Analysis – Features

Learning from the past: Syria's Labor Communist Party, a rich political history

Sunday 22 November 2020, by DAHER Joseph (Date first published: 30 October 2020).

Rateb Shabo, a Syrian leftist political activist, was jailed for 16 years in the 1980s and 1990s—including three years in the government's notorious Tadmur Military Prison—for his membership in the opposition Labor Communist Party [1]. His recent book, *The Story of the Labor Communist Party of Syria (1976-1992): A Chapter of the History of the Left in Syria* (al-Maraya, 2020), is a must-read window into progressive political resistance to the Assad regime from the 1970s to 1990s.

Contents

PART I: What can Syria's progressive opposition learn from the story of the Labor Communist Party?

Of all the leftist parties opposed to the Syrian regime, the Labor Communist Party (LCP) experience is likely the richest in terms of activism and political vision. The party has characterized itself with vibrant democratic internal debates and structures in comparison to other leftist and communist organizations, which featured a lack of pluralism and had a Stalinist heritage.

Different political tendencies existed throughout the history of the LCP, debating their analyses of the political context, as well as what kind of interventions were needed and the best way forward for the party. Similarly, the political practice and theory of the LCP were much more dynamic and non-dogmatic in comparison to other leftist parties, which were mostly rooted in Stalinist ideology. The party subscribed since its origins to an internationalist approach, linking the fate of the popular classes throughout the region and the world. The Soviet Union was not spared criticism from the LCP's members, especially regarding its policies towards the affairs of the region.

Party members were from all ethnicities and religious sects of Syria, making it likely the most diverse among leftist parties in the country. Women also had a significant and, in later years, growing presence in the ranks of the LCP, though were largely absent from leadership positions (p.191). Alongside the initial involvement of women in the first steps of the party through "Marxist Circles", or collective political groups, they played an increasingly important role throughout different periods of the party. Female members also suffered from the multiple campaigns of arrests by the security services, especially at the end of the 1980s as their numbers and participation in the party increased. As Shabo writes, the significant numbers of women in the LCP and their activism made the party clearly distinct from other leftist and communist groups, where women's roles were comparatively less prominent (p.194).

Creation and development

The Six Day War marked a stinging defeat of the Syrian and Egyptian regimes by the Israeli state, and heralded the end of movements stemming from Pan-Arab nationalism. Egypt, Syria and other states would gradually abandon their previous radical social and anti-imperialist policies. Their state capitalist development methods began to stagnate. As a result, they opted for a rapprochement with Western countries and Gulf monarchies and adopted neoliberalism, putting an end to many social reforms which had gained them popularity among sectors of workers and peasants.

However, just after the defeat of 1967, there was a general wave of radicalization in the Middle East and North Africa within leftist and Arab nationalist parties, which had originated several years earlier. This was reflected notably by the emergence of leftist Palestinian organizations such as the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) in 1967 and the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP) in 1969.

Alongside the rise of the radical Palestinian political and armed resistance, other countries witnessed significant development of radical groups. In Yemen, the Marxist-oriented National Liberation Front (NLF), established in 1963, formed the People's Republic of South Yemen (later renamed the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen) at the end of 1967, after four years of struggle against British colonial occupation. The takeover would inaugurate the most radical revolutionary experience during this period, but with limited impact because of the extreme poverty of the country.

Meanwhile in neighboring Oman's Dhofar region, an armed movement of social and national emancipation started to challenge the power of the reactionary sultan, Said Bin Taimur as well as British military and political influence. The Dhofar Liberation Front, a separatist group, entered a

process of radicalization towards Marxism and renamed itself the Popular Front for the Liberation of Oman and the Arabian Gulf in 1968.

Smaller leftist organizations in Lebanon, Syria, Egypt and Tunisia were also established in this process of radicalization. The Egyptian Workers Communist Party (EWCP), born from this new left, played an important role in the "bread uprising" that occurred in Egypt on 18 and 19 January 1977 as a response to a series of austerity measures implemented by the regime of Anwar Sadat, including the removal of subsidies on basic goods.

Most of these political parties were originally linked to the Arab Nationalist Movement (ANM), which was present throughout the region [2]. In their process of radicalization, they argued that the defeat of June 1967 was due to the "petty-bourgeois" socialism promoted by Gamal Abdel Nasser. In their view, only radical movements and approaches based in Marxism could defeat Zionism, overthrow autocratic monarchies and improve the living conditions of popular classes.

Origins in Syria

Syria was not immune to this process. In 1965, Syrian Baathist militants founded the Arab Revolutionary Workers Party (ARWP) around Yassine Hafez and Elias Morqos, two intellectuals who tried to reconcile Arab nationalism and Marxism. And within the Baath, young officers aligned with leftist general Salah Jadid operated a coup d'état on February 23, 1966. They represented the left wing of the Baath party, which stayed in power until then-Minister of Defense Hafez al-Assad ousted Jadid in 1970.

"Arrests by Syrian state security services in May 1978 left the party without any real leadership, as only three out of the LCA's 11 leaders were not yet imprisoned."

It was in this context that the "Marxist circles" were established in the mid 1960s, which would later give birth to the League of Communist Action (LCA) in 1976 and the Labor Communist Party (LCP) in 1981.

The Marxist circles were initially discussion groups set up throughout Syria where participants debated political issues of the Arab world through Marxist lenses. Each circle had its own dynamics and, in the beginning, developed independently. Members of the Marxist Circles coordinated and acted collectively.

Most initial members were students and former Arab nationalists in a process of radicalization. They were seeking to push against authoritarianism, as well as find a way forward in Syria after the defeat of 1967 (p.31). By 1974, Marxist circles were present in all major cities and universities, within the Syrian army, in trade unions and professional associations, and in the Ghab rural region of Hama governorate, which witnessed significant peasant revolts in the late 1960s (p. 38-39) [3]. The circles had several publications: "Red Banner," "The Communist" and "The Popular Call," which lasted until 1991.

By the end of summer 1976, after three large meetings [4], the League of Communist Action (LCA) was formed with around 30 delegates representing more than 120 members. A Central Committee was elected of 15 persons, representing the leadership of the new party, and a Working Committee of 5 persons (p.97). The newly created LCA described itself as a "Marxist-Leninist faction, whose central mission was to work with the rest of Marxist Leninist factions in Syria to build a Syrian branch of the Arab Communist Party, by raising political consciousness, organizing and mobilizing the working class and its allied classes in order to realize the socialist revolution within the

international proletariat horizon" (p.99).

Less than one year later, in March 1977, the party suffered its first arrest campaigns. Dozens of activists were jailed in Damascus, Hama, Aleppo and Lattakia. Four other repressive campaigns targeted the party between October 1977 and April 1979 (p. 120). Further arrests by Syrian state security services in May 1978 left the party without any real leadership, as only three out of the LCA's 11 leaders were not yet imprisoned.

Still, the LCA maintained its activities. In September 1979, the party elected a new Working Committee and published a transitional program concentrating on the objective of overthrowing Syria's regime and the establishing a democratic and revolutionary government (p. 124).

In August 1981, the Labor Communist Party was officially established in a general conference in Lebanon with 55 representatives, including two women.

The change of name was not merely symbolic, writes Shabo. Rather, it was a sign of despair in the abilities of the LCA to link and coordinate the work and activities of the official Syrian Communist Party and its splinter groups—most notably, the Syrian Communist Party-Political Bureau led by Riyad al-Turk [5]—and to transform into truly revolutionary communist parties. In Shabo's reading of the move, members of the conference had decided there were no longer any political or theoretical justifications to delay the formal establishment of a political "party," and of the absolute objective and class necessity that required it (p. 176). In the Central Committee, three main currents were represented: the Trotskyist current [6], the "moderate" current [7] and the new left current (p.177) [8].

The LCP maintained its activities throughout the 1980s, until the early 1990s saw them nearly cease due to successive repression campaigns by the government. One of the LCP's last main actions was in 1990, when it organized 300 mothers, sisters and spouses of imprisoned party members to demonstrate in front of Damascus' Presidential Palace.

Two years later, authorities arrested Abd al-Aziz al-Khayyar, the last remaining LCP leader still not imprisoned [9]. Some 13 other people were also jailed at the time for their suspected links to the LCP. The party subsequently became virtually inactive. The fall of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s also had ideological consequences on the LCP, with some members leaning more towards certain forms of liberalism, rather than Marxist ideologies.

However, during the so-called Damascus Spring in the beginning of the 2000s, following the Bashar al-Assad ascension to power, a number of former members played a role in the creation of so-called Forums, salons for discussion and debate, throughout the country. In Damascus, Munif Mulhem, a former leading member of the LCP, founded the Left Forum, which was subsequently shut down alongside others under pressure from the security services.

In August 2003, the LCP announced its return to the political scene, followed by a new publication called "Now." However, for many former members, the party no longer represented the initial aspirations and leftist ideals of the 1960s and 1970s.

Although the LCP continued to exist throughout the 2000s and 2010s, many members would wage their political involvement against the Assad regime as individuals, rather than from within the party. They went on to play roles in the uprising of 2011 through an array of groups, committees and different leftist coalitions within the popular protest movement.

During the uprising, the LCP supported the protest movement and was a founding member of the opposition National Coordination Body for Democratic Change. The group's main leader at the time,

Abd al-Aziz al-Khayyar, was disappeared by regime security forces in September 2012 on the road from the airport to Damascus.

There has been no information on his fate since.

Shabo's history of the LCP is an important window into a political party that is not well known—or oftentimes simply ignored—by many progressive circles both in Syria and abroad. The lessons of the LCP must not be lost in examining the strategies and mistakes of the dominant opposition groups that emerged since March 2011.

PART II

The LCP's history of standing alongside minority groups could hold lessons for today's Syrian opposition.

Outside Assad and the Muslim Brotherhood, a 'third camp'

The 1970s and 1980s in Syria saw violent conflict between the regime and the Islamic fundamentalist movements led by the Muslim Brotherhood (MB). Tensions culminated in the 1982 Hama massacre, in which regime forces besieged the city and killed thousands of residents.

In Shabo's telling, tensions between the two axes constituted the first "political test" for the League of Communist Action (LCA), the group that would later become the Labor Communist Party (LCP) (p. 115). The LCA had long opposed the regime of Hafez al-Assad, whom it considered corrupt; a dictator opposed to the interests of both the popular classes and the Palestinian cause.

The LCA and the Muslim Brotherhood (MB), at least ostensibly, shared the same general goal: overthrowing Assad's regime.

But for the LCA, the MB's approach proved problematic, with the latter's anti-democratic [10] and sectarian discourses and practices. MB members oftentimes killed Alawite personalities despite them having no direct political links to the regime [11].

The LCA saw the conflict between these two camps—the Syrian regime and the MB—as a struggle between two sections of the Syrian bourgeoisie, a struggle that was neither democratic nor "patriotic," in terms of serving the interests of the country. On one side, there was the bureaucratic bourgeoisie dominated by the regime; on the other, the traditional bourgeoisie, especially prominent traders, allied with the MB. Both sections of the bourgeoisie stood against the interests of the popular classes, in the LCA's view.

In response, the LCA worked towards the creation of a so-called "third camp."

In 1979, the party's newspaper, the Red Banner, published an editorial calling on the formation of what it named the United Popular Front. The group, as envisioned by the LCA, would be composed of political forces representing Syria's popular classes, and would stand in opposition to both the regime and the MB while pulling at the popular bases of these two sides (p. 117) [12].

Later on, LCA explained more precisely that it envisioned this front as the organizational tool for the popular classes to produce a true social revolution in Syria (p. 152).

The LCA criticized the Syrian political parties that were part of the competing Progressive National Front alliance, which supported the Assad regime in its violent confrontation with the MB, as well as

the left-leaning Lebanese National Movement alliance and some Palestinian resistance organizations (p. 117). These groups still perceived the Syrian regime as a national, or patriotic, and progressive force.

The LCP had long argued that the liberation of Palestine came along with the overthrow of regional regimes and the establishment of popular democracies as bases to support the Palestinian revolution. The repression of Palestinian organizations in Jordan's Black September conflict in 1970, as well as Hafez al-Assad's opposition to Palestinian resistance to Israel within its own borders, only served to solidify the party's stance.

Despite its efforts to recruit other leftist parties into its United Popular Front, the LCA had too little gravitational pull. Other leftist groups formed their own coalition only several months after the Red Banner published its editorial. These groups came together to sign what they called the "Pact of the Democratic National Gathering" (p. 160) [13].

The LCA's continuous contact with the Arab Socialist Union, a Nasserist party led by early Baath proponent Jamal al-Atassi, as well as the Democratic Socialist Arab Baath Party, linked to left-leaning former Baathist general Salah Jadid, did not earn it a place in the Pact. The Syrian Communist Party - Political Bureau (SCP-PB), one prominent signatory to the Pact, vetoed the LCA's inclusion.

The years prior to the Pact's signing had seen growing hostility from the SCP-PB towards the LCA. The former often refused official discussions with the LCA, though individual members of both parties had privately made contact with one another. SCP-PB leaders went as far as accusing the LCA of working with Syrian or Russian security forces to prevent the growth of their movement (p. 140) [14].

Meanwhile, the Pact had little class-related content or objective. The LCA criticized the positions of the majority of the parties within the Pact, particularly the SCP-PB [15]. In the LCA's view, Pact signatories saw the actions of the MB as an expression of popular movements and the streets, and not of a particular party. The Pact also failed to condemn the MB's spree of sectarian assassinations. In ensuing years, the signatories of the Pact would take a colder stance towards the MB, albeit without any radical criticism.

The Labor Communist Party that soon formed out of the LCA sought throughout the 1980s to create a large, independent progressive front against Assad and the MB. This was particularly true after the devastation of the Hama massacre in 1982, when LCP members once again called for the formation of a third camp separate from these two opposing sides.

Palestinian resistance

The Palestinian cause had been central to the LCP since the party's origins in Syria's "Marxist circles," collective political groups that emerged in the 1960s.

Palestinian refugees in Syria were often active or close to the LCP. Many members participated in armed resistance alongside the PLO and Palestinian leftist organizations such as the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP) and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) in refugee camps in Syria, Lebanon and Jordan. In some documented cases, people who had attended sessions of the Marxist circles later lost their lives in military operations against Israel. Some members of the party fought alongside Palestinian organizations to resist Israeli occupation forces' siege of Beirut in 1982.

"Just as with the Palestinian resistance, it was unity from below, from the revolutionaries themselves who hoped to overthrow the Syrian regime, that would advance the liberation of Kurdish population, they argued."

The LCP had long argued that the liberation of Palestine came along with the overthrow of regional regimes and the establishment of popular democracies as bases to support the Palestinian revolution (p. 69). The repression of Palestinian organizations in Jordan's Black September conflict in 1970, as well as Hafez al-Assad's opposition to Palestinian resistance to Israel within its own borders, only served to solidify the party's stance.

The LCP's opposition to the Assad regime grew following the intervention of the Syrian army in Lebanon in 1976, which was widely condemned by democratic and leftist opposition groups and professional associations in Syria [16].

Then in 1982, the LCP sent two groups of volunteers across the border to Lebanon to train with PLO armed forces and serve as auxiliaries for the Palestinian resistance. Prior to this, during the Israeli military siege of Beirut, the LCP sent 11 doctors—members or close friends of the party—to the Lebanese capital to help treat wounded Palestinian resistance fighters. Other members worked to guard their headquarters so that the Palestinian fighters would be free to go fight (p. 240).

One year later, the LCP played a key role in the establishment of the Popular Committees (1983-1986), a movement that gathered Palestinians in Syria [viii]. The movement described itself in its founding document as a national, democratic and popular structure, though one not seeking to become a formal political party. Committees were organized by neighborhood or profession, and each would be composed of four to five people. The committees were independent from one another in their cultural and political activities, only coordinating in the distribution of the propaganda and official public statements (pp. 240-241).

Palestinian refugee camps in Damascus were witnessing intense political activism at the time. Demonstrations in the camps multiplied, criticizing attacks on Palestinians in Lebanon by groups backed by the Syrian regime. Syrian security forces responded by arresting several hundred Palestinians.

Security forces also severely curtailed Palestinians' travel outside Syria, while continued repression made public meetings by Palestinian groups nearly impossible to organize, except for those in favor of the regime or supported by Syrian authorities.

The repression continued in the subsequent years, especially during 1985 and 1986 public protests in Syria against the "War of the Camps" military operations on Palestinian camps in Beirut, as well as during demonstrations on Palestinian Land Day in 1986 [17]. Protests and demonstrations diminished considerably in the Palestinian refugee camps following this last wave of repression. Syrian security forces continued, however, to pursue a policy of violent intimidation against Palestinians in the camps.

By 1990, approximately 2,500 Palestinian political prisoners were reportedly held in Syrian prisons [18].

An attempt at self-determination for Syria's Kurds

The LCA, and later its successor, the LCP, differed from other Syrian leftist movements in its support of self-determination for Kurdish people in Syria and the region. Other movements opposed or

simply ignored Kurdish self-determination, while the LCP's newspaper and brochures condemned discrimination of Syria's Kurds.

Their argument: unity of Arab and Kurdish revolutionary parties against the dictatorial bourgeois regime and reactionary parties—in other words, the MB—was the way to achieve self-determination for the Kurdish people. Just as with the Palestinian resistance, it was unity from below, from the revolutionaries themselves who hoped to overthrow the Syrian regime, that would advance the liberation of Kurdish population, they argued.

"Early on, the party understood that the emancipation of Syria's popular classes was linked to that of popular classes across the region, especially Palestinians and Kurds. The LCP saw these groups' struggles as their own, and understood that no salvation would come from states in the region, even if they professed sympathy to those causes."

The LCP participated each year in public celebrations of Nawruz, the springtime new year festival observed by Kurds, Iranians and other peoples. The holiday became an occasion for Kurdish communities and political groups to demand their national, cultural and democratic rights. LCP publications described celebrations of Nawruz as an act of resistance and affirmation of Kurdish national rights, in a country whose government was actively oppressing its Kurdish population (p. 142).

The oppression was widespread. In 1986, the Syrian government forbade any signs of Nawruz celebrations in two Damascus suburbs, and responded violently to participants who nevertheless mobilized. Security forces killed one young Kurdish man and injured others. Afterwards, participants organized a sit-in and blocked a main road. Members of the LCP participated in this demonstration. They also published a statement condemning police violence and demanding the liberation of all those who had been arrested (p. 143). The statement was translated into Kurdish.

The LCP made attempts to expand the model of the Palestinian Popular Committees to Syria's Kurdish population, but these failed as the vast majority of Kurdish parties declined to establish these groups. Meanwhile, Syrian security forces waged a new campaign against the LCP in 1986, considerably weakening its capabilities.

Collaboration between Syrian Arab and Kurdish political groups was long seen as a red line by the Syrian regime, which repressed such action. The Syrian regime's acceptance of certain Kurdish political groups from Turkey and Iraq within the country in these years, such as the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) led by Iraqi Kurdish figure Jalal Talabani and the Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP) affiliated with the Masoud Barzani meant that these movements abstained from any attempt to mobilize Syrian Kurds against Damascus.

Lessons for Syria's opposition

Why is the experience of the LCP still relevant? Early on, the party understood that the emancipation of Syria's popular classes was linked to that of popular classes across the region, especially Palestinians and Kurds. The LCP saw these groups' struggles as their own, and understood that no salvation would come from states in the region, even if they professed sympathy to those causes.

This view comes in stark contrast with today's main Syrian opposition bodies in exile, especially the Syrian National Council and the National Coalition for Syrian Revolution and Opposition Forces, also known as the Syrian National Coalition. Both bodies depended on foreign powers from the outset, and adapted their political actions and positions accordingly. The result: rather than seeing the

connection between the popular struggles of the region, the two bodies often supported the oppressive actions of these states, such as Turkey's oppression of Kurds within its own borders and in Syria, or Saudi Arabia's war in Yemen.

Meanwhile, the Palestinian cause has been ignored and silenced in order not to scare regional and western allies. Even worse, the vast majority of Syrian opposition bodies have opposed Kurdish national rights and replicated racist discourses and oppressive actions against Kurdish people, even supporting the Turkish-led and Syrian rebel-assisted invasions of Syria's northern Afrin region and other areas. The campaigns led to numerous violations of human rights and forced thousands of Kurds into displacement.

Finally, no independent and progressive political camp was able to develop after 2011 to oppose both the regime and Islamic fundamentalist forces. Rather, the Syrian Democratic People's Party and other democratic and liberal forces joined an alliance with the Muslim Brotherhood and other conservative right wing currents of the Syrian opposition, which were far more represented, to establish the Syrian National Council. Similar dynamics continued with the Coalition [19]. In addition, these actors did not hesitate to include some Islamic fundamentalist personalities, and attempted on some occasions to normalize or defend jihadist movements [20].

Here, the political experiences and debates of the LCP still matter: in the strategies that can be adopted against both the Syrian regime and religious fundamentalist groups, in building an independent progressive political camp, in tackling Palestinian and Kurdish self-determination. All these issues remain as current as they were when the LCP attempted to tackle them.

Memory of the LCP's political ideology should not be lost. Syrians watching today must seize upon the lessons of the party's progressive stance to build a future resistance, one that finds strength without repeating the same recent mistakes.

Joseph Daher

The author would like to thank Rateb Shabo and Munif Mulhem for their assistance and time in the process of writing this piece.

P.S.

• "Syria's Labor Communist Party, a rich political history". Published in two parts on Syria Untold. 16 October 2020 & 30 October 2020:
https://syriauntold.com/2020/10/16/syrias-labor-communist-party-a-rich-political-history/
https://syriauntold.com/2020/10/30/syrias-labor-communist-party-a-rich-political-history-2/

• Joseph Daher is a Swiss-Syrian socialist activist, academic and founder of the blog Syria Freedom Forever. He is part of the Wartime and Post-Conflict in Syria project at the European University Institute, Florence (Italy). He is the author of "Hezbollah: Political Economy of the Party of God" (Pluto Press, 2016) and "Syria after the Uprisings, the Political Economy of State Resilience" (Pluto Press and Haymarket, 2019).

Footnotes

[1] The party's name has also been translated into English as the Party of Communist Action.

[2] The organization has its origins at the American University of Beirut (AUB) with Syrian professor Constantin Zureik, a strong advocate of Pan-Arabism. The leadership of the movement included six AUB students: two Palestinians, Georges Habache and Waddi Haddad, a Lebanese, Salah Chabal, an Iraqi, Hamed Jbouri, a Kuwaiti, Ahmed El-Khatib and a Syrian, Hani El -Hindi.

[3] In 1969, the Baathist government forcefully suppressed a peasant uprising denouncing a system that indebted peasants to the Agricultural Bank to reimburse businessmen in the Ghab region.

[4] The first meeting was held in Damascus in November 1974, the second in Douma in 1975 and the third in Aleppo in 1976, representing, de facto, the first general conference of the Labor Communist League.

[5] The SCP-PB defected from the SCP because of the authoritarian behavior of Khalid Bakdash, its secretary general, and disagreements over national and pan-Arab issues. By 1976, the position towards the Syrian regime also became an issue between the SCP and SCP-PB because of the Syrian Army's intervention in Lebanon, which was condemned by al-Turk's factions. However, until 1976, members of the SCP-PB remained in institutions of the Progressive National Front (a coalition of Syrian leftist and nationalist parties supportive of the Syrian regime) and Syrian parliament (p.1976).

[6] They were close to the Fourth International and provided critical analysis and propositions to the party. This tendency was notably represented by Munif Mulhem who played a leading role in the history of the LCP and was imprisoned for more than 15 years by the regime between 1981 and 1997.

[7] According to Shabo, followers of this current were not organized in a particular political tendency and not coordinating between them. They followed the party line as agreed in the foundational meeting of the party in August 1981.

[8] This tendency is described as a "Leninist" tendency, with a form of "mechanistic" understanding of history. Their objective was to achieve a socialist revolution through a strategy of "Popular Front", in other words a wide alliance gathering leftist parties, social-democratic parties and unions as well as "liberal democratic" capitalists.

[9] He was released in 2005. In 2007, he participated in founding the "Left Assembly," which included the Communist Action Party, the Kurdish Left Party, the Body of Syrian Communists, the Marxist Democratic Assembly and the Coordination Committee of the Members of the Syrian Communist Party – Politburo.

[10] For example, in 1981, the deputy leader of the Muslim Brotherhood, Ali al-Bayanuni, in an interview with French newspaper Le Monde, declared that if the MB would reach power, the freedom to establish parties would not be extended to Marxists groups, even ones opposed to the regime.

[11] In June 1979, members of the Muslim Brotherhood and Fighting Vanguards (connected to the MB) committed a massacre by killing around 80 Alawi cadets in the Aleppo Artillery School.

[12] The title of the editorial featured in the *Red Banner* (number 36), was “Towards the Building of a United Popular Front.”

[13] It was composed of the Democratic Arab Socialist Union, Syrian Communist Party – Political Bureau; the Arab Revolutionary Workers Party, the Arab Socialist Movement and the Democratic Socialist Arab Baath Party.

[14] Riyad al-Turk continued even later on to have a sectarian political attitude towards members of the LCP. See this testimony of Munif Mulhem
https://www.facebook.com/monif.mulhem/posts/10216522911054208

[15] n an internal letter in July 1980, the SCP-PB exposed three possibilities in the development of the political regime in Syria, including one relying on the bourgeois class with “European” aspirations—in other words in favor of democracy. An alliance with wider sectors of the Syrian bourgeoisie and the Muslim Brotherhood was always a potential possibility for the SCP-PB.

[16] In 1980, all professional associations were dissolved by governmental decree. The regime then established new professional associations and appointed new leaders who mainly acted as corporatist arms of the state and the ruling party. At the same time, crackdowns against trade unionists affiliated with or who identified with opposition parties, who had been elected over official Baathist candidates in the 1978 and 1979 elections, intensified.

[17] In March 1976, a vast plan to expropriate Palestinians lands in the Galilee region had just been published. It was not the first time since 1948 that Palestinian land had been confiscated to establish or expand Israeli settlements, but this time the villages of northern Galilee had decided to react massively. They announced a general strike for March 30. The strike escalated into protests which clashed with the Israel occupation army deployed in the region. Israeli occupation forces killed six Palestinians and wounded several hundred. Since then, this day is commemorated annually on March 30, known as “Land Day.”

[18] Middle East Watch (1991). Syria Unmasked: The Suppression of Human Rights by the Asad Regime, New Haven, CT, Yale University Press. pp. 106–108.

[19] Even Riyad al-Turk declared in September 2018 that one of the initial problems with the SNC at its establishment was that the MB and groups linked to it dominated the opposition body. See Mohammad Ali Atassi, “In His First Interview after His Departure from Syria” (Arabic), Al-Quds Al-Arabi, September 2, 2018, http://www.alquds.co.uk/?p=1007786.

[20] https://tcf.org/content/report/pluralism-lost-syrias-uprising/?agreed=1