, it stresses the importance of protecting the right to freedom of expression and belief, full citizenship rights, and the creation of a secular state based on strict separation between religion and the state. This group also believes in the importance of gender equality, protection of children's rights, the liberation of the occupied Golan, providing support to the Palestinian people in their fair struggle against occupation and Zionism, as well as supporting the people all over the world in their struggle against imperialist domination over their territories and wealth.<sup>47</sup>

In the same context, the "Watan Coalition" (The Nation Coalition) is another left-wing group in terms of its structure and tasks. It is composed of intellectual and leftist revolutionary elites. It proposes to unite the forces of the lower classes in order to overthrow the dictatorial regime and build a democratic and civil state and a society of justice and equality. The founding statement

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46 The founding statement of the Syrian Civil Youths Pulse Gathering, 5/7/2011.

47 Final founding statement of the First Forum of the Syrian Marxist Left in Europe , March 2013.

of the coalition was signed in February 2012, by fourteen civil and political forces with leftist orientation such as Together for Free and Democratic Syria Movement, the Citizenship Movement, the Coalition of Syrian Left, Vision for Change Movement, the Revolutionary Left in Syria, the Syrian Revolution Support Committee, the National Initiative of Jabal al-Arab, the Democratic National Action Committee in Jaramana, the al-Tareeq (Road) Gathering, the Dream Group, the Civilian Enlightenment Movement, the National Bloc in Syria, the National Gathering, and the Communist Cadres in Jabal al-Arab (a group composed of individuals and blocs that have deserted their traditional communist parties and the historical Left Bloc).

The Watan Coalition has gathered all those who share the same political opinions. It rejects violence and believes in the necessity of overthrowing the regime as an essential step towards building a new Syria.<sup>48</sup> What is unique about this coalition is that it is formed of people from different areas of Syria and different sects of Syrian society. The group puts an emphasis on civil rights and economic issues, specifically for the lower classes. In addition, it gives its support to regain the occupied Golan and gives support to the Palestinian people in their struggle for self-determination.

Finally, it should be noted that these leftist forces in Syria differ in their size, presence, and activities. However, under the current situation, it is hard to accurately assess their actual contributions and roles because they all work under very difficult security conditions, and it is dangerous or almost impossible, to know the real names of their leaders and the scope of their cadres' involvement in the popular movement. However, the majority of these forces are trustworthy and credible.

## Challenges Facing the Syrian Left

It is important to admit that the Syrian Left forces, which have suffered during the last decades from different forms of persecution, have partially contributed to the outbreak of the revolution either by creating political and cultural awareness, or by generating a revolutionary spirit among the people. It is also important to admit that all of these parties share a common vision and common tasks, mainly ending autocratic rule and replacing it with a democratic model through the building of a modern civil state governed by a new constitution which guarantees pluralism, human rights, minority rights, and peaceful transfer of power. Therefore, these forces should agree on common stances in regards to the on-going conflict and on a political solution, and they should reject any exclusionary and aggressive discourse, as well as any external interventions.

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<sup>48</sup> See the founding statement of the Watan Coalition, 13 February, 2012.

We should also acknowledge that leftist forces are still scattered and incapable of reaching out and gaining the trust of popular classes, the driving force of change and the force that has deep interests in seeing this change happen. This is because of subjective, as well as objective, reasons. They include the success of autocratic rule in creating a big gap between people and politics, the difficulty of working with people because of the rise in violence, the increase in external interventions and internal sectarian divisions, the growing influence of extremist Islamic groups, the absence of mutual confidence and trust between leftist groups because of the weak awareness, the different experiences and environments, the negative impact of underground work, and painful prison experiences.

We can still be optimistic because many people believe that the left in Syria has a promising future. This optimism is further enhanced by the growing interest among young people in public affairs and in leftist ideologies, and because the oppressive and authoritarian nature of the ruling regime has become clear. Moreover, the crisis and shortfalls of the traditional left-wing parties, such as the Syrian Communist Party, have also become clear.

## **The Need for a Common Leftist Vision and Identity**

Regardless of the influence of left-wing parties on the popular movement and the size of their current role, there is an urgent need to develop a common vision that could establish a common left-wing identity which supports democratic change, empowers the revolution politically, corrects its course, and assists in avoiding the pitfalls of violence and extremism. This vision should be capable of answering the pressing questions posed by the realities on the ground, and it should be based on workers' rights and interests. It should be a vision capable of establishing a comprehensive political and economic program which responds to the needs of marginalized sectors of Syrian society. A vision based on building the state on principles of citizenship, non-discrimination between people regardless of their religious, sectarian, ethnic origin, or gender, while emphasizing equality and social justice, liberating the occupied Golan, supporting the struggle of the Palestinian people, and fighting the challenges of globalization. The starting point of this project is the creation of a climate of trust between all movements and individuals committed to the values and guidelines of the leftist ideology in order to initiate an open dialogue with the aim of unifying programs and mechanisms, or at least unifying leftist parties' discourse and the rhythm of their political practices.

Now is the time for leftist forces to live up to their responsibilities and to take the initiative, close their ranks and overcome the pitfalls of hesitation and competition, inspired by petty politics, which is impeding their work. The current situation in the country needs joint efforts between all left-wing

parties so as to be able to capture the moment and take the political lead. The left needs to clearly prove that it is the most loyal party to the values of freedom, justice, and equality, and the most dedicated party capable of shouldering the historical responsibility. It should prove that it is capable of opposing authoritarian violence and monopolization of power methods, and fighting against sectarian divisions and all forms of intolerance and extremism.

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# The Palestinian Left in Israel

\* Raef Zreik

## Introduction: Towards a General Definition of the Left

The Palestinian experience in Israel is a deeply complicated and convoluted story. From the ethnic cleansing that took place in 1948 to the military government that was forced on them until 1966, Palestinians in Israel have seen a campaign of politicide and marginalization on most facets of their daily life. Considering this, documenting the Palestinian left in Israel is not as simple in other countries. There is no ideological reference point to use which would be beneficial in understanding the Palestinian left in Israel. In this critique, I will address the theses of the Palestinian Left in Israel, and how these theses developed throughout their history. I will also discuss the stances of the Palestinian Left related to central and key issues, most importantly its position with regard to Zionism and the Zionist project, its vision for resolving the Arab/Palestinian–Israeli conflict, its vision of the status of Palestinians in Israel, social and economic issues, women’s issues, and social issues related to the composition of the Palestinian society in general.

Before delving into the various stances of the Left, I would like to begin with two preface questions that should constitute the basis of my subsequent interpretations of the stances of the Palestinian left in Israel. The first question is an attempt to answer the following question, what is the Left that we are talking about and what is so specific about its leftist ideology? My second question aims at a diagnostic reading of the landscape where this left is active, namely what is the relationship of the left to the State of Israel considering the colonial-settler nature of the state itself?

When we talk about the Left, we are discussing a series of ideas and principles. It is not necessarily a certain party that possesses all these ideas and principles. Being a Leftist party is a qualitative, not quantitative, issue in the sense that there are levels of the Left and there is no “real” or “fake” Left. There is no one, single Left, but rather different leftist streams who agree and disagree with each other on any number of issues. Philosophically speaking, the Left has inherited Hobbes’s and Marx’s legacy which is based on building on what seems to be natural and spontaneous in the relations of society, politics, and the state. Hobbes held that the state and society are the result



of a human choice, and therefore they are a social facility. This facility is not a natural phenomenon as held by Aristotle's ideology or by Christian and Muslim doctrines. The state, before everything else, is a human creation, and thus we are responsible for its shape, essence, and values. We essentially find in it what we put into it.

Secondly, historically and ideologically, the Left is the product of modernity. It embraces modernity to its fullest, i.e., it embraces the values of rationalism and enlightenment to their fullest and it does the same with liberal values. On the values level, the Left adopts the idea of equality, or at least embraces it to its own ends. It attempts to twin the idea of freedom and the idea of equality into a careful balance to benefit humankind. While the liberal thought has only adopted the formalist political equality idea, based on the principle of equality before the law and equality in civil and political rights, the Left embraced the idea of equality to its fullest extent by advocating economic equality. This is due to the belief that formalist equality, in the absence of materialistic economic conditions which make it possible for individuals to ensure their destiny and control the course of their lives, is nothing but an ignorant idealism and will always remain imperfect. In this sense, the Left has surpassed liberal thought and, at the same time, it is regarded as a continuation of this thought that because it adopted the values of freedom and equality embraced by the liberal idea to the fullest extent. It asserts that true freedom requires the presence of material conditions to be achieved and that equality is a value inseparable from freedom.

The confluence of the first heritage, the society and the state as a social facility or a social product, with the other heritage, approaching equality and freedom to their fullest extent, creates the third feature of the Left which is based on a special understanding of the role of the state and society and their relation with the citizen. As a result, the role of the state and society becomes prominent in planning and administration, as opposed to the individual citizen. The state has a central role to play in planning and designing institutions, and social relations, especially when it comes to economic arrangements and adjusting and regulating the market. The state's role is also to provide a large basket of basic services to the citizenry. This gives it a central and crucial role in regulating the economy and other services, such as the provision of water, electricity, education, and health services. Accordingly, the Left in general, opposes the privatization process and the state's abandonment of its role as a provider of basic services to citizens.

Another feature of the Left, or more correctly the Marxist Left, is the way it understands the nature of social change. For this Left, the process of change requires a structural transformation, not necessarily to be reached through revolutions. This is because there is a firm conviction that there are structural limitations which prevent the possibility of change in the economic structure through reform. Therefore, the Left is a fundamental and radical movement in its aspirations in terms of both its objectives and its tools.

## The Environment of the Palestinian Left

The Palestinian Left is active within a state that defines itself, above all, as the state of the Jewish people and as a Jewish state. A Jewish state means that it is not a state for all of its citizens, in the sense that it excludes all its non-Jewish citizens, and does not strive to create equality between Jewish and non-Jewish citizens. A state of the Jewish people also means that the state is meant to benefit world Jewry and not just those Jews who are already citizens. In fact, the State of Israel has laws in place, such as the Law of Return, which grants world Jewry the right to automatic citizenship upon their entry into Israel, a right that Palestinian refugees are actively disabled from utilizing. Thus, all the Jews, all over the world, become potential citizens and can by force turn their potential citizenship status into actual citizenship.

Excluding Palestinians from the Israeli concept of citizenship, despite their presence in the state, and considering Jews living all over the world as citizens by force and as part of the Jewish nation, completely changes the concept of the demographics in Israeli society. This is because the state believes that its priority and basic obligations are not towards its citizens but towards world Jewry. The Jewish nature of the state is not only reflected in the Law of Return and the Citizenship Law, but is also reflected in a long series of legislation that establishes the identity of the Jewish state, the status of the Hebrew language, and Jewish heritage. This makes the citizenship status of Palestinian citizens questionable and as if the issue of their citizenship has not yet been resolved or even acknowledged.

In addition, there is the reality of the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, which has become a normal and commonly accepted reality. The increase and expansion of settlements, bypass roads, and the continued confiscation of land and water resources are all factors that have in fact transformed the West Bank into a part of the State of Israel when it comes to issues of settlements and settlers. Therefore, we cannot say that there is a temporary reality or military occupation, but rather a settlements reality which intertwines with the indigenous Palestinian population, a reality similar to apartheid in the South Africa model, rather than the British occupation of India, for example. As a result, we are talking about a state with no clear political boundaries because they are subject to constant expansion, as long as there is an expansion of the settlements. In fact, the settlers are part of the state's citizens, despite the fact that they may seem, at first glance, to be living outside its internationally recognized borders. In such a case, we are confronted with a state that can be best described as a movement rather than a well-established state. I am here referring to a state that has not defined its Demos or its borders, that is to say Israel is a state with a logic for its acts which is closer to the logic of the revolution than to the logic of a state.

There is also the fact that Israel does not separate religion from the state in many areas and the first area relates to immigration and citizenship. The definition of a Jew under the Law of Return is ultimately a religious definition, not to mention the special status of the religious establishment, which is still monopolizing the personal status issues related to marriage and divorce. In addition, the Chief Raccinate has other laws and arrangements that grant moral and financial privileges to the religious establishment such as the kashrut<sup>1</sup> laws and the budgets of religious schools.

Finally, it should be mentioned that Israel, until today, has not been able to finalize the drafting of its constitution. It is true that there are some basic laws, which have a special and important status allowing the Supreme Court to repeal laws and regulations that are inconsistent with the fundamental laws of the state. However, in spite of that, these laws, the way they are enacted and the topics they cover, are still far from providing a comprehensive draft constitution that protects and promotes the rights of minorities in Israel, such as the Palestinians, and leaves them at the whims of democratic rule in Israel.

What does it mean to be a leftist in a state of this kind? What does it mean to be a leftist in a state that has not yet completed its modernization project, or established itself as a state, determined its borders, or finished the drafting of its constitution; a state which declares itself a state for all Jews in the world, occupies the lands of other people and everyday seizes more of their lands and water resources? These questions become more urgent when asked of the Palestinian Left. Therefore the question becomes, what does it mean to be a Palestinian Leftist living in the State of Israel under such circumstances? Is there a difference, or should there be a difference between being a leftist, and being a Palestinian leftist in Israel?

## On Situations and Choices

In his book *The Colonizer and the Colonized*,<sup>2</sup> Albert Memmi says that there is actually no colonizer who does not accept colonialism. This simply means that it is impossible to find a resident of an Israeli settlement who does accept the privileges given to him by the whole settlement project and his being part of the settler movement. That is, a settler, by their status and their social and economic position, belong to a sector which is practicing a colonial project regardless of whether he or she likes it or not. The colonizer who refuses the whole colonial project finds himself facing two possibilities, they can either join the indigenous people in their struggle against colonialism and consider

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1 Kashrut laws: Jewish dietary rules setting biblical dietary restrictions according to the Jewish Torah.

2 Albert Memmi, *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, Beacon Press, Boston, 1965.

themselves as part of their struggle or return to their country of origin. Memmi considers it difficult to identify with the indigenous people and to take this path because there is a difficult barrier that cannot be easily crossed resulting from the differences in origins and experiences. As a result, self-rejecting colonizers find that the best way out is to leave the settlement and return to their country. It is meaningless to be a leftist and progressive person when the individual is a part of colonial reality which benefits them.

The basic idea of Memmi is that statuses preside over stances, and stances cannot surpass statuses. We are born in a certain status, and it becomes a state of belonging and a historic becoming beyond the will of people who find that history has put them in. Stances are subject to contemplation, thinking and free choice (as far as there is a free choice) of moral and political principles which individuals wish to defend, embrace and be inspired by. Each stance, said or announced, is presented from a certain status. The same stance may have different connotations and meanings when it is said or announced from a different status and the same stance may be considered radical if it is said or announced by a certain party from a certain status, and it may be considered conservative if it is said or announced by another party in another status. To be a leftist is a stance and to be a Palestinian in a Jewish state built on the ruins of your people and as part of an ethnic settlement project, is a status. What is the nature of the relationship between stances and statuses? How did this relationship manifest itself in the history of the Palestinian Left in Israel as a product of a settler-colonialist project?

In his analysis, Memmi concludes that it is impossible to find a leftist colonizer if they opt to continue to live in an occupied land knowing that by their actual and physical presence they are participating in a repressive and exploitative reality regardless of whether they like it or not. As a result, regardless of his status, his status will make his stances hypocritical and meaningless. Following the logic of Memmi, the following question becomes critical, "If the leftist colonizer is a phenomenon that carries its contradiction within it, considering it as a non-existent phenomenon, can we claim that the counter argument is, the colonized, by virtue of his status, his survival and endurance is performing a progressive leftist role regardless of his status?" Is the Palestinian in Israel a leftist by virtue of his status rather than his stance?

One must always be conscious of the political reality Palestinians in Israel are facing whenever analyzing the Palestinian Left in Israel. The role and power of the State of Israel has an important impact on these parties. On the Israeli background, Palestinians, regardless of their different streams, seem as if they are on the left side of the political map by demanding equality, the withdrawal of Israelis from the occupied territories, and social justice. It is different if we look at them from the background of a Palestinian community inside Israel. It is clear that it is difficult, if not impossible, to put the Islamic movement and the Communist Party in the same trench. This begs the question about the

concept of the left, is it the sum of political stances or does it go beyond that to form a social stance and a cultural practice as reflected, for example, in the perception of women and the choice of a particular approach to life?

## The Palestinian Left in Israel

The Palestinian Left in Israel has been divided, each stream according to its own understanding of its status. Today, most of the Israeli Communist Party members are, in fact, Palestinians who are citizens of the state of Israel, but they are organized in the ranks of a party which defines itself as an Israeli communist party. The Israeli Communist Party passed through several stages in terms of its composition and status. In the beginning, and before the establishment of the state, the Palestinian Communist Party was founded by a group of Jewish immigrants to Palestine in the 1920's. It continued to be a Jewish party for many years, but the Arabization of the party started at the behest of the Comintern. In the early 1940's the party split on an ethnic basis. The Communist Palestinians joined the "League of National Liberation" until the creation of the State of Israel in 1948. The League, or the members who remained, have joined the Palestinian Communist Party to establish "the Israeli Communist Party," which split again in 1965 and most of its Jewish members walked out of the party.

This framing of status was a matter of dispute among the Palestinians and within the Palestinian left. The first real consolidated group was "The Land" movement (Al-Ard),<sup>3</sup> created in the mid-sixties and has opted to define itself as a part of an Arab-Palestinian movement rather than an Israeli movement. However, the Land Movement was quickly suppressed and its members were expelled, although by this time it had created national awareness on the importance of self definition within a Palestinian movement. However, the Land Movement succeeded in leaving behind a very important theoretic legacy, namely the creation of a pan-Arab awareness which stems from a

3 Al-Ard, "The Land" Movement," was established in 1959 and it formed the national group that withdrew from the Arab Popular Front, established in May 1958. Its representative body was formed of two major streams: the communist and the pan-Arab streams. The Arab Front was dissolved on the backdrop of the increased tensions and conflicts between the two streams which form it because of conflicts between the Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser and the Iraqi President Abdul-Karim Qassim. The Al-Ard Movement, which carried the name of "the al-Ard Family," was headed by Mansour Kardoush, Habeeb Qahwaji, and Saleh Baransi respectively. The ideology of the movement was dominated by the idea of Arab unity and it considered the Palestinian cause a pan-Arab cause. It called for giving the Palestinians the right to self-determination within the framework of the Supreme Secretariat of the Arab Nation (Qahwaji 1978). The authorities were very hostile towards this movement and they refused to give it a license to issue a regular newsletter. To ensure the provision of funding sources, the movement founded a company under the "Land" name. The authorities also refused to register the movement as a political party in 1964. The defense minister issued an order banning the activities of the Land Movement and ordered the confiscation of its property in October 1964. For more details: see Jiryis Sabri, 1973, *al-Arab fi Israel* (Arabs in Israel), Beirut, Institute for Palestine Studies; Moustafa and Ghanem, 2005, *al-Tantheem al-Siyasi lil Filastiniyeen fi Israel* (Political organizations of Palestinians in Israel), Ibn Khaldun series, *al-Mujtamaa al-Filastini fi Israel* (The Palestinian Society in Israel); Cardoush, Mansour, 1978, *Masar Harakat al-Ard* (The path of Land Movement), Shuoun Falastiniyah (Palestinian Affairs), March. Kahwaji, Habeeb, *al-Qissah al-Kamilah li Harakat al-Ard* (The full story of the Land Movement), Jerusalem, Manshourat al-Arabi.

Palestinian-Arab. This campaign considers that the core of the conflict between Palestinians, and Arabs as a whole, is in fact against the Zionist movement, and not Jews as a people. This legacy was reflected in the emergence of two movements, the Abnaa al-Balad movement (Sons of the Land movement)<sup>4</sup> and the Progressive Movement.<sup>5</sup> Historically, it is possible to understand these two movements as different reflections of the Land Movement's thought. The first, Abnaa al-Balad, as a leftist wing movement within a Palestinian struggle, and the second, the Progressive Movement, as a right-wing movement within this struggle. The awareness created by the Land Movement had enabled the creation of a Palestinian intellectual class. This class was divided into two political movements, one which represents the Palestinian left in Israel with similar theses to the Palestinian left as represented by the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine. The second is another branch of the left, the Progressive Movement, with a similar ideology to Fateh and the right-wing of Fateh.

During the 1990's, the emergence of the National Democratic and Arab Assembly (NDA),<sup>6</sup> was an attempt to establish the two dimensions of the political identity of the Palestinians in Israel to the fullest extent. First there was the civil dimension, represented by their Israeli citizenship and a demand for a "state of its citizens;" and the national identity and a demand for "self-

- 4 The first organization of the Abnaa al-Balad was established in Umm al-Fahm in 1969 with the aim of addressing local issues and not as a regional political organization. Despite this, in subsequent years, the founders of the movement started to stress the relationship between local activities and political issues. The founding meeting of the movement was held in 1972 with the participation of 17 people from among the pan-Arab activists living in the main villages in the triangle area. This movement, since its inception, had refused to participate in the Knesset elections because it refused to give legitimacy to the Israeli state. The movement strengthened its activities targeting the Palestinian students in the various Israeli universities. The branches of the Abnaa al-Balad in the different universities were named the "Progressive National Movement." The strength of the movement declined in the late seventies and early eighties. For more information, see Moustafa and Ghanem, 2005, al-Tantheem al-Siyasi lil Filastiniyeen fi Israel (Political organizations of Palestinians in Israel), Ibn Khaldun series, al-Mujtamaa al-Filastini fi Israel (The Palestinian Society in Israel), Haider, Aziz 1995. "Al-Haraka al-Wataniya al-Taquadumiyah –Abnaa al-Balad: Dirasa fi al-Qawmi wa al-Yawmi fi al-Fikr al-Siyasi bayna al-Filastiniyeen fi Israel (The National Progressive Movement, Abnaa al-Balad: A Study in the daily national and political thought among Palestinians in Israel). Center for the Study and Documentation of Palestinian society: Bir Zeit University.
- 5 The Progressive Movement was initiated in the city of Nazareth. A small group of the Democratic Front decided to withdraw from it and to form a new movement under the name of "The National Bloc," which later on called itself the Progressive Movement–Nazareth. Later on, and in preparation for the eleventh Knesset elections held in 1984, the movement announced the formation of the "Progressive Movement," which teamed up with the Badeel Group (The Alternative) under the leadership of Dr. Matti Peled and journalist Uri Aweiri. The two formed together the "Progressive List for Peace" and the list was headed by the lawyer Muhammad Miari. In its statements, the movement stressed the Palestinian national affiliation of Palestinians in Israel and called for recognition of the PLO as the sole representative of the Palestinian people. It supported the establishment of a Palestinian state alongside the State of Israel. It was represented in the eleventh Knesset by Muhammad Miari and Matti Peled after winning 17.6% of the Arab vote. For more information, see Moustafa and Ghanem, 2005, al-Tantheem al-Siyasi lil Filastiniyeen fi Israel (Political organizations of Palestinians in Israel); Benjamin Neuberger, Reuven Aharoni, and Mustafa Kabha, 2010, al-Mujtamaa al-Filastini fi Israel (The Palestinian Society in Israel), Part 3, "Ahzab wa Intikhabat, Qiyadat wa Wasaal Itisalat (Parties, elections, leaders and means of communications), Open University.
- 6 It was formed in 1996 and it gathered many political and academic movements who were active in Arab cities and towns. Examples of these movements are the Abnaa al-Balad Movement, a group of the Mithaq al-Musawat (Equality Charter), which was composed of a group which had left the Israeli Communist Party and most of its members were previously active in the student movement, a group of the Progressive Movement, which competed in the 1992 elections but did not pass the threshold, as well as other local organizational formations. For more information on the themes of this political group, see: Bishara, Azmi, 1999, al-Bayan al-Qawmi al-Dimocrati (The National Democratic Statement), the third Conference of the National Gathering. For the political program of the party see: <http://altajamu.netaj.co.il/site/program>.

administration and the collective rights of the Palestinian citizens in Israel.” It could be argued that the NDA had tried to combine the two trends in an attempt to consolidate their power and focus it on common goals.

## Stances and Statuses of Leftist Palestinian Political Parties and Movements in Israel

### The Israeli Communist Party

The Israeli Communist Party is one of the oldest Israeli parties. It was founded in 1919 (as a Palestinian communist party) by a group of Jewish immigrants to Palestine who were influenced by Marxist thought and the worldwide communist movement. For some years, the Palestinian Communist Party remained a purely Jewish party working in the Jewish community only. At the behest of Comintern, the party decided to Arabize itself<sup>7</sup> and to become an Arab and Jewish party. During the 1930’s, some Arab activists joined the party but in 1942, it split again, and the Arab communists formed the “League of National Liberation.” However, after the creation of the State of Israel, the two factions of the party re-united and formed one party under the name of the Israeli Communist Party, and its membership was open to Jewish and Arab citizens of the state of Israel. In 1965, there was yet another split in the party and many of its key Jewish activists walked out because of a key disagreement on the role of the Zionist movement. The wing which split from the party, headed by Moshe Sneh, was more biased in favour of the Jewish identity and had Zionist leanings. However, the dissident wing quickly faded from the political map and did not leave any trace or heritage in the communist movement, and its members joined other parties in the Zionist left. Here we have to point out that despite the fact that the party calls itself an Israeli party and sees itself mainly as part of the Israeli political map, most of its activists and members are Palestinian-Israeli. Therefore, Palestinians in Israel and for a big part of the Palestinian Left were very well aware of their choice to work within the framework of an Israeli party. However, making this choice did not negate the fact that those who took this conscious decision are, in general, part of the Palestinian left.

According to the 25th report to the congress of the Israeli Communist Party, held in 2008, the party defined itself as a “revolutionary party which aspires to achieve peace, equality, social justice, democracy, and profound social change towards socialism.”<sup>8</sup> The report also mentioned that, based on the party’s constitution, “the Communist Party struggles to achieve a renewed revolutionary socialism.” This definition was stated in Article 4 of the party’s constitution, “the Israeli Communist Party is the party of class struggle. It

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7 For more information, see Musa al-Budairi: “Shuyouiyouna fi Falastin – Shathaya Tareekh Mansi (Communists in Palestine - Fragments of a Forgotten History), Muwatin, Ramallah, 2013. Specifically, see the excellent introduction of the writer pp. 19-37. On the Arabization of the party, see p 26.

8 The report to the 25th congress of the Israeli Communist Party, Abu Rahmoun Printing Press, Acre, 2009, p.87.

is the revolutionary party of the working class and all exploited sectors of the society. It is the true national internationalism party, an Arab-Jewish party which struggles for the true interests of Israel and for the interests of all its inhabitants.”<sup>9</sup> The report also states that, “we offer to capitalism a key alternative, socialism, as we defined it in Article 3 of the basic principles of the party, as “a humane and democratic society built on social justice, the power of the working class and social change which replaces capitalism, a system of class exploitation and the exploitation of man by man.” The party believes that the lesson learnt from the failures of the twentieth century by the communist movement shows that “we should not abandon our demand for a revolutionary transformation of society, but we should struggle to bring about this change correctly.”<sup>10</sup> The party considers itself a revolutionary party, as stated in the above mentioned report to the congress. “The role of the party gains more importance when we talk about a communist party that takes a revolutionary, leading role in defending the interests of all workers and suppressed and exploited people...” It is essential for a revolutionary communist party, such as the Israeli Communist Party, to maintain a proper revolutionary structure,<sup>11</sup> and it considers itself a Marxist-Leninist party.”<sup>12</sup>

## The Position of the Communist Party on Capitalism, Imperialism, and Class Struggle

Capitalism and imperialism occupy a large space in the party’s literature, and the stances in regards to these two issues are regarded as a major guiding measure of the party’s policy and its analysis of political events. The party, in its analysis, starts by drawing the bigger picture concerning the status of today’s capitalism and cross borders corporate capitalism and then it analyses Israeli capitalism. Based on these analyses, tangible stances are made regarding the Israeli and the Arab-Israeli conflict contexts. It is clear from the way the party deals with the different topics and the way the chapters are organized that the party starts from general issues and ends with specific issues on the basis that it is possible to derive actual stances based on general issues. The party also considers that the general context which needs to be analysed is market capitalism and the globalization of big corporations because “the neo-liberal policies are being imposed by force through the use of military threats and political pressure.”<sup>13</sup>

Bluntly, the report to the congress states that “the neo-liberal fundamentalism, which is mainly sponsored by the United States, is the main threat to workers’

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9 Ibid, p. 87.

10 Ibid, p. 89.

11 Ibid, p. 99.

12 Ibid, p. 102.

13 Ibid, p. 24.



rights and the rights of peoples.<sup>14</sup> As part of this understanding of the global economic structure, the party believes that from the day that Israel pursued a policy of economic openness in 1985, it became a “subcontractor for multinational companies,”<sup>15</sup> which explains the privatization policy in Israel, the rise in unemployment, and the violation of labourers’ and wage earners’ rights. In addition, “the Israeli policy of occupation, which impedes the reaching of a political solution, is responsible for the continuous military/political confrontation with the Palestinians and is a source of direct and indirect destruction of the Israeli economy.”<sup>16</sup> Accordingly, the party’s economic policy program is based on a radical reduction of military expenditures, the ending of the funding of settlements, the end of the occupation, the cancellation of the privatization of state-owned companies and public services projects, and protecting the interests of the Israeli economy from the dictate of multinational companies.

## The Communist Party and the Palestinian Question

Historically, the Communist Party supported the 1947 partition resolution. It considered that the rejection by the Palestinian leadership of the proposal was a grave mistake, for which the Palestinians are still paying the price. The party considers Israel to be a Jewish state, in the sense that it is an expression of Jewish self-determination in their national home.<sup>17</sup> When Israel occupied the rest of the Palestinian territories in 1967, the party was the first to demand an end to the occupation and the creation of an independent Palestinian state in the occupied territories.

However, it is important to pay attention to the party’s assumptions when we analyse the national question in Palestine. The party indicates that “there are two clear and contradictory class-guided approaches regarding the national question, the internationalist proletariat orientation, which stems from the analysis of the class nature of the capitalist society and from the interests of laborers regardless of their nationalities. Secondly, there is the bourgeois orientation, which analyzes the reality on the basis of equations that may seem simple, people versus people, culture versus culture, religion versus religion, and civilization versus civilization<sup>18</sup>”.

The Israeli Communist Party considers the Zionist movement a reactionary movement in its ideology, as well as in its applications. In its seventeenth

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14 Ibid, p. 25.

15 Ibid, p. 46.

16 Ibid, p. 50.

17 Ibid, p. 76.

18 Ibid, p. 70.

Congress, the party gave reasons why Zionism is a reactionary movement. The party said that, first of all, the movement adopts a national and racist logic, and it ignores capitalist and class issues. It refuses the only tangible change, the socialist revolution. Secondly, it calls on the Jewish toilers to isolate themselves from the toilers of other peoples. Third, it is unrealistic, and it recognizes the existence of a global Jewish nation, capable of crossing regional barriers. Fourth, it conspires against the socialist system. Fifth, it is a military tool in the hands of imperialism against the Arab national movement. Finally, it contradicts the interests of Jewish workers everywhere, and it is against the national interests of the Israeli people.<sup>19</sup> The report to the twenty-fifth Congress noted that the Communists have fought many years against the Zionist ideology and practices and against the occupation of land “and stealing the land of Arab peasants,” against “the Hebron actions,” and “the persecution of Arab workers.”<sup>20</sup> The report to the twenty-fifth Congress added that “Zionism expresses the interests of the large Jewish bourgeoisie, and contradicts with the interests of the workers and with the interests of the Israeli people.”<sup>21</sup>

However, the party, in the same spirit, considers the partition resolution as an expression of the right of Jews to self-determination. In a comprehensive lecture in 1979 on the history of the Communist Party, on the occasion of its sixtieth anniversary of the creation of the party, Meyer Velner, the secretary general of the party said that “with the transformation of Palestine over the years into a binational, Arab-Jewish country, we called for the respect of the right of both peoples to self-determination and to national sovereignty. By this, we have expressed the real national interests of the Jewish people and the Arab people in our country.”<sup>22</sup> Velner added that “when the General Assembly of the United Nations adopted its historic resolution on 29.11.1947, imperialism had then tried and it is still trying to abort and hinder it.” From Velner’s lecture, one can understand that he considers the creation of the Jewish state as an achievement against imperialism.

If we put historical issues aside, it becomes clear that the Communist Party, and also the Democratic Front for Peace and Equality, have for decades adopted the principle of a Palestinian state within the 1967 borders, the evacuation of all settlements, and the recognition of East Jerusalem as the capital of the State of Palestine. The party also recognizes the importance of the Israeli withdrawal from the occupied Golan Heights as a condition for peace with

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19 Report to the 17th Congress, published by the Central Bureau of the Israeli Communist Party, al-Itihad Cooperative Printing, 1972, pp. 246-248.

20 The report to the 25th Congress, p. 90.

21 *Ibid.*, p. 90.

22 Sitouna Aaman Ala al-Hizb al-Shiyouei al-Israeli (The Israeli Communist Party after Sixty Years of its Creation), the Communist Party Publications, 1980, in Hebrew, p. 47 (translated by R. Z).

Syria. The program of the Front ensures the recognition of West Jerusalem as the capital of the state of Israel. In addition, the party calls for a just solution to the Palestinian refugee problem in line with the United Nations resolutions that recognize their right to choose between return and compensation. At the time, the Communist Party and the Front welcomed the Oslo Accords and called for the implementation of these accords. In spite of their reservations on some of the terms of the Geneva Initiative, the party said that "it sees it is a valuable document because it stresses the importance of a political solution and the necessary condition to reach this solution, negotiations with the Palestinian leadership."<sup>23</sup> The Front and the Party have also welcomed the Palestinian Authority's step of going to the UN to demand the recognition of Palestine as a member of the UN General Assembly.<sup>24</sup>

## The Communist Party and the Palestinians in Israel

On this issue, there has been progress made by the Communist Party. In its twentieth congress, held in 1985, the party stated "the Arabs in Israel are a national minority, and they are a part of the Palestinian Arab people." The report to the Congress<sup>25</sup> speaks about discriminatory policies against this sector of the Palestinian people. When the party program talks about equal civil and national rights of the Arab population in Israel, it refers in the first article to the need to "recognize under the law the Arab population in Israel as a national minority."<sup>26</sup> However, the report to the congress does not give any details on what is meant by this recognition. In the twenty-fifth Congress, we learn the details of this recognition, the right to Arabic and Palestinian language and culture, the duty of the state to recognize the Nakba, and to change the symbols of the state to reflect the presence of an Arab minority.

In regards to the national organization of Arabs, i.e. the election of representative bodies recognized by the state, the position of the party and the Front was conservative. In its response to the idea of electing an Arab parliament or an Arab representative body, the statement of the party's twenty-fifth Congress said that "this proposal is harmful, because it implicitly means the abandonment of confrontation in the main struggle yard, the state yard and limiting it to minor yards. Abandoning confrontation in the state yard reflects despair with the struggle for democracy and aims to replace it. Hence, it touches the existential interests of the Arab masses in Israel and leads to the abandonment of the Arab citizens' struggle, together with the Jewish

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23 Report to the 25th Congress, p. 37.

24 See the *Itihad* editorial dated 30.11.2012 entitled: *Mabrouk li Filistin* (Congratulations for Palestine).

25 The Israeli Communist Party, report to the 20th Congress, published by the Central Bureau of the Israeli Communist Party, 1986, *al-Itihad* Cooperative Printing Press, Haifa, p. 106.

26 The Report to the 20th Congress, p. 110.

democratic forces, against discrimination and racism.”<sup>27</sup> However, despite this major reservation, it could be said that the party made good steps in the 1970’s and 1980’s when it initiated the building of semi-representative bodies such as Arab student committees in the universities and the Committee for the Defence of Land. Unfortunately, the party did not go far in this experiment, considering that this would affect the Arab-Jewish work and isolate the Arabs in Israel.

In 2007, a set of documents were published and were later on known as the “Haifa Document,”<sup>28</sup> “The Democratic Constitution,” published by Adala, the Legal Center for Arab Minority Rights in Israel,<sup>29</sup> and the “Future Vision,” issued by the National Committee for the Heads of Arab Local Authorities in Israel.<sup>30</sup> Anyone who reads these documents can feel the nationalist tone contained in them and can also feel that they insist on considering the Palestinians as the indigenous population. The documents stress the identity issue of Palestinians, and it interprets the Jewish presence in the country through the prism of a settler-colonialist project. The party, in its twenty-fifth Congress, tackled this issue and said “there are many working papers and documents which tackle the issues of the Arab population. They all focus their efforts on answering the following question, how can we ensure a space for the new emerging Arab elites at the table of the Israeli elites? These documents often ignore the interests of the wider Arab social strata, workers, the unemployed, and families living in poverty.”<sup>31</sup> In response to these documents, the party presented its stance as “a party continuously struggling to induce a profound structural change in Israeli society which would guarantee the rights of all citizens, Arabs and Jews, to work with dignity and to earn fair wages and guarantee their right to shelter, housing, and free education”<sup>32</sup>.

In general, the party has its reservations with regard to the increase and the growth in the number of associations that appear under the aim of “professionalizing the mechanisms of the Arab public’s struggle.” It considers the emergence of these associations, with each working in one specific field as “a way of withholding the Arab masses from understanding the problem of discrimination against them and their relations with their allies in the Israeli society.”<sup>33</sup>

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27 Report to the 25th Congress, p. 69.

28 Haifa Document; <http://mada-research.org/wp-content/uploads/2007/09/haifaarabic.pdf>

29 Adala Document: <http://adalah.org/category/551/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AF%D8%B3%D8%AA%D9%88%D8%B1-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AF%D9%8A%D9%85%D9%82%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%B7%D9%8A/1/0/0>

30 The Future Vision; <http://www.arab-lac.org/tasawor-mostaqbali.pdf>

31 The Report to the 25th Congress, p. 69.

32 Ibid, p. 71.

33 Ibid, p. 68.

## The Party and the Arab Revolutions

The Democratic Front for Justice and Equality and the Communist Party dealt positively with the Tunisian revolution, and in the beginning of the Egyptian revolution, the party was enthusiastic about it. The party's enthusiasm was driven by the authoritarian nature of the Mubarak regime on the one hand, and the regime's close links with US policy and US interests on the other. Therefore, when the Muslim Brotherhood came to power and they began their national project, the Front and the Communist Party quickly lost their enthusiasm because they believe the Muslim Brotherhood to be initiating similar policies to those of Mubarak.<sup>34</sup>

As with everything related to the Syrian revolution, the vast majority of the party's members dealt conservatively with it and in a way that could be described as fairly hostile. The party considered the Syrian revolution as a part of a major plot, whose major supporters are the United States, Israel, Qatar, Turkey, and Saudi Arabia. It also considered that the revolution aims at ending the resistance role of Syria, as a state of resistance and steadfastness against US projects in the region. However, we must point out that it is not accurate to say that there were no voices within the party who were not enthusiastic about this analysis and who saw that the Syrian people have the right to revolt for freedom and dignity. They also said that it is not reasonable to blame the Syrian people if they revolt against their regime.<sup>35</sup>

It is important to highlight some general information about the party and its current position. The Communist Party is not directly represented in the Israeli Knesset under this name, but it participates in the elections under the name Hadash, the Democratic Front for Peace and Equality. Hadash is a political front that does not adopt all the ideological principles of the Communist Party, but is based on fundamental principles focused on the themes of peace, equality, the rights of workers and wage earners, and women's equality. For years, the party and the front were the major representatives of the Palestinians in Israel in the Knesset. Until the late seventies, they were the only representatives of Palestinians. In the eighties, the Progressive Movement, the Democratic National Assembly and the Consolidated List (which is mainly composed of Islamic forces and their allies, the Arab Movement for Change and the Democratic Arab Party) emerged. The front is today represented in the Knesset by four deputies, Muhammad Baraka, Dov Hanin, Hanna Sweid, and Afwa Aghbariyeh. In principle, the party and the Front maintained the Jewish-Arab makeup of the Knesset list over the past six decades, except in one of the elections when this rule was violated, and it was corrected in subsequent

<sup>34</sup> See: al-Itihad editorial, 17.12.2012.

<sup>35</sup> For a summary on the position of the party and the front with regard to the Arab revolutions, see: Madar Strategic Report, 2013, published by Madar, the Palestinian Center for Israel Studies, Ramallah, 2013, pp. 222-220.

elections. We must also point out that the activities of the party, by virtue of its being an ideological, intellectual doctrinal party, were not limited to politics only. It has participated actively in the union's elections over the last two years. What is more important is that it has issued, over the last decades, specialized magazines dealing with intellectual issues and literature, such as the al-Jadid Magazine which focuses on Palestinian-Arab culture, al-Darb, which dealt with intellectual matters and the al-Ghad, which covered youth issues.

## The National Democratic Assembly (NDA)

The NDA does not define itself as a left-wing party although in its theses and practices it has many things in common with the party and the Front. The points of intersection raise some questions about the meaning and the specificity of the left in Israel. Are the party and the Front stances in regards to the Palestinian cause, the cause of the Palestinians in Israel, the issues of privatization, anti-US stances, limited to the left parties? Or is it possible to derive these stances from other liberal or secular intellectual categories that do not necessarily belong to the leftist heritage? If so, what is special about the left of the Communist Party and the front?

The National Democratic Assembly (NDA), defines itself as follows:

"NDA is a pan-Arab, Palestinian national party with democratic principles, approach, and political objectives. It is committed to the principles of social justice, human rights, and peoples' rights, and it works with the Palestinian-Arab masses in Israel, and with the Israeli society in general, to establish links between national identity, democratic principles, and the requirements of building a free, modern, and developed society." NDA stresses that in principle, it relies on the "progressive human heritage, the heritage of the Arab national movement. and the Palestinian national movement."<sup>36</sup>

Awad Abdel Fattah,<sup>37</sup> the secretary of the party, defined the identity of the party saying: "NDA is a pan-Arab, secular party with national, democratic, secular, and enlightened pan-Arab members. It is not a Jewish-Arab party like the Israeli Communist Party."<sup>38</sup> Abdel Fattah added that the NDA works for the "abolition of the Zionist character of the State of Israel, which defines itself as a Jewish state and not as an Arab-Jewish state."<sup>39</sup> Despite the fact that NDA is a nationalist party, it works for the betterment of all the citizens of the

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36 The political programme of NDA as approved in 2004, p. 1.

37 He became involved at the end of the 1970's with the Abnaa al-Balad Movement. He was vice secretary general of the movement until the creation of NDA. Since 1997 and until today, he is the secretary-general of the NDA.

38 *Khitab ila al-Shabab* (A message to the youth), Awad Abdel Fattah, Published by NDA, the Central Education Department, 2006.

39 *Ibid*, p. 29.

State of Israel. Awad Abdel Fattah wrote that the “NDA provides a solution not only for the Palestinian-Arabs, but also for the Jews. It adopts the slogan of transforming Israel into a state for all of its citizens, a state where there is no racism, and a state of full equality between Arabs and Jews. In addition, the door should remain open for working together for a democratic and humane comprehensive solution, a binational state in all of the historic Palestine.”<sup>40</sup>

The NDA considers that the core conflict is between Zionism, as a settler-colonialist movement, and the Palestinians, the indigenous population of the country. Based on this consideration, an internationalist class analysis carried out by the Communist Party seems incompatible and not capable of understanding the nature of the conflict. In this context, Azmi Bishara wrote that “the existing national discrimination against the Arab citizens in the state is not a discrimination against an ethnic minority resulting from conflict between two bourgeoisie classes or from the desire of the Jewish bourgeoisie to tighten its grip on power in Israel...National discrimination against Arab citizens in Israel is the result of excluding the Arabs completely from the definition which the state gives to itself and the relationship between the different national groups and the state in Israel...The Jewish citizen in Israel, regardless of his social class, is more privileged than the Palestinian citizen in terms of his relation with the state apparatus and its institutions. This issue is not a fake or false ideology, it is the actual reality.”<sup>41</sup> Bishara refers to the evolution of class analysis to understand the situation of the Palestinian. In this regard, Bishara notes that “the conflict on the land of Palestine is a conflict between a settler-colonialist project which aims at transforming itself into a political project (the creation of a state) and between a national movement of the Palestinian people under crystallization and coming up with political projects. The conflict within the Zionist movement was not a conflict between a Zionist labour stream or an anti-Zionist stream and between a bourgeois stream within the same settlement project.”<sup>42</sup>

The NDA does not pay the same central importance to the analysis of capitalism and imperialism as the Communist Party, although one may find language similar to the language used by the Communist Party here and there, but not with the same intensity and the same perseverance. In the political statement of the sixth Congress held in 2011, the NDA speaks about the capitalist neo-liberal model saying that “this model has taken a brutal form of competition and domination, and it has deepened the social class gaps between the global north and south. US policy has been characterized by domination, plunder, and monopoly. This imperialist policy is at the heart of the structure of the system

40 Ibid, p. 29.

41 Azmi Bishara, *Al-Khitab al-Sisyasi al-Mabtour wa Dirasat Ukhra* (The abrupt political discourse and other studies) Muwatin, The Palestinian Institute for the Study of Democracy: Ramallah, 1998, p 185.

42 Ibid, pp. 183-184.

and the ruling elites in the United States of America.”<sup>43</sup> The statement praises resistance in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Lebanon (Hezbollah), which have thwarted American plans in the region.

## The NDA and the Palestinian Cause

In terms of the historical analysis, the NDA admits that the first catastrophe lies in the partition resolution because it was a historic achievement of the Zionist movement and the cradle of the Palestinian Nakba. Therefore, the conflict is not about 1967, but instead 1948. The Palestinian acceptance of a state within the 1967 borders is a concession by them and a part of their contribution to a historic compromise.

Accordingly, the premises for resolving the Palestinian issue, are based on the fact that there is a “people who were robbed of their land and a people who are victims of displacement and occupation.” The political program speaks about the importance of ending the occupation in the land occupied in June 1967, the evacuation of all settlements, the establishment of a sovereign Palestinian state, and the reaching of a just solution to the refugee issue on the basis of international law.<sup>44</sup> Even though the NDA formally adopts the two-state solution, its leaders are still devising plans to advance the one-state solution.

The NDA has its reservations in regards to the Oslo Accords. In the statement of the sixth Congress held in 2011, it said that “the Oslo Accords signed with the PLO leadership in 1993 is a serious mistake. It has created a deep rift within the national movement, led to the fragmentation of the cause into multiple files, and created an authority under occupation without actual sovereignty.”<sup>45</sup> The NDA believes that the Palestinian cause is passing through “a phase of decomposition because of the historical mistakes made by its leadership.”<sup>46</sup> It believes that Israel rejects the one-state solution and also rejects the two-state solution. In reality, it has chosen the “crusader state” model by refusing all Palestinian and Arab initiatives. Therefore, the NDA sees that there is no hope of continuing the current negotiations.<sup>47</sup>

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43 Ibid, p. 4.

44 See the political program – the one-bi-national-state solution. Also see: Awad Abdel Fattah: *Khitab ila al-Shabab* (A message to the youth), p. 29, and Awad Abdel Fattah, “Maazaq al-Taswiyeh wa Afaq al-Dawla al-Wahida, Dawr Filistiniyi al-48 fi al-Mashroua al-Dimocrati” (The impasse of the settlement and the one state prospects, the role of the 48 Palestinians in the democratic project).

45 The statement of the 6th congress, p. 85.

46 Ibid, p. 12.

47 Ibid, p. 16.



## The NDA and the Palestinians in Israel

The NDA focuses on understanding the nature of the relationship with the State of Israel as a settler-colonialist project that has been built on the ruins of the Palestinian people. Therefore, the program acknowledges that “Palestinians in Israel are the indigenous population of the country, who became a minority in their homeland after the Nakba. They are part of the Palestinian people and the Arab nation in terms of their national pan-Arab, cultural, and civil affiliation.<sup>48</sup> The NDA demands the recognition of the Palestinians as a national minority with what this means under international conventions relating to national minorities, in particular the UN Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities adopted in 1992. Among the issues stressed by NDA is the right to create representative and popular institutions for the Palestinian minority, and that the state of Israel should recognize these institutions. In other words, the Palestinian Arabs should be organized on a national basis through direct elections of the various bodies. In addition, the NDA demands giving a kind of veto power to the elected Arab representative bodies, and it rejects any government decision to be taken in regards to the Palestinians in Israel if the decision is not discussed with the Arab elected bodies. If we add to these demands the demand to acknowledge the cultural rights of Palestinians in Israel and their right to administer their cultural affairs, we are in fact approaching the model of a binational state within Israel itself.<sup>49</sup> Considering this emphasis on national identity, NDA believes that Israel should become a state for all of its citizens and ensure individual equality for all its residents, regardless of their sectarian, religious, ethnic, and national affiliation. The NDA does not see any contradiction between its emphasis on the national identity and its civil demand of turning Israel into a state for all of its citizens and the adoption of a Constitution which guarantees equality, separates religion from the state and bans all forms of discrimination.<sup>50</sup>

The party does not close the door to cooperation with the Jewish forces. In the NDA program, it is mentioned that “the party shall cooperate with the Jewish democratic circles that share the same vision, stances, and respect the specificity of the national cause of Arab citizens.”<sup>51</sup> This means that the NDA is looking for Jewish partners who agree that the basis of the conflict is not the occupation of 1967, but the 1948 Nakba and the displacement of Palestinians from their homeland. It is important to point out that among the NDA members, activists, and supporters, there are radical Jewish intellectuals. That being said, the overwhelming majority of its members are Arab.

48 The program of the party, March 2006.

49 *Khitab ila al-Shabab* (A Message to the Youth), op.cit, (39), p. 29.

50 See the NDA program, 2004, p. 5.

51 The program of NDA, 2004, p. 6.

In the social sphere, the discourse used by the NDA is closer to leftist liberalism or liberal left discourse. The NDA, in the details of its programs, calls for the importance of “opposing the policy of budget cuts related to social and health services’ budgets, and liberating the services sector, social security, health, and education from the control of market laws.” It also demands the adoption of “a fair tax policy, the defense of the unemployed persons’ rights, and the protection of the rights of workers and employees.”<sup>52</sup> At the international level, the NDA does not see itself as a part of a revolutionary socialist project although it calls for an international society and to a global alternative system “based on equality, joint work, the balance of interests, mutual cooperation, progress, social justice, equitable distribution of wealth between rich and poor countries, economic security, and a safe environment”<sup>53</sup>.

In regards to the recent Arab revolutions, the leadership of the NDA was supportive of the Egyptian revolution, while there were different views within the party leadership regarding the Syrian revolution. While some party members such as Dr. Jamal Zahalqa and Haneen Zoabi, supported it, others like Mustafa Taha, have opposed it. Awad Abdel Fattah, the secretary of the party, took a multifaceted stance with its regard.<sup>54</sup>

In the 1999 elections, the NDA ended its alliance with the front and fought the elections in alliance with the Arab Movement for Change, headed by Dr. Ahmed Tibi. This has led to the resignation of part of its cadres. Since then, the party has competed in the elections on an independent list, but it still enters into some alliances here and there in its electoral list.

In 2007, after the forced departure of Dr. Azmi Bishara, the party leader at that time, Dr. Jamal Zahalqa became the party leader. In the last elections, the party competed on an independent list and won three seats in the Israeli Knesset. These seats were given to Dr. Jamal Zahalqa, Hanin Zoabi, and Dr. Basil Ghattas. It should be noted that in the penultimate elections, Hanin Zoabi was elected on the NDA list, and this happened because the party’s internal constitution stipulated that a woman’s name should be listed among the first three names on the list. Therefore, Hanin Zoabi was the first Arab woman member of the Knesset to win on an Arab list. This has had its impact on women’s activities in the Arab Palestinian society as a whole, and it has urged other parties to put the names of women in more advanced positions to ensure female representation. Within the list of the front, Nabila Espanioly’s name was the fifth, and there was an agreement that she alternate with MP Mohammed Baraka, whose name was the first on the list.

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52 The programme of the party, 2004, p. 5.

53 The NDA programme, 2004, p. 6.

54 For a detailed review of the stances of the party leaders, see: the strategic report of Madar for the year 2013, op.cit, (35), p. 222.

The NDA has been publishing since 1996, the *Fasl al-Maqal*, which is the party's newspaper. It also administrates the "Arab 48" website which is close to the party. The party tried, and is trying, to establish close relations with the neighbouring Arab governments, peoples, and organizations because it believes that it is part of the political map of the greater Arab world. This is demonstrated in the several visits made by party leaders to neighbouring Arab countries, particularly Syria before the revolution.

## Conclusion

There are several questions to be raised when we talk about the Palestinian left in Israel. These questions contribute to clarifying the concept of the Left in general, and this is because of the very special situation in which the Left finds itself. First of all, the question of the relationship between the state, the economy, and politics in the Palestinian case in Israel sheds light on dimensions which may remain hidden in other cases, and which may clarify the extent of the complicated relationship between the market, the state, and Palestinian society.

The Jewish community in Israel has grown as a settler society separate from the Palestinian-Arab community. It has grown inside the womb of the British Mandate, and it organized itself as a religious, ethnic, social, and economic unit completely separated from Palestinian society. What is different about the Israeli settler communities is that they opted not to exploit Arab workers and to exclude them from the Hebrew labour market. Therefore, the capitalist logic was subjected to the national and ethnic separation, knowing that the Jewish community in the days of the *Yishuv*<sup>55</sup> first, and later on in the state of Israel, was a settler society building itself in an environment that opposes its existence. This society grew and developed in a very central way and with a high degree of organization characterized by a sophisticated social and economic system. The *Yishuv* community, which came first, and the Israeli society which came at a later stage, is an organic community to the greatest extent. It is a society where many intellectual and conceptual systems, which were separated in developed capitalist and liberal societies, interweave. The Jewish society is based on the non-separation of religion, nationalism, economics, and the state. The state, society, economy, and the Jewish religion interact within semi-closed organic dynamics and into a unique overlap. The state, society, and market have formed one stronghold, which manages its internal affairs and which is obsessed with ethnic purity.

Therefore, for many decades, these circles intersected and came together in a way which keeps the Jewish national and religious boundaries clearly

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55 A term used to describe the Jewish presence in Palestine before the creation of the State of Israel in the last quarter of the 19th century.

defined and excludes the Palestinian presence in Israel, despite the fact that Palestinians are citizens of the state. For example, Israel is one of the most centralized countries in the world regarding planning and construction. The public ownership of lands, by either the state or by Jewish institutions which have a recognized legal status, is approximately 93%. This is extremely high, especially by Western standards. Throughout long years, the Histadrut, the General Federation of Labourers in the Land of Israel, was the largest employer in Israel. The health insurance system applied today in Israel is nothing but the continuation of the cooperative health organizations of the Jewish Yishuv period.

In the 1980's, the logic of the liberal market on the one hand, and the logic of political liberalism on the other, became deeply rooted and started to pose a challenge to the closed ethnic, national, and religious logic. The open market policy, led by the Likud, has had its impact on the market development as a space separate from the state. If we take into account that the state is an ethnic Jewish state, the liberalization of the market from the direct and absolute control of the state has meant, among other things, the opening of the market for the Arab petty bourgeoisie, and this has enabled it to take advantage of the openings or gaps created by the market logic. As a result, the Israeli case, poses a challenge to the Israeli leftist thought, and it is difficult to derive clear positions in everything related to state control over public economic facilities. If the state has completed the process of separating itself from nationalism, religion, and ethnic identities, and if it sees itself having the same distance from the various groups that make up the state and distributes resources evenly, there is no doubt that the stance of the Left is supposed to limit the market logic in favor of the public sector, because the public sector ensures equality while the market creates a condition of inequality and widens the gaps. Unfortunately, things become more complex when the public sector and the state sector are subject to a closed ethnic, national, religious, and racist ideology. It becomes unclear in each case who is more liberal, the logic of the market or the ideology of the state.

The Left's inherent hostility towards the capitalist market logic may obscure the disadvantages of the state and the public sector logic if this sector is racist by the virtue of its composition. I believe that the Communist Party, by focusing on class and economic analysis, and the initial hostility towards the capitalist market, became unable to see the positive sides of the market economy when the latter collides with the closed ethnic and national ideology. I believe that there is no clear formula which the Left can be guided by in such cases. It could be useful to use the market logic to break the racial ethnic logic in some cases and to use the national logic to put limitations on the market.

The same thing applies to everything related to the Palestinians in Israel. There is no logic in the philosophy which requires taking a hostile or even a conservative stance in regards to the national organization of the Arabs through

general elections of their own elected bodies. On the other hand, there is enough theoretical heritage, which calls for being cautious in taking such a stance, considering that national-based organizations can inflame national feelings and slide toward nationalistic stances which distract the public from its material interests and keep it busy with nothing but symbolic matters. This remains just an opinion, among other opinions. At the same time, one could make the argument that balancing out Arab national aspirations is part and parcel of the overall struggle for economic equality in the state.

Therefore, one can say that it is impossible to capture reality by using one magic key, either the class or national framework. If the historic project of the Left is to carry the equality idea to its fullest, equality in production and the economy, then one can say that the Left is too far from being able to pave the way which would lead to a situation that guarantees this equality. It has been proven that it is very difficult to come up with such a prescription in relatively homogeneous societies such as the east European countries, and it becomes even more difficult to speak about equality under the complex Israeli reality. In a society and a state which occupies another people's land, practices a colonial project, and which has not yet finished the modernization of its project in the political sense (i.e. the separation of religion from the state and the building of constitutional institutions), the main items of the agenda become ending the colonial project, dismantling it on the one hand, and the completion of the liberal democratization project on the other. In such a society, the vocabulary of the left is very similar to the vocabulary of the secular and liberal political project.

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# The Iraqi Left: Between the Shadows of the Past and New Alliances for a Secular Civic State

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\* Karin Mlodoch

This article does not give a complete overview of all leftist actors in Iraq. It simply summarizes the history of the left, specifically the Iraqi Communist Party, and shows how a weakened traditional left and newly emerging democratic forces can jointly struggle against ethnic-religious sectarianism for a democratic and secular Iraq.<sup>1</sup>

## The Incongruous History of the Iraqi Communist Party

The first communist circles in Iraq were established in the 1920s by intellectuals such as Husain ar-Rahal and his sister Amina. Together, they developed ideas that combined socialist ideals with anti-colonial struggle and a struggle for women's rights.<sup>2</sup> In 1927, Iraqi railway workers in Bagdad launched the first strike with demands such as the writing of labor legislation and the right to form trade unions. As a result, the Workers' Trade Union was established in 1929.<sup>3</sup> In 1932, the British mandate over Iraq ended, but British colonial presence continued. Communist circles and unions continued their work, which included joining the boycott of the British-owned electric company in Bagdad in 1933.

In 1934, the Iraqi Communist Party (ICP) was founded. Operating in secret, it took the leading role in numerous strikes against British controlled companies

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1 The article is based on the author's observations in Kurdistan-Iraq since 1991, interviews with Iraqi activists, and secondary sources. I thank Dr. Andrea Fischer-Tahir for her advice.

2 Batatu, Hanna (1978). *The Old Classes and the Revolutionary Movements of Iraq*. Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press. p.393

3 Schmidinger, Thomas (2007). *Gewerkschaften zwischen Wiederaufbau und Bürgerkrieg*. In: *Gewerkschaftlicher Linksblock im ÖGB*. 26. März 2007. <http://www.glb.at/article.php/2007032611561350>

in the subsequent years. In the post World War II period, the strong role of the Soviet Union facilitated a period of relative freedom for Iraqi communists.<sup>4</sup> Under the lead of Yusuf Salman Yusuf (“Comrade Fahd”), the ICP developed into a populist party in the 1940s and became the most influential force in the struggle against British domination and the Iraqi monarchy. They struggled to protect and advance social, gender, and minority rights.<sup>5</sup> Between 1944 and 1946 alone, 16 labor unions, 12 of which were connected to the ICP,<sup>6</sup> emerged and organized between 30% and 60% of Iraqi oil, railway, electricity, and port workers.<sup>7</sup> Communist women pioneered the struggle for women’s rights and founded the League for Defense of Women’s Rights in 1952, later renamed the Iraqi Women’s League.

In 1949, the Iraqi monarchy’s persecution of the ICP culminated in the execution of Yusuf Salman Yusuf and three other members of the ICP leadership. In 1958, Abd’al Karim Qasim’s coup d’état overthrew the monarchy. After the coup, the ICP was able to operate more overtly and was strong enough to force Qasim to include communists in the government and pass a rather progressive Civil Law. The Civil Law strengthened women’s rights and initiated agrarian reform that resulted in the redistribution of land from wealthy landlords to peasant farmers. In 1959, the ICP founded the General Federation of Trade Unions (GFTU) which organized some 275,000 workers in key sectors of the Iraqi economy. Half a million people participated at the GFTU’s May Day celebrations.<sup>8</sup>

With the Cold War intensifying, the Iraqi communists’ strength posed a challenge to the United States, as well as to Arab nationalist and Ba’athist forces in Iraq and the region. Qasim, under pressure because of his alleged pro-Soviet policies, partly revised previous reforms and curtailed the ICP’s influence.<sup>9</sup>

The Ba’ath-party took power through a military coup against Qasim in 1963, and its first political appearance was marked by the murder of thousands of communists and unionists. Ideologically, the Ba’athists attempted to blend Pan-Arab nationalism and with anti-tribal socialist rhetoric. One of the first steps the Ba’athists undertook was to nationalize Iraq’s vast oil industry. With the money generated from this, the Ba’ath regime initiated a rapid process of economic development and modernization. They initiated a welfare reform which overhauled public services, granted civic rights to workers and women,

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4 Sluglett, Peter (2006). The Iraqi Communist Party 1934-1979. In: The Middle East Online Series 2: Iraq 1914-1974. Reading: Thomson Learning EMEA Ltd., p.1

5 Ibid., p.1

6 Ibid., p.1

7 Bader-Blau, Shawna (2007). Iraqi Unions vs. Big Oil, The War Economy of Iraq. Middle East Research and Information Project. Vol. 37. 243.

8 Muhsin, Abdullah (2004). The Iraqi Federation of Trade Unions: Outline History and Future Tasks. Paper 25.8.2004. Posted on: [www.iraqitradeunion.org/Archives/000072.html](http://www.iraqitradeunion.org/Archives/000072.html)

9 Sluglett 2006, p.2

and offered social security and a high living standard to vast sectors of the population. It was this seemingly “progressive” policy of the Ba’ath regime and its friendship with the Soviet Union, combined with pressure from the latter, that drove the Iraqi communists to enter the Progressive National Front with the Ba’ath-party in 1973, despite the brutal persecution they had experienced at the hands of their new ally.<sup>10</sup>

After the merger, the ICP was able to operate legally. The alliance with the ICP helped the Ba’ath regime enlarge its power without any serious opposition. Its “welfare” policy led to the decline of the productive agricultural and industrial sectors and the dependence of a large sector of Iraqis on government subsidies. The Ba’ath party installed itself as the one and only power center and massively expanded its apparatus. It used the communists to gain control of the General Federation of Trade Unions and gradually transformed it into a tool of control and repression. It crushed other unions, student groups, youth and women’s associations, and installed Ba’ath controlled mass organizations instead, such as the General Federation of Iraqi Women (GFIW). A meticulous network of control and repression was quickly imposed on the population. The sophisticated combination of welfare state services, mechanisms of control, and excessive terror put the Iraqi population in a situation of dependence and fear.<sup>11</sup>

In 1978, Saddam Hussein was able to gain unlimited power over the Ba’ath party, state institutions, and repressive organs. He gradually strengthened ties with the US and its Western allies. In 1979, the Ba’ath-ICP alliance ended once again in the brutal repression of the communists. Those who were not arrested, tortured, or executed fled into exile to Europe, Lebanon, or to Kurdistan, where many communists joined the armed struggle against the regime.<sup>12</sup>

Saddam Hussein based his power first and foremost on his extended family and Sunni Arab tribal structures in his home region of Tikrit. This concentration of power in the Sunni Arab heartland, coupled with the marginalization of the Shi’a population majority and the persecution of the Kurds, laid the foundation for the sectarian division of the Iraqi society that is so virulent today.<sup>13</sup>

During the Iran-Iraq war, which was fought between 1980-1988 and took the lives of over a million people on both sides, the Ba’ath regime utilized divisive sectarian rhetoric and state terror to mobilize the civilian population into fighting against the newly formed Islamic Republic of Iran. By this time,

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10 Sluglett 2006, p. 2-3

11 Al-Khalil, Samir (1989). *The Republic of Fear. The Politics of Modern Iraq*. London: Century Hutchinson.

12 Jabbar, Faleh Abdel (2010). *The Iraqi Communist Party*. Catusse, Myraim and Karam Karam (eds.) *Returning to Political Parties? Partisan Logic and Political Transformation in the Arab World*. Beirut: Presses de L’Ifpo. Retrieved from: [http://books.openedition.org/ifpo/1111\\_p\\_2](http://books.openedition.org/ifpo/1111_p_2).

13 Ibrahim, Ferhad (1997): *Konfessionalismus und Politik in der arabischen Welt. Die Schiiten im Irak*. Münster: Lit Verlag.



Iraq was fully supported by the United States and relied exclusively on a policy of empowering Sunni-Arab religious and tribal figures in the government. The Ba'ath party even went as far as to revoke parts of previous land and civil law reforms in order to further empower the newly appointed Sunni-Arab leaders. Religious symbolism began to permeate through war propaganda. The former image of the modern working Iraqi woman was quickly replaced by the patriotic mother, who sacrifices her sons for the state.<sup>14</sup>

In the last war months of 1988, the Ba'ath regime used its huge repressive apparatus against Kurdish resistance fighters in the north and Shi'a groups in the south. Shi'a revolts in the south were crushed and thousands of rebels were killed. Military raids and drainage operations were launched against the Marsh-Arab population in the south. The persecution of the Kurds reached its peak with the poison gas attacks on the Kurdish city of Halabja and the Anfal campaign in 1988. In the process, large parts of the Kurdish rural areas were destroyed, more than 100,000 young men and women were killed, and hundreds of thousands of farmers were forcibly resettled.<sup>15</sup> The Kurdish national trauma of Anfal and Halabja constitute a key argument in the Kurds' struggle for autonomy.

## The Kurdish Struggle for Autonomy and ICP-Kurdish Relations<sup>16</sup>

The history of the Iraqi Communist Party has been closely intertwined with the Kurdish struggle for autonomy. In 1943, the ICP established a Kurdish section named Shorish (meaning revolution in Kurdish). Unfortunately, many Kurdish activists felt the ICP's agenda insufficiently addressed the Kurdish national cause, and after several failed attempts, the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) was established in 1946. Under the lead of Ibrahim Ahmad, a well known leftist intellectual, the KDP initially combined Kurdish nationalism with socialist ideals. When Mulla Mustafa Barzani took the lead in 1958, the KDP dropped the socialist ideals of the past and strongly emphasized Kurdish nationalism. He developed the KDP into the leading force of the Kurdish struggle for autonomy.

Competing with the KDP for the avant-garde role in the Kurdish struggle, the ICP strengthened its Kurdish faction. After the execution of the ICP's leadership in 1949, Kurdish members took over several key positions in the ICP. In 1953, the ICP officially accepted the right of the Kurds for secession from Iraq.

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14 Al-Jawaheri, Yasmina Husein (2008). *The gender impact of international sanctions: women in Iraq*. London: I.B. Tauris.

15 Human Rights Watch (1993) *Genocide in Iraq. The Anfal Campaign against the Kurds*. New York: Human Rights Watch.

16 Information in this paragraph from interviews with Kurdish activists and Fischer-Tahir (2003). *Wir gaben viele Märtyrer. Widerstand und Kollektive Identitätsbildung in Irakisich-Kurdistan*. Münster: Unrast.

In 1970, the Ba'ath regime offered some autonomy rights to the Kurds and Barzani initially entered into negotiations. At that point a group of intellectuals around Shahab Sheikh Nuri and Anwar Zorab, both influenced by Marxist and Maoist ideas with a strong internationalist orientation, split-off from the KDP and founded the Marxist-Leninist group Komalay Randjaran (Kurdish: group of toilers), mostly referred to by its shorter name, Komala. They pursued an anti-tribal agenda and adopted sharp critical rhetoric against the Soviet Union and the ICP.

When the KDP took up arms against the Ba'ath regime in 1974, the ICP's Kurdish faction acted as the legislative and executive body for the Ba'ath regime instead of supporting the Kurdish uprising. The uprising was crushed in 1975. In the wake of the defeat, five leftist groups, including the Marxist-Leninist Komala merged to form the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), led by Jalal Talabani. While the KDP's power was based on the rural and tribal areas of the Badinan region, the PUK reached also out to urban intellectuals, industrial workers, and poor farmers. Komala fighters, then led by Nawhshirwan Mustafa, controlled entire rural areas and installed "revolutionary" councils and communal services.

When many ICP-members joined the Kurdish struggle, after the repressive blow suffered from the Ba'ath regime in 1978, their role remained ambivalent. Alarmed by the emergence of an alternative left force in Kurdistan, they allied themselves with the KDP in rivalry attacks against the PUK. In response, PUK forces under Nawshirwan Mustafa, today's leader of the Kurdish opposition movement Goran, massacred communist fighters in Pistashan in 1983. To this day, these events overshadow relations between the Iraqi communists and the Goran. With the Ba'ath regime's genocidal Anfal operations against the rural bases of the liberation movement, the Kurdish resistance was defeated with the few surviving peshmerga withdrew to Iran.

The ICP's alliance with the Ba'ath regime, and its latent competition with Kurdish left forces for the vanguard role of the Kurdish struggle, have caused a massive mistrust among the Kurds towards Iraqi leftist movements. At the same time, the complete silence in the Arab world, and also the international left, on the genocidal Anfal operations in 1988 has severely undermined the Kurds' confidence in regional and international left solidarity networks. Both aspects have certainly had an impact on the strong nationalist focus of most Kurdish political actors today, including the Kurdistan Communist Party.

## **1991-2003: The Kurdish Autonomy Experiment and the Decline of the Ba'ath Regime**

In response to Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in August 1990, the United Nations Security Council imposed economic sanctions on Iraq that were not lifted until

2003. In January 1991, a US-led coalition of 34 countries invaded Iraq for the first time. The subsequent insurrections of the Kurds in the north and the Shi'a in the south against the Ba'ath regime were ultimately betrayed by the war coalition and were brutally crushed by the Iraqi regime.

In the wake of the invasion, the Kurds obtained provisional autonomy in large parts of the Kurdish settled areas. Although they were backed by the US and its allies, it was not sanctioned by any national or international agreement. The Kurds' conditions remained provisional for another twelve years.<sup>17</sup>

Within the provisional framework, democratic elections led to the establishment of the Iraqi Kurdistan National Assembly and the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) in 1992. After this merger, the KDP and PUK shared regional power. Minority seats were obtained by Assyrian Christian, Turkmen, and Yezidi parties in the first Iraqi Kurdistan National Assembly. The Iraqi Communist Party and the Socialist Party were assigned parliamentarian seats and government posts in acknowledgement of their contribution to the liberation struggle. The Kurdistan Regional Parliament opted for federalism as the future constitutional framework with Iraq.

In the run-up to the elections, the PUK had dissolved its Marxist-Leninist Komala wing, abandoned revolutionary rhetoric, and adopted a social-democratic program which strived for Kurdish self-determination and a "future social-democratic society in Kurdistan."<sup>18</sup> The strategy shift reflected the collapse of the socialist bloc, and at the same time the PUK's attempt to establish itself as reliable political partner for the US and West European governments backing the Kurdish autonomy experiment.

Meanwhile, the weakened ICP tried to reorganize themselves from exile and from the Kurdish region. The fifth party congress was established in the Kurdish city of Shaklawa in 1993, the first after the collapse of the Soviet Union, marked a major strategy shift. First, Marxist-Leninist positions were abandoned, the party opened up to coalitions with democratic and nationalist forces to fight dictatorship and establish a democratic political system that ensures social justice.<sup>19</sup> A separate Kurdish section, the Kurdistan Communist Party – Iraq (KCP-I), was founded with Kareem Ahmed as secretary-general. The KCP-I holds 20% of the seats of the ICP Central Committee and its secretary-general is a member of the ICP's Political Bureau. Yet, the KCP-I pursued a specific political agenda for the Kurdish region.<sup>20</sup>

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17 For details see Winter, Bernhard (2002): *Kurdistan-Irak – Untergehen im Sicherem Hafen. Studie über die Folgen einer humanitären Intervention.* Frankfurt/M: VAS

18 Program and political platform of the PUK adopted in the First PUK Congress 1992. <http://www.aha.ru/~said/puk.htm>

19 Ismael, Tareq (2008). *The Rise and Fall of the Communist Party of Iraq.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. p. 286-288

20 The internal controversies around this and subsequent strategy shifts cannot be addressed in this article. A detailed description is given by Ismael, *ibid.*

Also in 1993, another leftist party was founded by a group around Rebwar Ahmed. The party was named The Worker-Communist Party Iraq (WCP-I), which is linked to the Worker-Communist Party–Iran, which was founded by Mansoor Hekmat two years earlier. Criticizing ICP and KCP-I for their betrayal of the workers' movement and the Kurdish parties for their nationalism and tribalism, the WCP-I referred to the council movement and propagated a return to Marxism and the "centrality of the workers movement."<sup>21</sup> They mainly operated in Kurdistan, reached out to displaced and unemployed people, and engaged in the sector of women's rights, opening the first women's shelter in Sulaimania. Unfortunately, their radical revolutionary rhetoric and feminist concepts clashed with traditional Kurdish society, and they received little support when they were attacked by the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan and forced to cease their activities in the region in 2000.

The influence of communist and leftist positions in Kurdistan was marginal in the 1990s. The political landscape was dominated by the KDP and the PUK, whose programmatic differences became imperceptible. Both parties chose to focus on a nationalist agenda and base their power on regional and historical loyalties and an extended net of cronyism rather than political programs. In 1994, their latent rivalry escalated to a bloody internal war that split the Kurdish region into two administrative sectors and further limited the spaces for political debate and opposition.

At the end of the 1990s, the region saw the emergence of a variety of civil rights organizations and media projects aimed at influencing the population. Though many of them were party driven, some used international funding for gaining some independence from the ruling parties and tackled sensitive social issues like the widespread social and domestic violence against women in the Kurdish society.

Ever since 1991, Kurdistan-Iraq has also been a safe haven for Kurdish political parties from Iran and Turkey. It hosts the Democratic Party of Iranian Kurdistan (DPKI)<sup>22</sup> which established the first Kurdish Republic in Mahabat, Iran in 1945 and today strives for a secular democratic and federal Iran, in addition to self-determination of Iranian Kurds. It gives refuge to the Komalah Iran,<sup>23</sup> the Kurdish branch of the Communist Party of Iran that combines the struggle for Kurdish self-determination with Marxist and socialist ideals. It has also been a safe haven for the Turkey based Workers' Communist Party (PKK),<sup>24</sup> a Marxist Kurdish organization founded in 1978 and involved in an armed struggle against the Turkish government for Kurdish independence. The latter tried to gain some

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21 [www.wpiraq.net](http://www.wpiraq.net)

22 <http://pdki.org/english/>

23 <http://k-kh.org/>

24 <http://www.pkkonline.net/en/>

influence in Iraqi Kurdish local politics, and especially during the internal war in the 1990s, and actually attracted quite a number of young Iraqi Kurds.

## The Run-up to the US-led Invasion of Iraq

In south and central Iraq, the socio-economic conditions deteriorated dramatically in the 1990s due to the ongoing international sanctions imposed by the UN and Western states. The Ba'ath regime aggravated the situation by channeling Iraq's scant resources for the benefit of its supporters and used the population's desperate situation for sustaining international conspiracy theories. Saddam Hussein based his power on an increasingly close circle of his extended family and the use excessive violence against all kinds of criticism.

The ICP did not have any operational structures in Iraq at the time and merely acted from exile and the Kurdish region. The absence of any secular opposition, in the face of the decline of the state apparatus and the disastrous situation of the Iraqi people, fostered the growing influence of religious and tribal networks in Iraq.

The ICP was torn between the main objective of overthrowing the dictatorship on one hand and the rejection of the international embargo that first and foremost disproportionately impacted the Iraqi people. In its sixth congress held in the Kurdish city of Erbil in 1997, it took a clear stand against the sanctions and passed a "national democratic program," calling for a broad national coalition to overthrow the dictatorship of Saddam Hussein.<sup>25</sup>

In the run-up to the US-led invasion in 2002/2003, the ICP refused to join US and UK backed "Iraqi Opposition Conferences," which were dominated by the Kurdish parties, the KDP, the Shi'a Supreme Council for Islamic Revolution in Iraq, Iyad Allawi's secular Iraqi National Accord, and Ahmed Chalabi's Iraqi National Congress. The alliance offered support to the war coalition in toppling the Ba'ath regime and establishing a "democratic federal Iraq."<sup>26</sup> The ICP accused them of paving the way for the US-invasion and launched the slogan "no war, no dictatorship."

On 20 March 2003, the US-led "coalition of the willing" invaded Iraq without a UN Security Council mandate. On 9 April 2003, the coalition forces took control of Baghdad. The toppling of Saddam Hussein's statue in Baghdad's Firdosi Square symbolically marked the demise of the Ba'ath regime.

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25 Ismael, *op.cit.*, p. 295-296

26 "Transition to Democracy in Iraq," 2002. <http://www.iraqfoundation.org/studies/2002/dec/study.pdf>.

Executive, legislative, and judiciary control of Iraq was assumed by the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA), institutional representation of the occupying forces, but de facto a branch of the US State Department of Defense and headed by Paul Bremer as of May 2003. The United Nations Security Council fully recognized the CPA's authority and terminated its sanctions against Iraq. Bremer's first action was a precipitous de-Ba'athification process that disbanded the Iraqi army overnight and dismissed thousands of Ba'ath Party members from the public sector, regardless of their rank or personal involvement in human rights violations. This was interpreted by the Sunni Arab population as collective punishment against them and certainly fuelled the sectarian violence to come, which Iraq is still dealing with to this day.<sup>27</sup>

Next, the CPA set up an Iraqi Governing Council (IGC) and selected its members primarily from the ranks of former opposition and exile groups. With 60% Shi'a and 40% Sunni, 75% Arabs and 25% Kurds, the IGC's composition corresponded to the respective percentages in the Iraqi population. This ethnic-religious perspective turned the hitherto latent sectarian divisions into "the organizing principle of government."<sup>28</sup> In May 2004, the CPA handed over the authority to the Iraqi Transitional Government to prepare for upcoming elections, draft a constitution, and pass it by a popular referendum. Afterwards, the CPA was formally dissolved.

Against its previous stand against the US-led invasion, the Iraqi Communist Party engaged in the US-dominated political transition process. Rashid Ghaliwieb, representative of the ICP in Germany, describes the dilemma:

*The left in Europe and the Arab countries argued against the war, defending the sovereignty of Iraq. But when our comrades returned to Iraq after the 9th of April, those comrades who had stayed in Iraq, blamed them for taking an anti-war position. How could you be against this war that finally brought down the dictator? However, today's developments show that we were right at the time: The war would bring only more destruction. And we had then warned already of the upcoming religious and ethnic divisions.<sup>29</sup>*

In May 2004, ICP secretary general Hamid Majid Mousa accepted a position on the CPA-installed Iraqi Governing Council. In the January 2005 national elections, the ICP-headed People's Union List won only two out of two hundred seventy-five seats in the National Assembly. Obviously under shock at this disastrous result, the ICP joined the Iraqi National List for the December 2005 elections, an alliance headed by secular Shiite Iyad Allawi, head of the CPA installed

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27 International Crisis Group (2003). Governing Iraq, ICG Middle East Report No. 17, 25. August 2003. Baghdad/Washington/Brussels: ICG. At: <http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/middle-east-north-africa/iraq-iran-gulf/iraq/017-governing-iraq.aspx>

28 Ibid, p. 15-16

29 Interview with Rashid Ghaliwieb, 19/5/2013

governing council in 2004. Thus, it further merged with the pro-US opposition. The ICP received two of the twenty-five seats won by the list and the post of the Minister of Scientific Research.<sup>30</sup> In the 2010 elections, ICP secretary general Hamid Majid Mousa failed to get the necessary votes for a parliament seat, the oldest party of Iraq thereby vanished from the legislative level.

## New Political Spaces in the Context of Escalating Violence

Despite the occupation, new social and political spaces and structures developed in the immediate aftermath of the regime's overthrow. After decades of dictatorship and sanctions, Iraqis could finally relate to the outside world again. Exiled Iraqis returned with the aim of participating in the transitional process. After just one year, dozens of trade unions emerged in key sectors of the Iraqi economy.

Former political prisoners and relatives of missing persons formed associations to engage in a more participative transitional justice process than envisaged by the CPA.<sup>31</sup> While four Ba'ath party controlled newspapers had formerly dominated the media landscape, a few months after the regime's overthrow some 180 daily and weekly newspapers were in regular circulation.<sup>32</sup>

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) mushroomed, most of them backed by international funding. Some failed when funding ceased. Some were sponsored by dominant parties or confined to specific humanitarian or communal topics. Yet, a number of NGOs, especially in the women's and human rights sectors, engaged in broader political debates and called for broader democratic rights.<sup>33</sup>

During the electoral processes in January and December 2005, NGOs raised country-wide awareness campaigns and functioned as electoral observers.<sup>34</sup> NGOs also had a crucial role in the debate on the Iraqi draft constitution in the summer of 2005. By bridging ethnic, religious, and regional boundaries, they convened meetings to discuss the draft and submitted amendments to the constitutional working group. Heated debates evolved between Kurdish and

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30 Jabbar 2010, p.8

31 Mlodoč, Karin (2003). *Irak. Lange Schatten der Vergangenheit*. In: Amnesty International Journal September 2003. Berlin: Amnesty International

32 Fischer –Tahir, Andrea (2010). *Pluralismus statt Partikularismus. Identitätspolitik und Presse im Irak*. In: *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte*. 24/2010. Berlin: BPP.

33 Own observations. See also: Fischer-Tahir (2010). *Competition cooperation and resistance. Women in the political field in Iraq*. In: *International Affairs*. Vol. 86, issue 6. P. 1381-1394

34 Own observations

Arab secular women's groups struggling for the separation of state and religion on one side, and Islamic Shi'a women's groups advocating a central role for Islam and Shari'a law on the other.<sup>35</sup> To this day, secular women in Iraq struggle across the country against an amendment of constitutional paragraphs that define Shari'a as the main source of law.<sup>36</sup>

The Worker-Communist Party of Iraq (WCPI) re-launched activities in Iraq in 2003, took a radical stand against occupation, and strongly criticized all actors engaging with the transitional process, namely the ICP for being part of the US-project. It acted under the slogan "no to capitalism and its Islamic-ethnocentric government,"<sup>37</sup> and called upon Iraqi workers to close ranks and "hold up Marx's communist banner" and founded the Union of the Unemployed (UUI) and the Federation of Workers' Councils and Unions of Iraq (FWCUI). Yanar Mohammed, an exile returnee from Canada and affiliated to the WCP-I founded the Organization of Women's Freedom in Iraq (OWFI) which combined the struggle against occupation with an engagement for gender equality.<sup>38</sup> Members of the WCPI and the OWFI are rather small groups but have good coverage in international left media, where they appear as the avant-garde of Iraq's anti-occupation protests.

At the time, political activists operated under great risks to their lives. Intellectuals, journalists, women activists, and unionists were targeted by terrorist attacks from former Ba'athists and militant jihadists. Escalating violence and a climate of overall fear restricted activists' mobility and hampered national exchange and joint activities.

Overall, the debate on Iraq's future in the immediate aftermath of the Ba'ath regime's overthrow was richer and more diverse and the CPA's role contested to a greater extent than would appear in international media. For the first time after decades of dictatorship, Iraqi streets had turned into a sphere of debate and political activities.<sup>39</sup> The rift over how to relate to the occupation forces dominated the debate; and the claim for a quick withdrawal of the occupation troops remained a priority until 2011 even among some actors who were engaged in the transitional process. The ICP was at the forefront of these efforts.<sup>40</sup>

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35 Own observations. See also: Efrati, Noga (2012). *Women in Iraq. Past meets Present*. New York: Columbia University Press.

36 Interview with Hanaa Edwar, 16.7.2013

37 WCPI statement 25/4/2012: <http://wpiraq.net/oldWCP/english/2009/25042012-1-May.htm>

38 <http://www.equalityiniraq.com/>

39 Isakhan, Benjamin (2009). *The Streets of Iraq: Protests, the Public Sphere and Democracy*. Paper submitted for refereeing to the executive committee of the Australasian Political Studies Association (APSA) Conference, 2009.

40 Jabbar 2010, p.7.



## Beyond Occupation: New Alliances against Ethno-Religious Sectarianism and Political Islam

The December 2005 elections led to a fully-fledged Iraqi government under Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki from the Shi'a Islamic Dawa-Party. Again, it was dominated by Shi'a and Kurdish factions with Sunni-Arab groups greatly under-represented. Under al-Maliki, sectarian division grew stronger and Political Islam gained influence. Conflicts also arose between his government and the Kurdish regional government on the disputed areas around Kirkuk and regional versus central authority on the exploitation of Kurdish oil resources.

As sectarian violence intensified, the US changed strategy and increased its troops' presence and engaged Sunni tribal Arab leaders who had risen against Al Qaeda in its counterinsurgency operations.<sup>41</sup> By 2008, violence had declined significantly and the US and Iraqi governments signed an agreement on the withdrawal of US forces from Iraq by the end of 2011.

For the 2010 national elections, al-Maliki presented an apparently more inclusive "State of Law Coalition," which included Sunni-Arab factions. Although the secular al-Iraqya alliance, led by Iyad Allawi won the elections, al-Maliki re-instated himself as prime minister after nine months of political maneuvers. He also kept strict personal control over the Ministries of Defense, Interior, and National Security. This breach of democratic norms has further slid Iraq into an autocratic state. Sectarian conflict, ineffectiveness, and corruption have led to a great degradation of services, high unemployment, and even larger poverty levels of Iraqi society. Waves of violence have continued to shatter Iraq after the US troop withdrawal in 2011.

In this context of violence and sectarianism, the Iraqi Communist Party has tried to reorganize and regain some footing after the initial shock of the 2010 elections. Current ICP statements show some optimism due to a slow but steady rising membership numbers and the winning of eleven seats (out of four-hundred-forty-seven) in the 2013 provincial elections.<sup>42</sup>

The party defines its key objective as overcoming the current "system of power division along ethnic and religious lines, which dominates all sphere of society and life, and install a real democratic system and a civic state."<sup>43</sup> The struggle

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41 International Crisis Group (2008). Iraq after the Surge II. The Need for a New Political Strategy. Middle East Report No. 75. 30 April 2008. <http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/middle-east-north-africa/iraq-iran-gulf/iraq/075-iraq-after-the-surge-ii-the-need-for-a-new-political-strategy.aspx>

42 Iraks Kommunisten blicken optimistisch nach vorn, 1.5.2103. [http://www.kommunisten.de/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=4122:iraks-kommunisten-blicken-optimistisch-nach-vorn&catid=44:internationales&Itemid=92](http://www.kommunisten.de/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=4122:iraks-kommunisten-blicken-optimistisch-nach-vorn&catid=44:internationales&Itemid=92)

43 Communiqué of the ICP Central Committee Conference, 20/5/2011. With the author.

against religious fundamentalism, corruption, and violence and the installation of the rule of law and the consolidation of democratic institutions are defined as the main guidelines of action. In the economic sphere, the ICP criticizes the shrinkage of Iraqi production capacities and the country's dependence on oil and supports the trade unions' struggle against the privatization of the oil sector.

The ICP remains the largest leftist political opposition with a multi-ethnic constituency in contemporary Iraq. That being said, its influence is weak. Many former communist cadres have long left the party's ranks and are today engaged in trade unions, student and youth associations, cultural and media projects, or NGOs. A prominent example is Zuhair al Jezai'ry, a member of the communist party since the 1960s. Twenty days after the overthrow of the Ba'ath regime, he co-founded the newspaper Al Mada and today he is the chief editor of the trilingual (Arabic, Kurdish, English) Iraqi news agency Aswat-Iraq, which tries to break with ethnic-national discourses.<sup>44</sup>

Another example is the prominent women rights activist, Hanaa Edwar, a member of the Communist Iraqi Women's League since the 1960s. Arrested in 1963, she went into exile, joined the Kurdish struggle, and in the 1990s founded the human and women's rights NGO, Iraqi Al-Amal Association.<sup>45</sup> Today, the NGO operates countrywide and combines humanitarian projects with political struggle against sectarianism and for democracy and gender equality. In June 2011, she made headlines when she stormed a televised government conference in Baghdad and confronted al-Maliki for the arrest of four protesters and his campaign against NGOs. Asked whether she considers herself a leftist, she states:

*"You see, our state has broken down; our institutions have broken down. This is not the time to talk about socialism, proletarian dictatorship, and things like that. We have to stop the rising religious influence in our society. We have to struggle for a democratic state, a constitution that separates religion and state, and the rule of law. This is a national question, not a problem of being a leftist or not being a leftist. I don't know if you consider this "left": human rights, democratic rights, a secular constitution, democratic institutions, and the rule of law. We need a broad coalition, including conservative and liberal forces, to pass new legislation and establish a civic state."<sup>46</sup>*

Hanaa Edwar's definition of current challenges echoes official IPC-statements. Today's ICP seeks alliances with trade unions and civil rights actors such as Al-Amal Association or the Iraqi Social Forum, a platform of some 40 secular non-

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44 [www.aswataliraq.info](http://www.aswataliraq.info)

45 [www.iraqi-alamal.org](http://www.iraqi-alamal.org)

46 Interview with Hanaa Edwar, 16.7.2013

governmental organizations and unions with an anti-sectarian and democratic agenda.<sup>47</sup>

Rashid Ghaliwieb states:

*“The question is: Will Iraq be an Islamic or a modern democratic state? We have to struggle to change people’s minds. Therefore, we need various forms of activities, cultural projects, youth movements, women’s groups... Since the fall of the Ba’ath regime, there are multiple new spaces and forms of protest in Iraq, and beside the traditional left, multiple new democratic tendencies have developed. I do not think the Iraqi Communist Party is isolated.... As such, I call upon the European left to gain a broader perspective on Iraq and support the entire spectrum of the left and its democratic forces.”<sup>48</sup>*

## The Trade Unions

Communists continue to have major influence in the workers’ union sector. In the Kurdish region, unions were already re-established in the 1990s, and were closely related to the ruling Kurdish parties. On the national level, only five weeks after the Ba’ath regime’s overthrow in 2003, a public meeting of 350 unionists, many of whom communists returning from exile, resulted in the foundation of the Iraqi Federation of Trade Unions (IFTU) being created. In the first year alone, 12 national unions were founded under the umbrella of the IFTU in Iraq’s key economic sectors,<sup>49</sup> operating in Baghdad and 15 other provinces. At the same time, the former Ba’athist union GFTU claimed it had regrouped after sacking Ba’athist officials and competed with the IFTU for the leading role in the unions’ movement, the access to the properties of the GFTU, and the one seat reserved for an Iraqi member in the International Confederation of Arab Trade Unions (ICATU).<sup>50</sup> In September 2005, they merged and became the General Federation of Iraqi Workers (GFIW).

The Federation of Workers’ Councils and Unions (FWCUI) was founded in 2003 and is closely related to the Worker-Communist Party of Iraq. It has a clear Marxist and revolutionary orientation. It took a hard line against the occupation and strongly criticized the IFTU for engaging with the US-dominated transitional process and, to this day, operates outside the GFIW-umbrella. In addition,

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47 <http://www.iraqicivilsociety.org/archives/category/iraqi-social-forum>

48 Interview with Rashid Ghaliwieb, 19.5.2013.

49 Muhsin 2004; op.cit.

50 Owen, Tudor (2004). Iraq: Unions and the Law. TUC Report of an ICFTU-fact finding visit. Retrieved from: <http://www.tuc.org.uk/international/tuc-7859-f0.cfm>

the General Union of Oil Employees (GUOE), later renamed the Federation of Oil Unions of Iraq (FOUI) and led by Hassan Juma'a Awad, has kept its independence from the GFIW. It was founded in 2003 and represents all oil workers of the state owned companies in Basra.<sup>51</sup>

The various unions have organized a number of strikes in key sectors of the Iraqi industry in the last years. Workers have organized to struggle against issues of unemployment, low wages, malfunctioning services, and corruption, and at times against the deployment of external workers in the oil sector by multi-national companies.<sup>52</sup> All unions share common strands of activism: One of their central demands is the adoption of a new labor law that complies with the norms of the International Labor Organization (ILO) to replace, the still in effect, 1987 Ba'ath Labor Law that disbanded workers' unions.

The fight against the privatization of Iraqi oil is another shared strand of activism. All trade unions object to the Iraqi government's plans to allow the so-called Production Sharing Agreements (PSA) with international oil companies, which grant the latter extensive long-term control on the production conditions. Since 2007, unions have organized country wide strikes and protests against what they consider the sellout of Iraqi oil, raised awareness campaigns, consulted with international unionists, and submitted amendments on the Oil Law draft to the government.<sup>53</sup> Their mobilization has had the support of multiple non-unionist platforms such as the Iraqi Social Forum. In February 2013, FOUI-leader Hassan Juma'a Awad was arrested for organizing illegal strikes according to the Ba'ath-labor law. As a result, many local and international actors, including the worker-communists, joined a campaign that led to his release in July 2013.<sup>54</sup>

Except for the FWCUI, unionists' activities cannot be defined as leftist per se. While the ICP had a major role in re-establishing union structures in post-war Iraq, today, many union leaders and activists are affiliated with the dominant sectarian political parties, which try to use them for sectarian purposes. In 2011, the Iraqi Oil Minister, who is affiliated to the radical Shi'a Sadrist movement, tried to place unionists loyal to his party in central positions of the GFIW.<sup>55</sup> The large strikes in the Southern Oil Company of Basra, organized by the FOUI, were at times backed and utilized by local Shi'a authorities who aimed for a better share of oil revenues to be invested in their region.<sup>56</sup> Yet, in an overall climate of sectarianism, the unions' joint activities are an example of political activism that crosscuts ethnic and religious boundaries, except for the dividing

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51 Schmidinger 2007

52 Bader-Blau 2007, op.cit, p.3.

53 Ibid.

54 [www.industrial-union.org/union-victory-basra-court-finally-drops-charges-against-hassan-juma](http://www.industrial-union.org/union-victory-basra-court-finally-drops-charges-against-hassan-juma)

55 <http://www.iraqitradeunions.org/wordpress/?p=4733>

56 Isakhan 2007, p.11

lines with the Kurdish unions. This latter group refuse to merge with the GFIW, and beyond giving priority to Kurdish autonomy in oil exploitation, refuse to touch on the Kurdistan regional Government's Oil contracts with international companies. These contracts are destructive because they clearly disadvantage Kurdish workers and foster the privatization of the oil sector.<sup>57</sup>

## Mass Protests against Deteriorating Socio-Economic Conditions: The Iraqi Echo of the “Arab Spring”

With the backdrop of constantly deteriorating socio-economic conditions, protests erupted in June 2010 which entailed thousands of Iraqis gathering in various cities of Iraq to demonstrate against the government's failure in delivering electricity and other services. The Electricity Minister was forced to resign due to the protests. Unfortunately, at the same time, the government issued new restrictions on the rights on protest and form demonstrations. Encouraged by the popular uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt, Iraqis returned to the streets again in February 2011. Lawyers protested against a malfunctioning judicial system in Baghdad, Mosul, and Basra, and journalists demonstrated against censorship restrictions put in place by the government. Protests culminated in a declared “day of rage” on the 25th of February 2011, when tens of thousands of demonstrators gathered in numerous cities of Iraq, including the Kurdish region, to protest against corruption, poor services, shortages in water and electrical supplies, and unemployment. Both the Iraqi and the Kurdistan Regional Government answered with repression, killing numerous demonstrators in Iraq and one in Kurdistan.<sup>58</sup> However, al-Maliki came under pressure and presented a Reform Plan to be implemented in 100 days as a response to the demonstrations and the subsequent killings that came from the government. The plan has yet to be implemented and demonstrations have continued since. The protests crosscut ethnic and religious divisions and see the participation of communists, unionists, civil rights groups, professional associations, and intellectuals. The ICP is actively engaged in the mass protests, interprets them as “revolutionary storms”<sup>59</sup> and endorses the emergence of new forms of political activism with young people using modern communication technologies in organizing the protests.<sup>60</sup>

The “Arab Spring” had an encouraging impact on Iraqi left and democratic forces and was directly echoed in the mass protests in 2011. The worker-communists see them as “revolutions” and the current protest against

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57 Bader-Blau 2007, p. 2

58 Amnesty International (2011). Days of Rage. Protest and Repression in Iraq. London: Amnesty International.

59 Communiqué of the ICP Central Committee, 20.5.2011

60 Ibid.

the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt as a revival “with bigger determination to overthrow the counter-revolutionary forces.”<sup>61</sup> The ICP interprets them as “revolutionary storms” against despotism and the impact of global neo-liberalism that impoverishes and marginalizes millions of people. Yet, it warns of “blindly copying” the Arab Spring movement and simply applying it to the Iraqi situation. The ICP worries about the lack of organized left forces, which it fears opens the door to abuse of mass protest by conservative and religious forces.<sup>62</sup> References to the intertwinement of the Iraqi left with the left in other Arabic countries, and solidarity with the Palestinian left’s claim for a Palestinian state within the borders of 1967, are part of the ICP’s agenda.<sup>63</sup> Currently, leftist movements are looking towards the escalating conflict in Syria which further fuels sectarian conflict and violence in Iraq. The ICP underlines Syrian people’s right to democracy, opposes regional and international interventions, and calls for negotiations between the government and opposition forces.<sup>64</sup>

In the civil rights debate, regional networking is part of a broader international orientation. The newly emerging Iraqi Social Forum has tried to link up with international social movements. It even went as far as to send an Iraqi delegation to the recent World Social Forum in Tunisia in March 2013 and is currently inviting regional and international activists to convene for an “Iraqi Social Forum” in Baghdad in September 2013 under the motto, “Another Iraq is possible.”<sup>65</sup>

## Political Opposition and Civil Rights in Kurdistan after 2003

Sanctioned as a federal region in Iraq by the constitution and receiving 17% of Iraq’s oil revenue, the Kurdish region has undergone a process of political stabilization, economic recovery, and rapid modernization since 2003. The Kurdish population has benefitted from vast employment opportunities in the public sector and the booming construction, telecommunications, and oil sectors. The Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) has struggled for a solid power-share at the national level on one track, and has worked to consolidated their quasi-state structures, with an eye on eventual independence from Baghdad, on the other track.

In regards to the region’s rich civil rights and media landscape, the KRG

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61 [www.wpiraq.net/?p=3127&lang=eng](http://www.wpiraq.net/?p=3127&lang=eng)

62 Interview with Hamid Majid Mousa, 18.5.2013, op.cit.

63 Interview with Rashid Ghaliwieb op.cit.

64 Ibid.

65 <http://www.iraqicivilsociety.org/archives/2243>

prides itself as the bearer of a region of democracy in midst of violence and conflict in Iraq. Under the democratic surface however, the KDP and PUK have consolidated their power and extended vast nets of cronyism and nepotism over the area. Party affiliated television stations and newspapers have monopolized the media sector, while independent media and civil rights face censorship and repression when discussing the dominant parties' power structures.

Discontent over the dominant parties' corruption and power abuse has increased steadily among the Kurdish population. In 2005, Nawshirwan Mustafa Amin, the former leader of the PUK's Marxist-Leninist wing KOMALA, broke away from the PUK and founded the opposition movement Goran (Kurdish meaning change). Goran has criticized the high levels of corruption and malfunctioning services and demanded administrative reforms and budget transparency. As a result, in 2009, they gained twenty three percent of the seats in the Regional Parliament at its first run-off to the regional elections. Though committed to democratization, Goran's political agenda has given priority to Kurdish national issues and has regularly halted its struggle for social reforms when external conflicts with the Iraqi government have arisen. That being said, the movement has brought numerous young people "back to politics," revived parliamentary debate on democratization and broadened the scope of action for civil rights structures.

A heterogeneous civil rights movement challenges the dominant parties and urges the KRG to adopt social and political reforms. Party-related women's organizations and women's NGOs have jointly and successfully lobbied for pioneering legal reforms, including the 2011 adopted Family Law, which imposes sanctions on violence against women, including female genital mutilation.<sup>66</sup>

A number of independent media outlets in Kurdistan, such as the magazines Hawlati<sup>67</sup> and Awene,<sup>68</sup> have provided critical debate on corruption and cronyism and the need for democratic reforms. They maintain a critical stand on governmental parties and the new opposition movement Goran. In May 2010, the murder of 23-year-old student, Sardasht Osman, who had written a satirical article on the Barzani family, triggered a wave of protests throughout Kurdistan, led by students, intellectuals, and civil rights groups. In February 2011, demonstrators, who were mostly young people, gathered once again in Kurdish cities to protest against corruption and for democratic reform, this time encouraged by the rebellions in Egypt and Tunisia and parallel to the protests in

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66 Human Rights Watch: Law banning FGM a positive step. 24.6.2011.  
<http://www.hrw.org/news/2011/07/25/iraqi-kurdistan-law-banning-fgm-positive-step>.

67 <http://www.hawlati.co/>

68 <http://www.awene.com>

central and southern Iraq. When KDP gunmen opened fire on demonstrators in Sulaimania, protests spread throughout the region and went on for days, but were ultimately gunned down by Kurdish military and police forces. Activists and critical journalists were arrested and harassed. What had promised to be a “Kurdish Spring” once again lapsed into a KDP-PUK feud, whereby both parties accused the other of incompetence in the face of unrest. However, protests ebbed away when conflicts in Iraq rose with the imminent withdrawal of the US-troops from Iraq in late 2011. Once again, fear of external threat to Kurdish autonomy took precedence over the internal Kurdish debate on democracy and reforms.

The opposition role of the Kurdistan Communist Party–Iraq (KCP-I), currently led by Kamal Shakir, is ambivalent. The KCP-I holds one out of one hundred eleven seats in the Kurdistan parliament and the ministerial portfolio of Culture and Youth in the 19-minister-cabinet.<sup>69</sup> The KCP-I focuses on parliamentary work, is closely linked to the governmental structures, and restrains itself from harsh criticism of the ruling parties or from touching on sensitive national issues such as Kurdish oil contracts. As other Kurdish political actors, the KCP-I is another example of how Kurdish political actors are torn between the struggle for social and political change and the priority of defending Kurdish autonomy. Indeed, current statements of the ICP mention only a few words about the Kurdish comrade’s political performance and thus shed light on some dissent within the ICP about the KCP-I’s subordination of social rights and national topics under the banner of the Kurdish cause. Individual communists, such as Pakhshan Zangana, head of the Communist Women’s League in Kurdistan, have had an active role in women’s networks which include pushing for women’s rights in constitutional and legal reforms.

It is the Worker-Communist Party of Kurdistan (WCPK), the Kurdish branch of the Worker-Communist Party of Iraq, re-established in 2008, that holds up the flag of Marxism in Kurdistan.<sup>70</sup> Currently led by Osman Hajy Marouf, the party runs the radio station, Peshang (Kurdish meaning forward) and the magazine October. It criticizes governmental and opposition parties for their nationalist and bourgeois agenda and members participated in the street protests in 2010 and 2011. While the party’s influence is marginal, individual members are active in independent media projects and in local women’s NGOs, where they advocate overcoming the partial NGO work and instead developing a Kurdish feminist movement.

Overall, the historically rooted mistrust that the Kurdish population has of the Iraqi national process has been reinforced by violence and sectarian

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69 [www.krg.org/p/p.aspx?l=12&s=030000&r=319&p=229](http://www.krg.org/p/p.aspx?l=12&s=030000&r=319&p=229)

70 [www.hkkurdistan.org](http://www.hkkurdistan.org)



conflict after 2003 and the raising conflicts between the KRG and the Iraqi government. The alienation from the Iraqi national process extends, also, to left political actors such as the KCP-I and civil rights structures. Drives towards national networking, for example, women's rights groups' joint struggle to anchor women's rights in the constitution, continue to be hampered by the volatile security situation.

## Conclusion

Left and democratic forces in today's Iraq struggle with the legacy of three decades of dictatorship, twelve years of sanctions, and the US-led invasion and occupation after 2003. For most of them, US-domination and the pro-and-contra-invasion strife that have dominated the political debate in the aftermath of the Ba'ath regime's overthrow are no longer a central point of reference. Today, they instead struggle against an Iraqi government that bases its power on ethnic-religious divisions and the related rise of Political Islam. They also struggle against violence, corruption, unemployment, and poverty in a country that sits on the world's second largest oil reserves.

The traditional left, and namely Iraq's oldest and historically highly influential party the ICP, have dramatically lost influence in Iraq. This is a result of decades of persecution and operational absence from Iraq, the world-wide decline of left ideology after the collapse of the socialist bloc, and lastly, the ICP's own inconsistent history and its many strategy shifts. Yet new political and social spaces of action and debate have emerged after 2003. Iraqis have extensively used these new spaces and have participated in elections and constitutional debates despite escalating violence. Multiple new political actors have emerged including civil rights groups, women's associations, and media projects. Many communists have left traditional party work and now engage in these new social and political initiatives. Communists are also active in the trade union movement, one in which hundreds of thousands of Iraqi workers struggle for new labor laws and against the privatization of the Iraqi oil industry. Iraqi trade unions currently give powerful examples of country-wide mobilizations beyond ethnic-religious divisions.

The ICP has tried to regain a new footing, has abandoned vanguard and class struggle rhetoric, and seeks alliances with a broad spectrum of unions, NGOs, women's associations, and media projects. Though many of its new allies do not explicitly define themselves as leftist, there is a common ground where democratic and human rights values are heralded to lead in a secular democratic civic state. Today the traditional left, including more radical leftist groups like the Worker-Communists and newly emerging social and political initiatives, join in campaigns for new labor laws, against privatization of the oil sector, and for social and legal reforms. The mass protests against the Iraqi

government in 2010 and 2011 have shown the powerful impact of these new alliances.

In the Kurdistan region, a new political opposition and a broad spectrum of civil rights actors challenge the ruling parties, denounce corruption and cronyism, and call for democratization. That being said, left and democratic Kurdish political actors, including unions and communists, remain stuck between the struggle for social and political change and strong nationalist positions that prioritize the defense of Kurdish autonomy. Historically rooted mistrust in the national political process and conflicts with the central government hamper both, inner-Kurdish democratization processes as well as exchange and joint action on the national level.

Despite ongoing tensions between various actors, the struggle against sectarianism and Political Islam is a vibrant and encompassing group of parties, NGOs, and civil rights organizations. Together, they are putting the foundation for a democratic and secular civil law in Iraq which protects the rights of minorities, protects civil rights, ensures media freedom, and strives to bridge sectarian divide.

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