

Great victory for Lebanese communists

GEORGES BATAL

The official legalization of the Lebanese Communist Party, Comrade Nicolas Shaoui, its General Secretary, said in an interview with the *Al-Akhbar* weekly, is, essentially, a recognition of realities. In its forty-six years it has never fenced itself off from the national or class struggle, in which it suf-

fered many casualties, among them Comrade Farajallah Helou, one of its outstanding leaders.

Founded when Lebanon was a French mandate territory, the Party played a consistent and active part in the national liberation movement and the popular struggle

to end the mandate and the occupation—a struggle that led to political independence and the evacuation of foreign troops after World War II.

The formation of the Communist Party is associated with the growth of the working class, the development of its class consciousness, and the organization of trade unions. From its inception it has been the only political force speaking for the interests of the laboring classes. It led the struggle for their demands and was largely responsible for the growth of the trade union movement. After independence, the Party has continued its work in the new conditions, gradually emerging as a national political force to be reckoned with.

Periods of illegality alternated with legal activity, police terror with relative calm. But the Party learned to combine illegal forms of work with legal, always in the forefront of the struggle, upholding the independence and interests of the working class and people in the face of imperialism, reaction and Zionism.

The Party was able to function legally on several previous occasions, but these were due mainly to external, international factors. The first prolonged spell of legality followed the victory of the Popular Front in France; the next resulted from the Soviet Army's victories. Now, however, legalization is primarily due to domestic and inter-Arabic factors, and moreover, has been reinforced by legislative act.

To appreciate the significance of this victory, one must look back a year or two at the objective and subjective factors that made complete legalization and its legislative recognition an unavoidable necessity.

The principal contributing domestic factor was the growing economic, social and political crisis of the ruling financial oligarchy. It clearly showed the working class and the people the correctness of our Party's earlier assessments and the need for a national-democratic regime. As the crisis developed, popular resistance mounted, together with the influence of our Party and other progressive forces. This found expression in major strikes and successful Communist efforts within the trade unions to promote working-class unity. For the first time in the country's history the strike movement involved civil servants: engineers, teachers, post office, state security personnel, etc. The economic position continued to deteriorate, and this was reflected in the financial sphere, the mainstay of Lebanon's economy. Several banks were

insolvent, deposits dwindled, crediting and other financial operations were hamstrung.

The political crisis of the financial oligarchy regime was most vividly exemplified by the 1969 government crisis which lasted seven months and paralyzed the work of the legislative branch. This was coupled with aggravation of differences between representatives of the financial oligarchy within and outside the administration, which facilitated the activities of the democratic forces by creating an atmosphere of greater freedom and democracy.

The main inter-Arab factor contributing to the Party's legalization was the June 1967 war unleashed by Israel, and its consequences: the upsurge of popular opposition to imperialism, Zionism and reaction and the masses' turn to the Left. The realization was growing that the petty bourgeoisie were incapable of leading the liberation movement or achieving its basic aims, and people came to see the limitations of bourgeois political programs. All this produced a swing in favor of firmer, more decisive leadership and more radical and balanced political programs. The conditions gradually matured for the working class and its Party to play a bigger part in the Arab national liberation movement.

The influence of the inter-Arab factor on political life was additionally augmented by the growth of the Palestine resistance movement in Lebanon. Its alliance with the Communist Party and other progressive popular forces and parties helped to tilt the political balance in favor of the popular movement, consolidate democratic freedoms and curtail the activity of the reactionary forces.

The main international factor was the growing role of the Soviet Union in the area, a role recognized by all anti-imperialist forces. It also decisively contributed to the consolidation and extension of the Arab national liberation movement and the progressive Arab regimes. Popular appreciation of the Soviet Union's role helped strengthen the democratic movement in Lebanon.

Under pressure from these domestic and external factors, the regime was forced to make concessions to moderate the more acute contradictions in its relations with the popular movement, the progressive Arab states and the Palestine resistance movement, and thus find a way out of the government crisis. The appointment of Kamal Joublatt, chairman of the Progressive Socialist Party, as Minister of the Interior removed the obstacles to broad

activity by our Party and other progressive forces.

In addition to the objective factors contributing to legalization, one must also take into account the subjective factors, notably changes within the Party which enabled it to make effective use of new openings. These factors date back to the preparations for the second Party congress, which rectified Party policy, enhanced its influence on domestic and inter-Arab affairs and strengthened its links with the masses.

The rectification of the Party's general line was effected in the face of fierce opposition from Right- and Left-wing opportunist elements in the former Party leadership. The concept of "alliances" was defined in terms of a class approach. It has been forcefully demonstrated that a class assessment of alliances is in no way isolationist, as claimed by the opportunists. On the contrary, the new policy has increased the Party's influence and kept it from tailing after one or another bourgeois group.

Pursuing the Second Congress line, the Central Committee correctly assessed the situation in our part of the Arab world and specified the forces exerting the greatest influence on the nation's life. This provided the basis for our present alliance policy. The Party's activity on the inter-Arab scene not only helped rectify its general line, but also strengthened its positions within the country and abroad.

In the Central Committee's view, legali-

zation is an important victory, a democratic gain for the Lebanese national movement as a whole, an extremely important gain for the working class, an event that will doubtlessly influence the development of Communist parties in the Arab world and their relations with the progressive forces within their countries. At the same time, for all the importance we attach to this victory, we harbor no illusions. For the situation in our area is unstable and there is always the possibility of provocations.

In the new conditions, the Central Committee has set the Party major political and organizational tasks. We have to step up the struggle on all fronts and make the most of legality for the Party as a whole, for each organization and member. Legalization—and this the CC has emphasized—does not mean a radical change in the Party's general line: on the contrary, consistent operation of the Party's line had, in fact, led to legal status.

Our victory has stimulated enthusiasm and a feeling of pride in the Party. In the CC's view, the main task now is to utilize the new situation and step up work to strengthen and expand our ranks and to realize the Second Congress's slogan, "For a mass Communist Party in the Lebanon!"

And the earnest of making our victory secure is strengthening the Party on the basis of Marxism-Leninism and proletarian internationalism, and consolidating its ties with the masses and its alliances.