

The Campaign “You Stink” Shakes the Sectarian Regime in Lebanon

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Lebanon had experienced some major protests in early 2011 against the sectarian regime following the regional popular uprisings, but the movement unfortunately ended a few months later, especially after the sabotage of several religious and reactionary parties against the movement and with the complicity of leftist movements of Stalinist tradition.

A new popular dynamic started with the campaign “you stink” that was triggered after a waste management crisis. Piles of garbage were accumulated in the streets of Beirut since early July, after the closure of a major garbage dump’s site in the city of Naameh, a coastal town in the South, at that time.

Opened in emergency in 1998, this landfill of waste had to close ten years later and never exceed 2 million tons of garbage. Last July 17 2015, when the inhabitants of nearby villages blocked the road to the garbage trucks of the company Sukleen, the garbage dump had been enlarged four times and contained 18 million tons of waste. Since that day, the smell that was choking on a daily basis Naameh extended to the streets of Beirut. After ten days without garbage collection, it already accounted for 3000 tons of daily waste.

Subsequently the Lebanese national unity government composed of the forces of March 8 and 14, [1] transported some amounts of garbage heap in the poorest areas to temporarily relieve tensions in the capital Beirut and spared the more gentrified neighbourhoods. Until today, no solution has been found to the crisis of the accumulation of waste, most of Lebanon’s streets are now filled with garbage.

The bourgeois and sectarian ruling class also attempts to split the profits from the privatization of garbage pickups depending on sectarian and geographical lines. Especially the links between Averda, the company managing Sukleen and the powerful Hariri family. Close to the former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri, assassinated in 2005, Maysarah Sukkar established Averda a few months before getting his first contract in Lebanon. With a turnover of \$20000 dollars, he was then granted the multibillion waste market of Beirut and Mount Lebanon, without public bids. The contract was renewed several times in the general opacity.

Averda contract finally expired on July 17 2015. Without any political agreement found on a new space where to bury the waste, Sukleen trucks began dumping them in rivers, open spaces or in the port of Beirut.

The campaign “You stink” initially demanded an ecological solution to the waste crisis, but later as we will explain it the movement was radicalized to condemn the Lebanese sectarian and bourgeois regime as a whole.

At the first mobilization in the framework of this campaign Saturday August 22, more than 10,000 protesters demonstrated in the streets of Beirut. The demonstrators were challenging all the sectarian and bourgeois political parties of March 8 and 14 in the waste crisis and the corruption poisoning the country.

During these first protests, the repression of the army and the police was very violent. They tried to push the demonstrators off the roads leading to the city centre of Beirut, shooting live ammunition in the air and targeting protesters with tear gas and water cannons. The police also attacked the demonstrators with batons, wounding more than 75 persons.

Despite the fierce repression, new mobilisations were organised the next day as a challenge to the police, with about 20,000 people in the streets of Beirut. One could read on the walls of the luxurious downtown invested by the protesters, graffiti such as "Down with capitalism" and "Downtown Beirut belongs to the people", "No to homophobia, racism, sexism and classism" and "Revolution".

The various Lebanese media, all at the service of the sectarian and bourgeois political parties, with the collaboration of security services and even some members of the campaign "you stink" that did not want a radicalization of the movement and the challenging of the sectarian regime, tried to discredit the movement as a whole, by notably particularly characterizing young people from Beirut poor suburbs who had joined the movement as "infiltrators" "rioters" and "saboteurs" ... A false propaganda, which by using similar terms, reminded for many protesters the propaganda of the Assad regime in Syria against the peaceful demonstrators at the beginning of the revolution in 2011.

Mobilizations and sit-ins were held throughout the week despite the continuation of the repression that resulted in the hospitalization of more than 400 people.

Other demonstrations took place in other parts of the country, but particularly in the Akkar region, which is located in the North of Lebanon and is the poorest and the least provided in public services [2]. People mobilized under the slogan "Akkar is not a dustbin" after the government's proposal to transport the waste in this region. In return and to try to convince the people of the region of this measure, the government decided to allocate \$ 100 million to the development of Akkar and 200 million already allocated were made available for road infrastructure and sewers.

A group of municipalities in the Akkar valley has also launched a campaign called "Tamartouna bifadlikoum" (You have buried us by your largesse) who refuses the barter principle of disposing of Lebanon's waste in Akkar and to guarantee in return the development of the region.

In the same region of Akkar, the residents of the village of Ersal to prevent the creation of a garbage dump area in the locality launched a petition.

The trade unions of the General Confederation of Lebanese Workers (known as the CGTL) called to join the movement following the events of August 22 and 23 August, but because of their weaknesses and their submissions to sectarian and bourgeois Lebanese political parties, their calls are in many ways just rhetorical.

On Saturday August 29, a new massive demonstration was organised in the capital Beirut gathering between 60 000 and 100 000 people. The youth was very much present and the demonstrations were highly dynamics.

One could read and hear the following messages in the protests: "Revolution against the ruling class, against sectarianism, against racism, and against patriarcat"; "Secularism, equality and social justice"; "From Douma to Beirut the people is one and does not die"; "From Baghdad to Damascus and Beirut and Palestine, one revolution", "the people want the fall of the sectarian regime", etc...

Numerous protesters were condemning also the corruption of the political elites of March 8 and 14, as well as the neo liberal and privatization policies that impoverished the popular classes of the country and led to the destruction of public services.

In these mobilisations, a new front was established gathering various leftist and progressive movements, in which we can find at its heart the Socialist Forum, called "the people want" under the slogan "secularism, equality and social justice". This progressive coalition demands notably: the liberation of all the protesters arrested during the demonstrations "you stink" and the end of the repressive campaigns of the State; the establishment of a Constituent Assembly on the basis of a non sectarian proportional election and with Lebanon as a single district; resignation of the Environment Minister and the sidelining of the Council of Development and Reconstruction on the waste issue; prosecution for all those involved in the business of privatization and waste management; an investigation on all those involved in the violence in recent protests, that is to say the political and security officials, headed by the Interior Minister, Nohad Machnouk; etc ...

The multiple and various attempts of the sectarian and bourgeois political parties of March 8 and 14 to co-opt the movement for its own political benefit and opportunist interests are for now still a failure.

The mobilizations in Lebanon, such as the continuing ones in Iraq that also gathered hundreds of thousands of protesters on Friday August 28, show us that the shock wave of the revolutionary processes that began in the region in 2011 are very far from being finished, despite the various counter revolutionary offensives. We must give our support to these new uprisings in Lebanon and Iraq while continuing to support the revolutionaries in Syria, Bahrain, Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen, Palestine, etc ... fighting for the initial objectives (democracy, social justice and equality) of the revolutionary processes and against all forms of the counter revolution.

As we have said before and despite the significant and multiple difficulties, the revolutionary processes are not dead...

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[1] The March 8 coalition is linked to Syria and Iran, and includes Hezbollah, the other Shi'a party Amal and the Free Patriotic Movement (Christian) led by General Aoun. On the other side, March 14, supported by the US and Saudi Arabia, gathers the Future Movement led by Saad Hariri (Sunni), the Lebanese Forces and Kataeb (Christians).

[2] The north of Lebanon and its capital Tripoli represents 20.7% of the inhabitants of the country, but 46% of the extremely poor and 38% of the poor. The area is also the least equipped at the medical level, while dropout rates, unemployment and female illiteracy are among the highest. No large-scale development project has also occurred since the 1990s. The number of business establishments do not exceed 17 000, of which the vast majority are small family businesses with less than five employees, in the governorate of North Lebanon, while we found in Mount Lebanon and Beirut up to 73 000 and 72 000 business establishments.

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