Le Pen: Resurgent fascism?

By Diana Johnstone

PARIS

POLITICAL VACUUM HAS developed in France, and Jean-Marie Le Pen is filling it. The National Front, which has won recent cantonal elections, up graded by the Socialist government with the intention of decentralizing and reinvigorating French democracy, were totally dominated by Le Pen.

Yet after scoring 8.69 percent of the vote in the first round, Le Pen's National Front emerged from the March 17 second round with only one of the thousands of obscure local constituency seats at stake in these elections, whose main interest was to beenshadow possible trends for next year's national assembly elections.

Le Pen's real achievement is that his National Front has moved the extreme right in France from its marginal existence as several squabbling groupings completely outside the mainstream of political life with media coverage, candidates in elections and, above all, growing local militant organizations, especially in the cities of southern France where Le Pen's strongest natural constituency is made up of repatriated European settlers, the pieds noirs, from Algeria. Having lost their former privileged position in Algeria, these pieds noirs often feel a special resentment at the presence of Algerian immigrant workers in France that goes beyond the usual xenophobia.

Le Pen's recent campaigns have been based heavily on resentment of Arab immigrants, but his appeal and program go beyond that, and his elections are part of a plot to make the police feel guilty and thus weaken their response to the terrorist offensive currently threatening Europe. What "terrorist offensive" is? Is it the one being cooked up by neo-fascist sects of the right in order to justify a rightist takeover, or could it be the foreseeable resistance to the social order Le Pen and his friends are after?

Le Pen's political career began in 1955, when the right-wing populist Pierre Poujade was looking for young military officers for his Democratic Center of Independents and Peasant (D.C.I.)-supported cantonnelth shoppers. Thus, in January 1956, Le Pen became the youngest member of the National Assembly. Finding Poujade too soft on Algeria, he left for his tour of duty as interrogator officer in 1957 before being re-elected to the National Assembly in November 1958 on the ticket of the National Center of Independents and Peasants (C.N.I.)—a party that to-day takes in extremist rightists, who no longer want to look more mellow and centrist.

It is noteworthy that Le Pen was always primarily interested in "nationalism and racism" above and beyond "nationalism, particularly concerning France's overseas colonies. In 1960, Le Pen broke with the Gaullist consensus rooted in the French Resistance that has been the main ideological obstacle to the "right" and, thus, has been the remnant of the World War II colonizers. The Gestapo described members of the Resistance as "terrorists." This memory and the parallel were strong in the minds of the French intellectuals who opposed French torture of Algerian rebels.

The Algeanians interviewed by Liberation were all admitted "terrorists," that is, members of the Algerian National Liberation Front, who had been involved in planting bombs against the white settler population. Liberation recalled that Lt. Le Pen and his fellow interrogators were operating with the blessings of his division chaplain.

Le Pen's military policy is closest to what Reaganites want for Europe.

Le Pen is a practicing Catholic with a preference for the Latin mass. He believes the "schools should be separated from the state" and private schools should both compete and be subsidized, to allow a natural acracy to arise according to its merits.

It is significant that Le Pen's supporters were not at all disturbed by Liberation's sensational February 12 issue citing five Algerians who confirmed longstanding reports that Lt. Jean-Marie Le Pen supervised and took part in torture of prisoners during a tour of duty as interrogation officer in Algeria in early 1957. Over the years, Le Pen has responded inconsistently but with the most active part of the actual Resistance to Nazi occupation.

The disintegration of the Gaullist consensus got underway in 1960 with the resignation of Gaston Gérardin, and has been accelerated by obsessive concentration on Soviet misdeeds in Poland, Afghanistan and elsewhere. For France today, the anti-Communist mood is so strong that the far right that always agreed with the Gaullist consensus rooted in the French Resistance—but which for a long time scarcely dared say so in public—is now able to have a briefer contact with terrorism, and even to start rehabilitation of the former as the lesser evil.

Le Pen says that the current attacks on him for torturing prisoners in Algeria are part of a plot to make the police feel guilty and thus weaken their response to the "terrorist offensive currently threatening Europe." What "terrorist offensive" is? Is it the one being cooked up by neo-fascist sectors of the right, or could it be the foreseeable resistance to the social order Le Pen and his friends are after?
S. Security

Continued from page 3

can decide to work a shortened workweek
instead of going from full-time to full retire-
ment in one step.

Expenditures for Social Security are
listed in the budget with other outlays, and
Social Security receipts are listed with other
receipts, Rivlin noted. The program has been a
part of the "unified budget" since fiscal year 1979 and it will remain so until it's
separated in October 1992.

S. Africa

Continued from page 5

wouldn't adopt the Sullivan principles.

In countering those economic concerns
congenial organized labor's support has been crucial to
divestment movement around the country. In Michigan, Massachusetts, New
York and Boston union support was par-
ticularly key, notes Sandy Boyer of the
New York Labor Committee Against Apar-
theid. Most of the large internationals,
especially in the public sector, support di-
vestment, but the AFL-CIO remains un-
swayed.

The difference of opinion has sometimes
tended tension in the anti-apartheid ranks.
An AFL-CIO conference on South African
labor drew criticism from black South Af-

can trade unions in attendance (In These
Times, Jan. 23) at least partly because of
historic suspicion of CIA and State Depart-
ment ties with the federations' Afro-Amer-
ican Labor Center. But the friction was also
casted by the federation's stance toward
divestment. Leon Sullivan, a General
Motors board member and author of the
Sullivan principles, was featured prominent-
ly, as was a Mobil Oil official who heads up
the corporate campaign for the Sullivan
guidelines.

Then in early March, the New York Labor
Committee Against Apartheid spon-
sored its own South African labor confer-
ence, endorsed by most liberal-left unions,
including AFSCME, the UAW, ACTWU,
the Hospital workers and the United Mine
workers.

AFL-CIO officials were invited, but
doomed to attend, and both South Af-

can Emma Mashinini of the Commercial,
Catering and Allied Workers expressed
public disappointment that the federation
had sent neither representatives nor solidar-
ity greetings.

Boyer minimizes the conflict, however.
"The AFL-CIO advises, but the individual
unions carry out their own policy," he
notes, and that usually has meant working
with local divestment groups. He sees labor
liberalizing its stance in response to more outspoken pro-divestment statements by
South African unions.

Of course, as black resistance to the
Bother regime strengthens and inevitably
becomes more violent, that will likely pro-
duce more strains within the movement,
between those who support the insurgents
and those who want to keep their distance.
Already conservative unions, most nota-
ably Albert Shanker of the American Feder-
tion of Teachers, have criticized the AFL-
CIO's cooperation with TransAfrica be-
cause of the black lobbying group's past
support for non-aligned socialists such as
Jacobs' Michael Manley and Grenada's
Maurice Bishop.

Robinson acknowledges the dilemma.
"That's why it's important that this move-
ment develops," he told In These Times,
"before more people over there were pro-
voked to take up arms."

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Lebanese Shi'ites protest the destruction of their homes by Israeli armed forces.

LEBANON

Israel’s brutal policy is forcing Shi’ite resettlement

By Jim Yamin

SIDON, LEBANON

T FIRST GLANCE THE RECENT fighting near this southern city appears to represent simply another violent spasm of Lebanon’s 10-year civil war. Yet a more careful look at the impact of Israel’s “Iron Fist” policy, initiated February 20, suggests these new battles may be part of a larger strategy.

Israel’s new policy of stepped-up repression against Shi’ite Muslim civilians is unraveling the religious and political demographics of south Lebanon. Tens of thousands of impoverished Shi’ite Muslims are fleeing the region. At the same time, pro-Israeli Christians are being induced to settle in and hold Lebanese-backed Christian militia.

The depopulation of southern Shi’ite villages is inflicting deep scars on Lebanon’s poorest and largest sector. Moreover, Israel’s tactics are threatening whatever delicate prospects exist for uniting Lebanon’s various communities.

Since Lebanon’s founding as an independent state in 1943, access to political power, developmental resources and revenues, as well as the availability of human services, have been institutionalized on the basis of religious sectarian or “confessional” affiliation. More than 10 years of civil war have been waged against these confessional structures that facilitate the exploitation of a disenfranchised majority by a privileged minority.

Israel is exploiting these volatile confessional traditions to serve its strategic interests. The current policy against Shi’ite villages, forcing the exodus of this community, is a bid to create a new demographic reality that would reinforce the confessional structures that have fueled Lebanon’s internal war.

Displacement through terror.

The official reason for Israel’s current policy is to halt increasing guerrilla attacks by the Lebanese against the Israeli Defense Force (IDF). Yet according to combined tallies of Agence France Presse and the Associated Press, at least 180 military operations were launched against the IDF during the first month of implementation of “Iron Fist,” compared to a monthly average of about 50 in 1984. During a two-week period in mid-March, 17 IDF soldiers were killed. Thus contrary to Israel’s stated objectives, the occupation policy is provoking more Lebanese resistance attacks.

Families can be seen trekking over hills and through citrus groves in an exodus out of the occupied region from the village of Qasmin and across the Litani river, the only exit route civilians are allowed to use. Two-thirds of the population of Sir el Gharieh recently fled, the village mukhtar said. He also reported that nearly half the population of dozens of other villages in the general Tyre-Nabatiyeh region have also fled their homes.

Village raids are the primary means by which Israel’s policy is implemented. During the morning villages are usually stormed by scores of armored vehicles and troops that fire indiscriminately. Then males between the ages of 14 and 60 are rounded up.

Subsequent civilian interrogations include beatings, deprivation of food and water, and forced kneeling or standing for 12 to 72 hours outdoors, according to villagers who remained after the roundups. Many civilians are arrested during the roundups, and prisoners are held in detention centers where even the International Red Cross is not allowed access, the villagers said.

Villagers in Sir el Gharieh described a February 23 IDF raid this way: After all the men in the village were rounded up, seven young detainees were singled out. According to the witnesses, the seven were machine-gunned in the legs, and two of them were subsequently bayonetted in the abdomen. One of the two, 17-year-old Youssef Mohammed Dhaq, called out for water. IDF troops responded by picking him up by his feet and immersing him headfirst in a village water catchment basin until he drowned. The remaining five, they said, were allowed to bleed to death while the rest of the detainees watched.

After the raids, homes are frequently bulldozed or dynamited. One such operation took place in Bazourieh in late February when a patrol of 50 heavily armed Israeli soldiers entered the village.

At a dusk-to-dawn curfew and bans on motorized transport are imposed in the Qana region. Theosition centers where even the International Red Cross is not allowed access, the villagers said.

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The policy is a bid to create a new demographic reality in southern Lebanon.

out the hinterland of the South were already deserted. The normally bustling Nabatiyeh and Tyre now resemble ghost towns during the day, since villagers in the surrounding regions as well as residents of those cities are afraid to leave their homes.

Another reason for the fresh fighting in the South is that the IDF has attacked non-sectarian Lebanese human service organizations that serve the poorest and most neglected segments of the population in their areas. The Nabatiyeh office of Mouvement Social, a social and medical service agency with centers throughout Lebanon, was ransacked three times and bombed once more last year. Secours Populaire, another medical service agency, opened a new branch that works with the government Ministry of Public Health, operates a hospital in Nabatiyeh that has been the target of threats and harassment. Staff there described a steady pattern of obstruction of the hospital’s services. The hospital director, Dr. Hikmet Amin, said he was threatened three times in the last nine months and his car was blown up.

Construction of a new hospital was completed nine months ago, but the IDF has prohibited its opening for service to the public, according to Amin. Two doctors and seven nurses have been arrested in the last nine months for unspecified reasons. For more than a year Secours Populaire has not been allowed to operate mobile clinics to outlying villages.

Round up the Christians.

Mass desertions of Shi’ite Muslims from the Israeli-backed South Lebanon Army have cut that force’s manpower by an estimated 25 percent, assuring that the composition of present and future Israeli proxy militias in Lebanon will be almost entirely Christian.

One Christian source revealed an effort last December to entice by 2,000 the number of Christian municipalities mobilized to fight in the South. He said that 150 young men were recruited by the right-wing Christian Phalange Party from his region in the Mets mountains northeast of Beirut. Similar numbers, he said, were being recruited from other surrounding Christian villages.

It is no coincidence that an uprising within the Phalangist Party led by right-wing militant Gubrani Geagea has a renewed aim to unite all Lebanese sects with a vision toward the eventual reunification of Lebanon, whereby different Lebanese sects will live in officially segregated areas from each other. His long-standing close ties with Israel are well known, and his popular base within Lebanon is considered to be solid.

In the name of “defending” Christian villages, Geagea is provoking battles between his Free Lebanon Army and combined forces of the Lebanese Army, nationalist opposition militias and Palestinian observers believe Geagea is playing into Israel’s hands in its efforts to foster an atmosphere of increased mistrust and antagonism between confessional groups. If these dynamics can be exploited by Israel and its increasingly isolated Lebanese allies, the migration of Christians into the South becomes an easy task for the IDF.

Thus the stage is set for a profound test of Lebanese popular will. Israel and its right-wing Lebanese proxies have employed religious demographics as well as the spirit of the country along confession lines. Meanwhile, Lebanon’s embattled Christian community finds itself caught between the dragon’s jaws as it struggles to make an in- terim step toward bringing security to the region.

Jim Yamin is the Midwest Program Officer for Grassroots International, an independent, non-profit relief and development agency that supports projects in conflict and the Occupied Territories. He recently returned from a 10-week trip to Lebanon.