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Lebanon

Georges has returned, Ziad has left us!

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On 25 July 2025, [Georges Ibrahim Abdallah](#), finally released, returned to his native Lebanon where he was welcomed as a hero. The next morning, [Ziad Rahbani](#), musician, theatre and radio personality, son of the legendary couple Fairouz and Assi Rahbani, took his last breath in a hospital in the Hamra district of Beirut. The Lebanese – and Arab – left is moving from euphoria to tears.

It took only two days for the Lebanese media to mention a word that has gone out of fashion: the left. Two spectres of Marx attract their attention. The first, Georges Ibrahim Abdallah, a former militant of the Lebanese Revolutionary Armed Factions (FARL), returned from the French prison of Lannemezan on 25 July 2025 to head for his native village of Qobeyat, in northern Lebanon, after a long incarceration of four decades. The second, the musician and man of the theatre Ziad Rahbani, was a member of the Lebanese Communist Party (PCL). Son of the Lebanese diva Fairouz and the composer Assi Rahbani (1923-1986), an extraordinary musical genius with biting irony, he passed away the day after the return of Georges Ibrahim Abdallah, at the Khoury hospital in the Hamra district of Beirut, leaving the country in shock.

Only 24 hours apart, in different registers and repertoires of action, Georges Ibrahim Abdallah and Ziad Rahbani both tell a certain history of the Lebanese left, between pen and gun: one a Guevarist, the other more in the image of Bertolt Brecht, but both driven by the same anti-colonial passion, fiercely in solidarity with the Palestinians in their native Lebanon. They were also both Christians assigned to the Lebanese civil registry, in a country frozen in the rigid rules of political confessionalism, Georges Ibrahim Abdallah being a Maronite, and Ziad Rahbani being Greek Orthodox. But this confessional assignment in no way prevented them from supporting resistance, even “Islamic,” in Lebanon. The departure of the former and the return of the latter are concentrated in a very short historical moment. Chance or fate, it would have been difficult not to connect them.

In the shadow of the PFLP

In this resonance between Georges and Ziad, there is first of all Palestine and the left, or the left because Palestine. Born in April 1951, Georges Ibrahim Abdallah, a teacher by trade, was first politically socialized in the ranks of the Syrian Social National Party (SSNP), a secular party claiming to unify a “greater Syria” and to reject the old borders of the French mandate period. At that time, the SSNP was particularly well established in the Christian lands of northern Lebanon. In the second half of the 1970s, like so many Lebanese at the time, Abdallah joined the ranks of a Marxist, nationalist and Leninist Palestinian party: the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) of George Habash (1926-2008).

It was still the time — the 1970s — when the socially emancipatory narrative of the Lebanese left blended easily with the aspiration for Palestinian national liberation. The old PCL founded in 1924, the Progressive Socialist Party (PSP) of Kamal Jumblatt (1917-1977) or the very young Communist Action Organization in Lebanon (OACL) born at the end of the 1960s, were allies of the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO), in the context of the civil war (1975-1990). It was also the time of a real “Palestine International”: thousands of fighters from the radical left and national liberation movements from Western Europe, Asia, South Africa, Latin America and all the Arab countries left for Lebanon, in the Palestinian refugee camps, to train in the profession of arms. They joined Palestinian political formations: the PFLP or the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP) — in a Marxist decolonial vein — but also the Fatah of Yasser Arafat (1929-2004), the chair of the PLO.

Wounded in 1978, during the first Israeli invasion of southern Lebanon, Georges Ibrahim Abdallah later became one

of the founders of the FARL, a small Marxist organization close to the PFLP, striking Israelis and Americans abroad. They claimed responsibility for a series of targeted attacks in France in the first half of the 1980s, including the assassinations of the US military attaché in Paris, Charles R. Ray (18 November 1982), and Yacov Barsimantov, second counsellor of the Israeli embassy and Mossad liaison officer (3 April 1982).

Since then, the history of the FARL has been revealed over the years, but sparingly: the clandestine organization protects its own people from Israeli reprisals in Lebanon. The organisation, which disappeared from the post-Lebanese civil war political landscape in the early 1990s, nevertheless issued rare statements paying tribute to those who had died in recent years. This is how the Lebanese public learned, in December 2016, of the death of Jacqueline Esber, “comrade Rima” by her nom de guerre, Georges Ibrahim Abdallah's companion. Born in 1959 in the village of Gibrayel, not far from that of the Abdallah family, members of the FARL, it was she who shot Yacov Barsimantov in Paris in April 1982. No one knows how she returned to Lebanon, escaping the French police, or how she defied the furious eye of the Israeli services during several decades of semi-clandestinity in Lebanon.

As for Georges Ibrahim Abdallah, the rest of the story is known, from his arrest in Lyon in October 1984 for using Algerian “true-false papers” to his sentencing three years later to a life sentence for complicity in murder. A relentless French media campaign – from both the right and the left – wrongly blamed the “Abdallah clan” (Georges and his brothers) for the series of attacks committed in France from 1985 to 1986 by the Committee of Solidarity with Arab and Near Eastern Political Prisoners (CSPPA). Eligible for release since 1999, Georges Ibrahim Abdallah has always had his requests for release rejected, becoming the longest-serving political prisoner in Western Europe, until 17 July 2025, when the Paris Court of Appeal authorized his conditional release as of 25 July. On that day, he returned to Lebanon.

The turning point of Tal El-Zaatar

Ziad Rahbani's Palestinian story is less well known, or rather, it is often silenced. The musician, the composer, the man of the theatre, the “son of Fairouz and Assi Rahbani”, the one who invented an absolutely inimitable musical style, borrowing as much from jazz as from oriental music: all this was happily celebrated at his death in a façade of consensus, beyond political divisions and confessional affiliations. And yet, nothing is less consensual in Lebanon than having crossed into the ranks of the PFLP – the same Marxist-Leninist organization to which Georges Ibrahim Abdallah belonged.

In 2012, Ziad Al-Rahbani was on the set of the pan-Arab news channel *Al-Mayadeen*. Interviewed by its director Ghassan Ben Jeddou, the musician remembered the first moments of the Tal El-Zaatar massacre in the summer of 1976. A Palestinian refugee camp nestled in the Christian east of Beirut, it was besieged by the Maronite militias of the *Kataeb* (the Phalanges) of Bashir Gemayel (1947-1982), the Guardians of the Cedar of Etienne Saqr and the Tigers of the National Liberal Party (PNL) of the former Lebanese president Camille Chamoun (1900-1987), all assisted by the Syrian army, which then turned against the Palestinians.

The young Ziad, in his twenties, witnessed the bombings from the top of the family home in Rabieh, in the heights of Beirut. He also remembers the visits of Kataeb leaders (Karim Pakradouni, Michel Samaha) and representatives of the Syrian services (Ali Douba, Nazi Jamil, Ali Al-Madani) to the family home, the evenings sometimes ending with dancing on the tables, while the massacre was nearby. He then discreetly recorded the conversations, and reported the content of the secret discussions to the PFLP. The massacre of Tal El-Zaatar made him decide to flee the Christian east, to go to western Beirut, in a form of political and family rupture.

This was followed by a rich collaboration of several years with the Palestinian organization – and with its Lebanese

twin, the Arab Socialist Action Party (PASA). He composed several songs for the PFLP, without ever signing them, and worked with its film department. He composed the soundtrack for the film adaptation of "Return to Haifa," a short story by the writer, intellectual and former PFLP spokesperson Ghassan Kanafani (1936-1972), assassinated by the Mossad in Beirut. The film was released in 1982, under the direction of Iraqi director Kassem Hawal.

Ziad then moved closer to the PCL, of which he became a member. The Marxist party was then at the heart of the armed resistance to the Israeli occupation of southern Lebanon, following the murderous offensive of the summer of 1982. It launched, along with other left-wing and nationalist formations, the *Jammul* (*Jabhat al-Muqawama al-Ouataniya al-Loubnaniya*, Lebanese National Resistance Front), which had been harassing Israeli troops since September 1982.

In 1984, Ziad Rahbani composed the anthem of the PCL on the occasion of the sixtieth anniversary of the founding of the Party. From then on, the hammer and sickle would never leave his neck on television sets. He regularly collaborated with the major media of the PCL – the radio station *Sawt el-chaab* ("The Voice of the People") and the newspaper *Al-Nidaa* ("The Call") – and participated in the cultural universe of the PCL alongside communist artists, such as Khaled El-Haber or Sami Hawat.

With the latter, he made the album "Ana Mouch Kafer" (I am not a miscreant) in 1985. The revolutionary spark did not die out with time: when the journalist and writer Joseph Samaha, a former member of the Organisation for Communist Action in Lebanon (OACL), launched the left-wing daily *Al-Akhbar* (The News) in the summer of 2006, Ziad immediately offered him a regular column entitled... "Mal 'amal?" ("What is to be done?"), in reference to Vladimir Lenin's book.

Revolutionary melancholy

On July 28, 2025, in front of the gates of Al-Khoury Hospital, on the occasion of the lifting of Ziad Rahbani's body, it was this same daily newspaper that was distributed free of charge to a dense crowd that had come to greet the artist one last time. Its front page displays a map of Palestine on a background silk-screened with a photo of the musician, in Andy Warhol mode, with the sole slogan: "Al-wadeh dawman!" ("Always clear!"), to signify that he has never deviated from his convictions. Two days earlier, the newspaper devoted all its front pages to Georges Ibrahim Abdallah, under the title: "He has not surrendered.... And he came back free."

Al-Akhbar is not alone in establishing a link of continuity in time between the figures of Georges Ibrahim Abdallah and Ziad Rahbani. It was more or less the same crowd, the same actors, the same known and unknown faces that met on Friday for the return of Georges Ibrahim Abdallah to Beirut international airport, and on Monday for the departure of Ziad Rahbani to his final resting place. The demonstration of a somewhat melancholic left followed the hearse on rue Hamra which carried, as a true artistic, journalistic and cultural artery of the 1960s and 1970s, everything that the Lebanese intellectual left could dream of. Red flags of the PCL or white flags of the former Lebanese National Resistance Front (*Jammoul*), hammers and sickles, but also the four colours of Palestine, marked the two days of 25 and 28 July 2025.

One last link has escaped no one: the remarkable presence of Hezbollah at both events. Party of God MP Ibrahim Al-Moussawi welcomed Georges Ibrahim Abdallah in the lounge of honour of Beirut airport, alongside the chair of Hezbollah's political bureau, Mahmoud Qomati, the secretary-general of the PCL Hanna Gharib and the Nasserist MP for Saida, Osama Saad. The Shiite Islamic group also organized a popular welcome in the southern suburbs of Beirut, when the convoy of the former prisoner took the road to the Lebanese mountains: a communist of the Christian faith was celebrated as a hero of the national resistance to Israel. Three days later, it was the same Ibrahim

Al-Moussawi who, alongside another Hezbollah deputy, Ali Fayyad, walked on rue Hamra Street behind the coffin of an artist who was more surely an atheist than a believer. No doubt a disbeliever, the left-wing musician has never hidden his sympathy for the Shiite group in the context of repeated wars with Israel.

The Lebanese public still remembers the photo of the artist at a Victory Festival held shortly after the end of the 33-day war between Israel and Hezbollah in July and August 2006: on his cap screwed on his head, was written “Nasr min-Allah” (a victory of God), a formula playing on the surname of the former secretary general of the organization. Hassan Nasrallah, assassinated by Israel in September 2024. With the 2011 uprising in Syria and the gradual entry into a long civil war, the Lebanese and Arab lefts divided on the subject, between supporters of the revolt against former president Bashar Al-Assad and sympathizers of an “axis of resistance” to Israel led by Hezbollah, but to which the Syrian regime also belonged. Ziad Rahbani did not escape the controversy, accused by some of being too complacent with the Lebanese Shiite party and its regional allies.

Prioritizing opposition to Israel – the still occupying power in southern Lebanon – the left, embodied by figures as diverse as Georges Ibrahim Abdallah and Ziad Rahbani, was finally less animated by the societal concerns of the new Lebanese social movements of the 2010s than by a main contradiction between “imperialism and its enemies”, in a deep continuity with the 1960s and 1970s – all in a context of medium-intensity Israeli war on Lebanon since the last official cessation of hostilities in November 2024, and of genocidal war on the Gaza Strip.

The former communist and irreverent composer will have achieved without his knowledge an unprecedented national unity, sometimes feigned.

Georges has returned, Ziad has left. But the resonance effect between the return of one and the departure of the other has a limit: the “official Lebanon.” Georges Ibrahim Abdallah was certainly given a warm welcome by the people at the exit of Beirut airport, mixing old and young generations of activists, and the mainstream media covered the activist's return to his native country live. But neither the presidency nor the prime minister sent delegations to welcome the former prisoner from Lannemezan – even though his convoy back to Qobeyat was, for security reasons, officially accompanied by state security. The fear of anger from the United States, already burned by the French court's decision, was far too great. The imperturbable 74-year-old militant now welcomes uninterrupted, from the top of the mountains of Qobeyat, an incalculable number of sympathetic political, trade union and religious delegations – including many young people – seeming to say: this is only the beginning, let's continue the fight.

For Ziad Rahbani, on the contrary, there was no ostracism: the funeral and burial organized in the Christian village of Bikfaya, north of Beirut, attracted all of official Lebanon: ministers and former ministers, parliamentarians of all political persuasions, businessmen, and everything that Lebanon can understand of a world of show business connected to the Lebanese confessional elites. The former communist and irreverent composer achieved an unprecedented national unity, sometimes feigned, without his knowledge. No doubt it was also a question of meeting in Bikfaya around the only consensual figure still alive in Lebanon, national icon and mother of the deceased, Fairouz, to give the fleeting illusion of a patriotic communion at a time of deep internal splits over the future of the country and the future of Hezbollah's weapons.

Ziad is already subject to commercial recuperation: the Virgin company called on the population to take part in a marathon in his honour on Saturday, 1 August starting from Zeytouna Bay – a small Beirut marina privatized for luxury boats – in a country hit every week by Israeli bombings.

No one yet knows who will win the battle: the old anti-capitalist, anti-colonial and anti-confessional dreams of Ziad Rahbani, or the steamrollers of capital, always able to recuperate the dead to create a living commodity.

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Translated by **International Viewpoint** from [Orientxxi](#).

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