CHAPTER 9

Social Rights: Emergence of a Colonial Welfare State

Personal status law was not the sole avenue of challenge to paternalism. Present also at the 1936 protests that brought forth the later-aborted independence treaties, and at the 1939 protests against French interference in religious law, was the labor movement. While the women's union staged conferences as patriotic mothers, labor unions were coalescing into the largest mass movement in the territories. Both groups demanded social rights to education, health, and work. Unencumbered by the mandate charter's protections of religious law, social rights were governed by civil law and so were open ground for a subaltern challenge.

By 1930, as discussed in Parts One and Two, the mandatory state had expanded social services to unprecedented, if still insufficient, levels. Emergency aid and self-justifying beneficence bestowed upon a populace, however, did not constitute social right. Rather, they were the meager fruits of a paternalistic bargain with landed, bourgeois, and religious elites. It was only in the late 1920s and 1930s that popular demand for a sustained state commitment to social welfare was organized by various social groups: labor unions, women's groups, Communists, civil servants, philanthropists, and even bourgeois nationalists. Social services were claimed by these groups not as an act of French generosity, but as a right that the state was obliged to fulfill for its citizens. Fueled first by the lingering postwar economic stagnation, then by the onset of world depression, demands on the state were boosted by mass politicization in the 1930s. Seminal was the 1931 mass boycott in Damascus and Beirut against foreign-owned electric companies, which after six months forced a significant reduction in rates.[1] Through the decade, urban groups organized as never before to express their anger on a variety of issues, not just profiteering by French concessionary companies, but also unemployment, falling wages and school shortages, as well as the dismissal of parliaments and delays in independence treaties.

These protests succeeded, by the eve of World War II, in cracking the edifice of colonial paternalism with the first changes in the legal boundaries of the civic order. Social rights directly assaulted the privileges of mediating elites, for their intent was to bypass the patronage networks of religious patriarchs, local political bosses, and bourgeois employers to establish a direct relationship between subaltern citizens and the state. Subaltern groups invoked the republican principles that lay dormant in the oft-suspended constitutions to assert claims to universal democracy and equal rights of all citizens. Indeed, labor unions and other groups were deeply influenced by the depression-era expansion of social rights in liberal, industrialized countries that were laying the foundations of welfare states. By 1939 the outlines of a colonial welfare state had emerged.

Labor and the Demand for Social Rights

Despite the growth of modern industry in the 1930s, urban workers were hit hard by the world depression between 1930 and 1937. Real wages in cities fell by half, in terms of ability to pay for family food each month, as many workers were laid off or forced to cut back their work weeks to three or four days.[2] As unemployment reached an estimated 30 percent, the French continued to deny the problem, while the new industrialists profited from workers' competition for jobs to keep wages low.[3] As strikes multiplied, bringing little relief from employers, workers came to recognize their common grievances and they began to appeal to the state for relief. Aleppo, where nearly half of textile jobs had disappeared during the 1920s, was in the vanguard of this shift. In August 1930, 50,000 workers and their families reportedly marched to the office of the high commissioner's deputy to demand raises.[4]

The labor movement, along with student groups, was at the center of urban unrest that shook government in both countries in the early 1930s. Industrial strikes, boycotts of electric and tramway companies accused of inflating their rates, protests against budget cuts and layoffs of civil servants and against continued high tax rates contributed to the decision by high commissioners Henri Ponsot and Damien de Martel to suspend the Lebanese and Syrian constitutions and parliaments in 1932 and 1933, respectively. Despite the return to rule by decree, however, the French could not ignore the labor movement's pressure to redress grievances.

Strikes and demonstrations against unemployment finally pressured the state to adopt a major job-creation program. In 1933, de Martel inaugurated a public works program to relieve unemployment, with a budget of 10 million

LLS, and ordered a further study to develop import substitution industries. He also increased funding for workers' technical education. Also in 1933, when Syrian civil servants protested unfair layoffs in state governments, the High Commission intervened to discipline local government officials.[5] When civil servants again threatened to strike after the franc was devalued in 1936–37, de Martel introduced cost-of-living wage increases for all government employees, including teachers. The state also intervened in labor disputes in the private sector, arbitrating between strikers and their employers. In 1936, for example, the Damascus municipality imposed a pay raise for hosiery workers after a week-long strike, against the protestations of the factory owners.[6]

Men were not the only activists in the labor movement. A small number of women, especially Lebanese Christians employed in the new textile factories and in the tobacco industry, began unionizing too. By the mid-1930s the Communist Party opened a women's wing, attracting some prominent bourgeois women activists like Imilie Faris Ibrahim, a friend of union-founders Ibtihaj Qaddura and Salma Sayigh and a secretary of Nur Hamada's Women's Arabic and Cultural Assembly. Women's groups also intensified their labor efforts, directing their claims, as labor unions did, at the state. Nazik 'Abid founded a society for working women in 1933 that pressured the Lebanese state to adopt laws to permit sick days, maternity leave, and equal pay. 'Abid preached that the key to women's political liberation was their economic independence.[7] And in 1934 female teachers in Syria, feeling the economic pinch of the depression, organized to complain that they were paid less than male teachers and to demand repeal of the requirement that they quit their jobs when they married.[8]

Labor unions also called for safer workplaces and social security. The labor movement's interests coincided here with those of the various women's groups. Both sought minimum wages, limited work hours, and safety protection. Their advocacy, combined with pressure from the League of Nations' International Labor Organization, forced the mandatory state to reverse its longstanding opposition to protective labor laws. In 1935 and 1936, the French drafted and imposed upon the Lebanese and Syrian governments laws that set general standards for industrial hygiene and safety and for the protection of women and children workers.[9] The latter laws limited women's work to eight hours a day, required one day off per week, assured maternity leave, and banned women from workplaces with heavy machinery and dangerous substances.

Unions heralded the laws as a first step toward comprehensive labor codes protecting all workers against arbitrary layoffs, long hours, and injury. Agitation for the expansion of labor rights intensified during the heady years of mass protest in the mid-1930s. The highly mobilized labor movement became

a key player in a new pattern of politics that pitted the French and their collaborators against the nationalist opposition. Each side vied to win the support of the urban masses as pressure for independence treaties and the return of constitutional government mounted.

De Martel offered jobs, technical education and salary increases in an effort to focus workers' attention on his promises of economic development and to divert them away from nationalists' calls for independence, treaties, and constitutional government. He offered a carrot in 1934 and 1935, with decrees in both Syria and Lebanon to grant unions a limited right to organize.[10] The laws were intended to buttress the popular standing of France's hand-picked heads of government, Shaykh Taj in Syria and Habib Pasha al-Sa'd in Lebanon. De Martel insisted in speeches that the common people of both countries would be better served by his public works programs than by a return to raucous parliamentary politics of the nationalists. Nationalists were outraged, and in turn sought to cast France as the true enemy and rally workers to their cause.[11] In 1933, the Syrian National Bloc convened a congress to dispute De Martel's claims of economic progress. Aleppine nationalist leader Abd al-Rahman Kayyali published a scathing 200-page tract, sold in bookstores and sent to the League of Nations, that blamed French policy and favoritism toward French concessions for retardation of the Syrian economy and especially for the lack of jobs.[12]

Labor leaders thus faced a dilemma similar to that of women who sought personal status reform: to whom to direct their claims? While workers supported the nationalist movement, they knew that many nationalist leaders were also their employers and so unlikely to support their increasingly class-conscious claims for rights. In the 1930 Aleppo demonstration for pay raises, for instance, the National Bloc supported the employers, while it was the French deputy who finally negotiated a pay raise for the workers.[13] But by openly appealing to the French as arbiters in labor disputes, the movement risked the same accusations of betrayal that Nazira Zayn al-Din's appeal to Ponsot had garnered.

So in the 1935–36 wave of mass protests, labor cast its lot with the nationalists. Lebanese unrest crested in 1935 around economic issues. Workers joined a range of demonstrations orchestrated by nationalist elites, especially against the tobacco monopoly that was reinstated by de Martel that year. At the same time, supported by both nationalists and Communists, taxi and truck drivers struck against restrictive state regulations. De Martel acted quickly to cut ties between workers and nationalist elites by deploying police, dissolving the drivers' union, and banishing leading nationalists Riyad al-Sulh and Fakhri al-Barudi from

Beirut. Workers were also excluded from the January 1936 presidential elections, restricted only to members of parliament, who elected nationalists' opponent Emile Eddé. Later in 1936, the newly formed (and illegal) labor federation led by typesetters perpetuated the general atmosphere of political revolt through strikes and demonstrations in support of Socialists' electoral victory in France and of Lebanese independence. In October 1936, widespread strikes for pay raises greeted the devaluation of the franc. This time however, reflecting the leftist sympathies of the Popular Front (elected the previous May), the High Commission responded by ordering a small increase and releasing labor leader Mustafa al-'Aris from jail.[14]

Meanwhile in Syria, workers joined merchants and students in staging a 36-day general strike throughout the country in January–February 1936.[15] The labor movement's ability to organize thousands of workers, especially with the formation of the Damascus Union of Labor Syndicates that summer, complemented the National Bloc's patronage power to mobilize students and urban quarters through neighborhood bosses. The Communist Party also supported the strike, in keeping with its nationalist turn under the new leadership of Khalid Bakdash.[16] While ideological commitment certainly motivated workers, the feebleness of French offers played a part in their decision too. Unemployment remained high, despite public works programs and repeated French denials of the magnitude of the problem. And the 1934–35 revisions of laws on labor organizing were hollow at the core: while they theoretically permitted unions, they retained Ottoman bans on worker-only associations and labor federations.

The return to constitutional government in 1937–39 appeared at first to ease labor's dilemma. The French capitulated to the mass protests and agreed to negotiate treaties. In anticipation of independence, they reauthorized parliaments and granted greater autonomy to the Lebanese and Syrian governments. The National Bloc was elected to head the Syrian government in late 1936, and the nationalist Constitutional Bloc would gain a majority in the Lebanese parliament in 1937. The Popular Front in France also contributed to a change in political climate. The Front's sympathy for social rights revived aspirations abandoned since Sarrail and the Syrian Revolt of establishing true republicanism in Syria and Lebanon. Now, the labor movements did not hesitate to direct their claims to the local states. Although they remained technically illegal, the nascent labor federations began to lobby their parliaments for a comprehensive labor code for all workers, including long-sought protections such as accident insurance, sick pay, and guaranteed pensions. The federations argued that workers deserved a payback for their contributions to the nationalist cause.

Like their fellow subalterns in the women's movement, however, labor

leaders were soon disillusioned by their alliance with nationalist elites. The proposed labor codes foundered in parliaments dominated by the bourgeois owners of businesses who employed the union members. In 1937, Syrian unions threatened a general strike when the National Bloc government imprisoned labor leaders for defying the law against employee-only unions. Both state governments eventually backed down, and from then on tolerated workers' right to organize. But the parliaments continued to stall debate on the labor codes. In Syria, the labor federation staged a general strike in May 1938 and threatened a second one later in the year. Jamil Mardam Bey's government rushed to assure labor leaders of their sincerity, issuing a decree in January 1939 that formally, and belatedly, authorized worker-only unions. But Mardam Bey's government fell in February 1939 before voting on the labor code. In Lebanon, unions won minor victories with laws on industrial hygiene and severance pay and a 1938 presidential decree creating a Service for the Protection of Manpower. But bourgeois politicians feared the implantation of French-style socialism and in May 1939 the Lebanese parliament roundly rejected the new service's proposal for a corpus of social and labor legislation.[17]

Despite the impasse on the labor codes, the language of workers' rights had entered parliamentary discourse. The labor movement had aroused workers' consciousness of their subaltern position and mobilized them not only to make material demands upon their employers, but also to raise their status in the civic order through civil law. Unions had won the informal right to organize and minimum guarantees on severance pay and workplace hygiene, as well as a precedent for maximum hours and safety protections in the laws enacted on behalf of women and children. Through their federations and association with the growing Communist Party, the labor movement's more than 20,000 unionized workers rivaled the power of nationalists' urban organizations by 1939. It had fundamentally altered politics, by reversing the French's anti-labor policies and by threatening the mediating power factory of owners and concessionary companies that once stood between them and the state. As World War II loomed, the movement was poised to extract even more rights.

The labor movement's success resonated beyond shop floors to challenge the premises of paternalism throughout the colonial civic order. The Communist Party joined the March 1939 demonstrations, not just to protest the French parliament's rejection of the treaty, but to protest France's support of an oppressive, rural mediating class: "The French democratic mission in the world doesn't consist in protecting reactionaries among feudal lords . . . [who] are criminals that the French Revolution of 1789 would have condemned to capital punishment."[18] Leading unions like the Beirut typesetters also campaigned for

republican principles and anti-sectarianism.[19] They claimed to represent all subalterns' right to equality, and denounced ethnic and religious divisions that were reinforced by paternalistic elites like religious patriarchs, tribal chiefs, and some political party leaders. They also claimed to support women workers on an equal footing with men.

But while the labor movement's successes shook one pillar of paternalism, mediated power, their impact on the second pillar, gender hierarchy, was less certain. First, the unions represented only a small portion of working women. Most urban working women—household maids, petty peddlars, at-home seamstresses and lacemakers, and schoolteachers—did not benefit from the pay raises and other benefits won through the 1930s strikes. Second, while the labor protection laws of 1935–36 were proclaimed by unions as precedents for future laws covering all workers, their immediate impact on women was highly ambiguous. As long as the laws remained in force only for women and children, they effectively defined them as a separate and inferior category of worker. Because employers were reluctant to arrange shorter shifts and better health standards for women, the laws virtually blocked women's entry into high-paying industrial jobs at a time when their employment in home, silk, and artisanal industries was plummeting. The laws also limited women's ability to work enough hours to support their families. Government records report that Lebanese families objected to the loss of women's (and children's) wages, and that female workers concealed the number of hours they worked from inspectors.[20]

The labor movement's broad attack on paternalism was also muted in its effect on women's subaltern status because of its distance from the women's movement. There is virtually no existing record of sustained contact between them, outside of the Communist women's auxiliary. But even there, women's interests were subordinated to those of class. The labor movement did little in these years to defend women's right to work from religious attacks. In 1938, for example, a group of Beirut shaykhs petitioned the interior minister to ban women from working in retail shops, because they "offend good morals by working in public." Two Christian women were subsequently forced to quit their jobs in a lemonade shop located near a mosque.[21] Neglect of the issue was likely due not only to general neglect of women's concerns, but to political strategy as well: labor leaders did not want religious concerns to split the movement. In the March 1939 Syrian protests, Communists said they opposed personal status law reform because it would enflame sectarian divisions that would weaken working-class solidarity. This was a far cry from the party's 1931 platform, which had explicitly condemned veiling and forced marriage.[22]

Although nowhere stated as such, we might surmise that similar concerns generally discouraged labor leaders from pursuing overt alliances with the women's movement.

For women's union leaders, an alliance with labor would have required betrayal of their own class; that is, the economic interests of their fathers and husbands among the nationalist elite. It would have been a very difficult trade-off to make. Women's class-based alliance with nationalist elites not only distanced them from the labor movement, but also discouraged women's cross-class solidarity with other women. This is not to say the women's movement neglected the plight of poor working women. Bourgeois women who did not work for a living did mobilize to aid their poorer sisters. The Syrian Woman's Awakening Society, for example, expanded its program to provide work for rural women living on the outskirts of Damascus. Nadida Shaykh al-Ard, a member in the late 1930s, drove into the Damascene countryside weekly to supply women with sewing machines and embroidery materials and teach them to make high-quality bath towels and tablecloths. The society then sold the items at elite charity functions; half of the proceeds went to the women workers, and half to the purchase of more supplies.[23] A similar effort, the Encouragement of Lebanese Industry Society (Inhad al-sina'a al-lubnaniya) was established by the wife of President Emile Eddé, in cooperation with ladies from prominent Beirut families. In 1938 it received lottery revenues from the government to create jobs for 600 rural artisans, mainly women.[24] These efforts sought to ease pain caused by the decline in indigenous industries. But they were also made in the paternalistic spirit of bourgeois philanthropy. The Encouragement of Lebanese Industry, for example, touted itself as a vehicle to "cement a stronger union among Lebanese *ladies* in service of their country (emphasis added)."[25] Poor women were the clients of their bourgeois benefactors, not sisters in subaltern struggle. They were not encouraged to organize on their own behalf. As a result, the women of the urban masses remained an untapped, unorganized resource for either the women's or the labor movement in the 1930s.

In sum, friction among class, religious, and gender identities discouraged a broader alliance among subalterns in the paternalistic colonial civic order. While lack of solidarity likely harmed both movements, the women's movement appears to have suffered more.The structure of the 1930s civic order had encouraged the Communist-labor movement to abandon women's rights, just as elite nationalists had, in favor of recruitment opportunities among (male) populist and religious milieux. Even as their strategy of patriotic motherhood made barely a dent in the gendered boundaries of paternalistic privilege set by religious law, women stood to reap little from the comparative success of the

labor movement in cracking mediated hierarchies of paternalistic power through civil law.

Emergence of a Colonial Welfare State

Labor rights were not the only social rights to expand in the 1930s. A broad spectrum of urban society mobilized to claim rights from the state. To justify their claims, these groups invoked both the text of the mandate charter, which required the French to prepare their nations for independence, and the republican spirit of the French Revolution taught in their school textbooks. They increasingly adopted the language of social rights to forge a new basis of citizenship influenced directly by the socialist and statist ideologies of interwar Europe. Claim-making was further inspired by French and nationalist bargaining strategies that emerged within the arena of electoral politics. By 1939, the accumulation of social rights won had sketched the outlines of a veritable welfare state, albeit one distinguished by its colonial setting.

Social rights were by no means, in the minds of agitators, the principal goal. Under nationalist leadership, protests were framed primarily in terms of demands for self-government and independence from French rule. Grievances were used to support arguments that the French had violated the terms of the mandate with economic policies that inhibited growth, industrial development and employment, and with chronic shortages of schools and low levels of health care. Many grievances were sent by petition to Geneva, in an effort to convince the League of Nations to cancel France's mandate because of these violations.

In response, High Commissioner de Martel sought to convert these political challenges into bargains over social rights. While the state's willingness to grant social rights was certainly enhanced by the election of the left-leaning Popular Front government in France, idealism was not likely the main impulse to bargain. As World War II loomed on the horizon and as the treaties languished in the French parliament, the French desperately sought ways to stabilize their hold on Syria and Lebanon. By introducing social policy initiatives, they could exploit the ambiguity latent in the opposition's demands in order to shore up popular support.

For even as the groups rejected the very fact of French rule, they continued to demand more state intervention, not less, in social affairs. Amidst criticism of French language requirements in schools, there were constant calls for more state schools. Amidst criticism of the continued high incidence of disease and

infant mortality, there were calls for the expansion of public health departments. Amidst criticism of an industrial policy favoring concessions to French firms, there were calls for state support of a national economy. The French responded in piecemeal fashion to these specific grievances, and so sidestepped fundamental challenges to their rule. As we have seen, to complaints about unemployment, they created jobs. To complaints about crowded classrooms, they funded more schools. To complaints about poor safety regulations, they stepped up health inspections. In sum, the French responded to the mid-1930s challenges by transforming their paternalistic policies of social spending into the recognition of citizens' rights to state protection and support.

Social rights were thus the byproduct of a triangular political bargaining process involving the French and their mediating collaborators; religious and nationalist elites in opposition; and the subaltern movements. The first two groups vied for the loyalty of the subaltern urban masses, a rivalry that peaked during elections. As the French cynically diverted nationalist complaints into social rights, so did nationalist elites, seeking to build mass followings, adopt a social agenda that would foster a cross-class, anti-French alliance. Nationalists' motives were as disingenuous as those of the French, as we saw in their defeat of labor code proposals. Even as nationalist elites spoke the language of social rights, they maintained their power as old-fashioned urban patrons who used their government access to spread benefits to their clients.

In the bargaining process, the French were forced to expand their skeletal system of social services far beyond what they had understood to be their commitment when the mandate was assigned. After budget cuts in the early 1930s, state spending, especially by the state of Syria and the Common Interests administration, steadily rose in the late 1930s. For example, the number of civil servants in Syria and Lebanon climbed from 13,728 in 1936 to 15,621 in 1939.[26] And in addition to the legal commitments made to workers, the state made new commitments in public health and education. Between 1929 and 1938, health and education spending rose from 10.5 to 18.5 percent of the Syrian budget, and from nearly 9 to 13 percent of the Lebanese budget.[27] A brief look at the expansion of these branches of state social policy will illustrate how, in conjunction with labor law, the foundations of a colonial welfare state were laid.

As discussed Part Two, in the 1920s the French had laid the foundations of a public health service, relying heavily on private intermediaries like French missionaries, who received state subsidies to provide clinics and hospital care. The rudimentary system of the 1920s funneled its still-meager resources to

constituencies most important to stabilizing French rule: the army, urban elites, Lebanese, Christians, and men. Peasants, women, Muslims, and the lower classes, at the time unorganized into mass movements, were relatively neglected. Criticism of this neglect mounted. Women's groups and newspaper columnists badgered the French to increase funding for public health and to speed responses to epidemics. Workers' demands for safer workplaces and accident insurance also promoted a broader interest in public health. Unions in the Syrian city of Hama, for example, agitated in 1931 for installation of a sewer system.[28] Petitions to the government and League of Nations in turn brought pressure from the international arena.

French response to the pressure was modest, but significant. Even as post-war epidemic outbreaks subsided and even as budgets were slashed in the 1930s depression, funding and services for public health expanded. Between 1929 and 1938, annual spending for public hygiene and assistance in Syria and Lebanon increased by 20 percent, from 546,000 LLS to 661,000 LLS. In Lebanon alone, public health spending rose by 50 percent between 1936 and 1938. That the French sought recognition for their support of public health was demonstrated in the fanfare and press coverage of the 1938 openings of a new maternity hospital in Lebanon and an insane asylum in Syria.[29] In preceding years, new state-funded anti-tuberculosis sanitoria had also been opened in both countries. In addition, state provision of free hospital care in Lebanon rose by nearly 50 percent between 1930 and 1938, to 6,400 patients treated annually. In Syria, free doctor's visits at state-run clinics nearly doubled, from 306,000 to 590,000 between 1930 and 1938.[30]

The High Commission also undertook a vigorous campaign for disease prevention. The plague was finally eradicated from Beirut after 1933 thanks to a program that destroyed rats. The incidence of trachoma and smallpox was significantly reduced through vigorous school inspections and vaccination programs. Inspections of food vendors and public baths were stepped up, with tens of thousands of sites visited by state inspectors annually. New laws passed in both countries subjected food servers to annual medical exams and set higher penalties for fraudulent claims about food quality. Malaria, however, remained a grave health threat, as hundreds continued to die of the disease each year. Despite pressure from the League of Nations to address the problem, the French insisted that the state could not afford the high cost of draining swamps.[31]

As important as the quantity of care was the change in public expectation of it. As early as 1925, newspapers like the prestigious *al-Muqtabas* in Damascus and *Le Réveil* in Beirut called public health a right of citizens, and an obligation

of the state.[32] In the 1930s, common citizens took up the language as well, rejecting France's characterization of health care as a generous gift. In 1934, for example, the imposing Kawkab hotel in Beirut collapsed, killing 39 people. Public protest flared as violations of building codes became known. Forty-five relatives of victims petitioned the League of Nations, accusing the French of applying lower building standards in Beirut than in Paris, and of "violating the right of the people."[33] By the end of the decade, government officials themselves adopted the notion that public health was a right. Writing in the quasi-official journal *Dimashq* in 1940, Dr. Yusuf 'Araqtinji, founder of Syria's public health service, stated that sound hygiene laws were "the right of the Syrian people."[34]

Popular pressure for state-funded education exploded in 1930, when Lebanese parents, teachers, journalists, ulama and nationalists unseated Prime Minister Emile Eddé after he closed 100 state schools attended mostly by Muslims, as part of a budget-cutting scheme.[35] Although 75 of the schools were reopened, by the early 1930s thousands of students each year were being turned away in Syria and Lebanon because there was no room in state schools.[36] At the start of the 1935 school year, police were called out in Tripoli to suppress a demonstration by students denied admission. Two years later, 200 parents in Tripoli protested to the League of Nations "in the name of civilization, humanity, and culture" against the distribution of educational funding to local "patriarchs and bishops" while state schools remained overcrowded.[37] Nationalists in both countries demanded universal education as not just as a social right, but as a political right—claiming that an educated citizenry is a precondition of democracy.[38] Likewise, the women's union continued to pressure the state for more girls' schools, in the name of their future patriotic duty as mothers of citizens. Labor unions, too, were among the biggest agitators for a greater state commitment to education, because many of their members were illiterate. They submitted numerous petitions to the state for libraries and trade schools.[39] Even religious leaders began using the language of rights, to demand larger state subsidies for their private schools.[40]

The French defended their policy by claiming that drops in state revenue during the depression prevented the hiring of new teachers, and that localities had failed to contribute their share of funds for school construction, required by a law dating from the Ottoman era.[41] However, popular pressure eventually had its effect. In 1938, the French used extra-budgetary funding to open 28 new government schools in Lebanon, the first new schools in years.[42] Moreover, the total number of schools and students in all mandated territories rose by more than 50 percent in the 1930s, totalling 2,554 schools with about 280,000 students in 1938. The number of students educated primarily with

state funds also rose by 50 percent, to 92,000 in state schools and 55,000 in the quasi-public French missionary schools regulated and subsidized by the High Commission.[43] And even though school expansion did not keep up with demand, education showed the most impressive growth of any category of government spending. Education expenditures rose from 4.6% of all state budgets (1.4 million LLS) in 1929 to 8.6% (2.4 million LLS) in 1938.

With the establishment of basic social rights to health, education, and job security, in the form of both legal protection and fiscal commitments from the state, the cornerstone of a colonial welfare state had been laid. The level of state commitment to welfare may be compared to that made by the British and French states prior to World War I, when a host of legislative guarantees and the first financial entitlements were established. But the demand for welfare in Syria and Lebanon more closely approximated contemporary developments in 1930s France and Britain. The term "welfare state" itself had become current in Britain by the late 1930s, while in France the foundations of "l'état providence" were laid with universal unemployment insurance laws in 1928 and 1930. In Syria and Lebanon, women's groups and labor unions explicitly invoked as their model contemporary events in France, where in 1935–36 democratic Socialists and Communists joined labor unions to agitate for substantial new state intervention in economy and society, and to bring the Popular Front to power.[44]

Despite these shared ideologies, the nature of state commitments to welfare differed profoundly from the European cases. The mandatory welfare state was distinctly *colonial* in the way welfare was funded, in its level of funding, and in the delivery of services to the population. In contrast to social services in metropolitan France, those in Syria and Lebanon were not funded primarily by taxes or other contributions from the middle and upper classes. First, there was little revenue to collect from the thin layer of elites in an unindustrialized country. Second, direct taxes were paid primarily to the local state governments, which spent little on social services. Social spending in the mandates was financed, instead, primarily by the High Commission, through customs revenues and subsidies from Paris. This fiscal arrangement had much to do with the emergence of welfarism in the political context of a confrontation between colonial rulers and a population seeking liberation. Because of this volatile context, the French were unable to levy taxes to pay for social services on the very citizens who called for them. The colonial welfare state was, at its origin, a stopgap measure designed to forestall demands for independence, not the product of an evolutionary social contract binding state and society and involving a commitment to higher taxes.

A related, colonial characteristic of the emergent welfare state was its low level of spending. Because of lack of tax revenues, and because of constant demands in Paris for frugality, public education, health, and labor protections were horribly underfunded compared to European welfare models. However, underfunding of social services, so much criticized at the time, was partly an illusion because state budgets often omitted the huge investments made directly from Paris to private agents and semi-public agencies that provided services at cut-rate costs. And while state spending was low relative to Europe, it was unprecedentedly high in the Syrian and Lebanese context. Local waqf foundations, for example, spent only a fraction of what the state did on education, health, and poor relief.[45] Nonetheless, relatively low funding should in no way disguise the fact that this was an emergent welfare state. Common usage often simply equates welfarism with high levels of entitlements. Welfarism is a matter of kind, not quantity, of commitment; it grounds the relationship between the state and its citizens in the language of rights, rather than that of paternalism, and in sustainable legal guarantees rather than occasional gestures of beneficence.

This brings us to the third distinctively colonial feature of the Syrian and Lebanese welfare state: its mediated delivery of what were largely state-funded services. In diverting political grievances into social claims, the French turned to the paternalistic constituencies they had cultivated as pillars of their rule: rural landlords and tribal chiefs, missionaries, urban bosses, and religious leaders. These elites became vehicles not only of political control, but also for the delivery of social services. The French in a sense could kill two birds with one stone: the desire to award power to mediators and the need to appease demands for social rights. As a result, especially in Lebanon, the bulk of publicly funded health care and education remained in the hands of private, and usually religious, agencies. Maronite Patriarch Antoine ʿArida, for example, proposed abolishing public schools altogether, insisting that only autonomous religious sects should oversee the moral upbringing of children. He insisted that religious education was a right of citizens and that state control was a contravention of this liberty. At the same time, he argued that the state should fund the religious schools so as to further national progress.[46] As we have seen, however, the corollary of mediated state services was a hierarchical bias in access to state benefits, which tended to favor the urban bourgeoisie, landowners, Lebanese Christians, and males more than peasants, workers, Muslims, and women (see chapter four). Islamic populists, whose views resembled those of ʿArida, did not receive a fraction of the school subsidies that Maronites did. In contrast, European welfare states were ideologically

constructed as a means of leveling social inequality and establishing direct state control over society through public institutions. Welfare was practically linked to states' needs for healthy, literate military recruits and its needs to pacify growing numbers of industrialized urban workers. These conditions did not hold in Syria and Lebanon, where citizens did not generally serve in the army and where the state more urgently needed to appease middle classes and elites who could potentially lead an armed rebellion, as Syrians had done in 1925–27.

In sum, on the eve of World War II, the bargaining process that had laid the foundations of a colonial welfare state reached a critical juncture, as tensions between right and privilege heightened. French strategy, in diverting calls for political independence with offers of new social rights, had driven a wedge in the cross-class coalitions of 1936, pitting the reigning national bourgeoisie against their erstwhile subaltern allies seeking inclusion in their own right. The national governments were also threatened by religious groups, who sought to preserve their mediating roles. The two-way pull for privilege and right exploded in the 1939 mass protests, which featured both religious and labor groups. The expanding labor movement was poised to make a credible challenge to the mediated and hierarchical structure of the colonial welfare state. Along with women, organized workers intended a far more radical transformation of state obligations and citizens' rights than had so far been attained.

Conclusion to Part Three

The legal boundaries of the colonial civic order underwent fierce renegotiation in the 1920s and 1930s, in a complex, triangulated process of political bargaining among subalterns, paternalistic intermediaries, and the French. The outcome by 1939 was rather contradictory. On the one hand, the preceding chapters may be read as a story of paralysis, failed attempts by the women's and labor movements to redraw legal boundaries that were guarded jealously by religious, nationalist, and French elites. Gendered legal distinctions, in particular, remained largely intact. Suffrage was still defined as a male prerogative. Citizens' personal status was still differentiated by religious law. And while some social rights were won, they were vitiated by class and gender privileges that preserved paternalism within the emergent colonial welfare state.

On the other hand, the period was one of profound reorientations within the prevailing paternalism. While the assertion of religious authority may

have narrowed the boundaries of state jurisdiction, the demand for social rights conversely broadened the state's role in the civic order. Moreover, initial gains in social rights posed a challenge to the power of mediating elites. The promise of a more direct relationship between the state and subaltern groups threatened the legal boundaries that privileged mediating elites' authority.

Gendered legal boundaries of the civic order were also simultaneously reinforced and challenged. New was the political attitude that saw women's lack of suffrage as the bulwark of the entire political and social order. New was religious elites' exclusive claim to legislate women's personal status. New was the formal distinction between the rights of female and male workers. Also new, however, was the assertiveness of women in claiming not only civil service jobs, but also equal pay; in not only claiming the right to education, but also enrolling in universities and entering the professions; in forming not only the women's unions, but also staging public conferences and writing books that rattled ruling elites.

Indeed, gender was the Gordian knot of the entire paternalistic edifice, entwined with the sinews of state, religious and class power that bound the civic order together. We have seen how women's efforts to gain political and civil rights triggered alliances variously among religious and secular mediating elites and the French. We have also seen how gender and class pulled in opposite directions among subalterns, distancing the women's and labor movements from one another. To understand fully the ways in which gender undergirded the colonial civic order, however, we must look beyond the rarified realm of the law to examine the more mundane arenas where political conflicts were waged and identity was formed. It was clear after 1936 that the sheer numbers of organized (male) workers and Islamic populists made elites and the French heed them. They had shown that they were capable of disrupting public life with massive strikes and demonstrations. It is therefore essential to investigate why, despite its conferences, charity works, and demonstrations, the women's movement did not expand. While we have seen that class bias and the dual legal system hindered the prospects for such an expansion, they do not provide a complete explanation. Part Four will show how women's mass mobilization was peculiarly weakened by the gendered construction of the urban public, and how women's challenges to the spatial boundaries of the colonial civic order became the object of cross-cutting politics of religion and class similar to those surrounding the law.