CHAPTER 14

Climax of the Colonial Welfare State

War arrived in Syria and Lebanon not with bullets, but with holes in clothes. Within the first five months plummeting imports opened a huge market in used clothing. Soon, paper shortages cut down the size of newspapers and Damascenes worried that wheat exports to Lebanon would drain their own dwindling stock.[1] For a time, though, normal life seemed to continue. In May 1940, the women's union in Beirut made headlines with a petition to the city government for cleaner public parks and bakeries.[2] After the fall of France the next month, however, the region slid into general economic and political crisis. Workers' and women's protests—and competition between nationalists and the Free French to satisfy their grievances—forced a radical expansion of the colonial welfare state, which in turn engendered further class and gender conflict.

Social Breakdown and Vichy Repression (1940–41)

High Commissioner Gabriel Puaux boasted that it was easy to govern in the first year of the war, as his 100,000 French troops were "more than adequate to inspire everyone to respect France's wishes."[3] Puaux used martial law to arrest labor leaders who mounted strikes against low wages and layoffs, as well as most Communist leaders, by January 1940. Signs of sympathy with the Germans brought further arrests, particularly among the Syrian National Party and Najjada in Lebanon, and nationalist youth groups in Syria. In addition to the stick of military force, Puaux wielded a carrot of 50 million francs sent from Paris to ensure imports of necessary goods and to stanch unemployment by reviving de Martel's public works program. Puaux did not, however, revive de Martel's bargaining policies. The civic order was stilled as it had been in the early 1920s, under military repression.

The war's second year would not be so calm. The June 1940 occupation of France and inauguration of Vichy rule in Syria and Lebanon aggravated conditions beyond endurance. Funds from France were cut, as was vital trade. The British instituted a shipping blockade, shut off the flow of oil from Iraq to Tripoli's refinery, and closed borders to markets in Iraq and Palestine. By December, gasoline supplies were so short that sales to taxi drivers were banned. More than 50,000 workers were unemployed in Damascus alone, while the cost of living rose to double that of 1939. As bread lines lengthened, despite price controls and rationing schemes, Lebanese life was reduced to a daily focus on acquiring food.[4] Although lukewarm to Vichy, Puaux in desperation imitated the fatherly pose of its leader, Marshal Pétain, in radio broadcasts that urged the population to observe its "duties" of work and discipline, and in public appearances like a visit to a girls' school in Latakia (fig. 17). But a primary pillar of France's claim to rule since World War I, the guarantee of basic welfare, was crumbling. Fearing mass revolt, Puaux lamented, "The inhabitants [of the Levant] had been accustomed by us, perhaps too quickly, to consider the Republic as a wet nurse with an inexhaustible breast."[5]

The first hunger marches took place in Aleppo and Damascus in January 1941, shortly after the arrival of Puaux's Vichy successor, General Henri Dentz. In February, the new leader of the Syrian National Bloc, Shukri al-Quwwatli, seized control of protests against unemployment, high prices, and shortages, and organized a shopkeepers' strike that spread to all of Syria's major cities. In the face of French tanks and mass arrests, the strikes spread to Lebanon's cities in March and April. Also active in both countries were paramilitary youth groups, Islamic populists, Communists, and labor leaders not yet jailed.[6] In April, the Phalanges and Najjada, who allied to organize women's bread protests and to stockpile wheat for the unemployed, staged a major strike against the government. The threat of continued strikes forced Vichy to lower the price of bread and to oust its puppet governments. Emile Eddé was replaced with Alfred Naqqash (Naccache) as president of Lebanon. The new Syrian head of state, Khalid al-'Azm, promised immediate public works jobs, welfare for youth and workers, an ambitious public health program and increased supplies of food.[7] Social pressure and Vichy's lack of funds had forced the state back to the bargaining table.

However, Dentz and his ministers at the same time deployed Vichy's tenets of order and sacrifice to repulse demands for jobs and a full return to parliamentary government.[8] Vichy's ideology of family, work, and nation resonated with conservative elements in both Syria and Lebanon, where pro-fascist

and pro-German sentiments were widespread. In March 1941, for example, the Lebanese Bar Association rejected the membership application of a woman who had just graduated from law school, explicitly invoking Marshal Pétain's statements in France that women should devote themselves to the family and leave scarce jobs to men. Dentz and several Lebanese politicians supported the bar's decision. But critical press coverage apparently forced the bar to revise its ban, to grant membership at least to unmarried women. Three women immediately joined, but faced the prospect of losing their legal practices upon marriage, much as female schoolteachers did.[9] Vichy ideology was also profitably exploited by the Jesuits in Lebanon, whose leader, Father Claude Chanteur, was an avid supporter. *L'Ecran*, the movie magazine of the Catholic youth group L'Equipe, moved closer to the views of Islamic populists in printing a call to censor movies shown to women, blaming films for their loss of sexual morals.[10] While this proposal was never implemented, Catholic pressure did convince Vichy censors to impose a new rating system restricting films viewed by children.[11]

However, Vichy's police repression, change of governments, and ideology of family and discipline did not secure its rule. Vichy leaders in France undermined their position in the Levant when they moved toward overt collaboration with the Nazis in the spring of 1941, just when fighting in the Balkans raised the Allies' concern about the Middle East. In May, when Dentz permitted German use of Syrian airfields to support a recent anti-British coup in Iraq, the Allies decided to act. The Vichy government in Syria and Lebanon fell at the hands of a Free French/British invasion in early July 1941.[12]

Free France and the Revival of the Colonial Civic Order

The Free French were even poorer in resources than Vichy had been. Not only did they lack subsidies from the metropole, but they also ruled during the deepest economic slump of the war. Their legal claim to rule was also jeopardized by Vichy's abandonment of neutrality for collaboration with the Germans, which many Syrians and Lebanese claimed was tantamount to withdrawal from the League of Nations and so to abdication of the mandate. More portentiously, the British, who supplied most of the invading and occupying troops, were unenthusiastic about reinstating full French sovereignty. In response, the Free French claimed to rule as representatives of the True France, still loyal to the League of Nations and committed to the Allies'

anti-fascist, democratic principles.[13] On June 8, General Georges Catroux had dropped leaflets from airplanes proclaiming the end of the mandate, independence, war relief, and revival of trade with the British-occupied regions of the Middle East; the goal of the invasion, the leaflets stated, "is not to repress your freedom but to assure it, to chase Hitler's forces from Syria and make your rights, and those of France, respected."[14] Charles de Gaulle, on a visit in August 1942, reaffirmed French rule in the Levant as a bulwark of democracy.[15] The Vichy rhetoric of duty was thus replaced by Free France's promises of social and political rights.

Under pressure from de Gaulle, however, Catroux postponed a full return to the parliamentary regime of 1939 as too risky to French interests: democratic symbols would be subordinated to the preservation of empire.[16] The Free French were too weak in 1941 to manage a full return to combative politics of the 1930s. Fully one-third of top French bureaucrats and all but 2,500 troops had opted to return with Dentz to Vichy France, and their ranks would not be fully replenished until 1943. French tentacles of support among non-state mediating bodies were also attenuated, as most French missionaries were pro-Vichy: Catroux exiled the Jesuit rector of St. Joseph University, Claude Chanteur, to Cairo for continuing to lead his students in prayers for Marshal Pétain.[17] Finally, the Free French had little wealth with which to buy local support, for wartime trade losses had nearly emptied the coffers of the Common Interests administration. Total government spending sank in 1941–42 to less than half of 1939 levels, in real terms adjusted for inflation.[18] Wartime trade was to remain severely restricted under the guidance of the Middle East Supply Center (MESC), the regional economic system run from Cairo by the British and Americans.

So in the autumn of 1941, Catroux revised his June promise. He proclaimed a conditional independence, wherein martial law was lifted and local governments were granted more autonomy. But he delayed parliamentary elections and appointed interim presidents who would rule by decree: In Syria, Shaykh Muhammad Taj al-Din al-Hasani, prime minister in the late 1920s and early 1930s; in Lebanon, Alfred Naqqash, the prominent Maronite businessman and judge who had been Vichy's last head of state.[19] Catroux also renamed the High Commission to reflect the transition, calling it the Delegation General. It still retained, however, vital control over the military, police and the Common Interests administration, which still provided a modicum of revenues from trade tariffs, foreign concessions in public utilities and transport, the tobacco monopoly, and the Tripoli oil refinery.

The colonial civic order soon revived. What occurred was an uncommon

blossoming of mass politics during wartime, when politics in most other countries was muted. The Free French were forced to liberalize the regime despite their very real fears of mass revolt. As soon as martial law was lifted in late 1941, the mass movements of the 1930s mushroomed as never before in protests against inflation, wage deflation, and food shortages. The politics of bread and wages would be the pivot of a revived process of political bargaining between the Free French and the nationalist opposition, who, in anticipation of the postponed elections, sought to sway the sentiments of the urban masses. The decision to liberalize during the depths of wartime stress would have profound implications for the future of both French rule and the colonial civic order.

The years 1941–42 were the darkest days of wartime hardship, and urban populations, those with the most capacity to upset French rule, were hit hardest. The summer harvest of 1941 was poor, provoking both public panic and government alarm: "Fearing a famine like that of 1917–18, all of Mount Lebanon speaks of protests and demonstrations," French police reported on September 9.[20] Ten days later, similar reports came from Aleppo and Damascus. The 1942 crop would also be poor, and despite MESC food shipments, fear of famine would not subside until the bountiful harvest of June 1943.[21] Dairy products, oranges, vegetables, rice, and meat virtually disappeared as many families survived on bread, olives, macaroni, and occasional lentil soup.[22] Prices soared far beyond wages: the cost of food rose 450 percent, while the general cost of living rose about 300 percent between January 1939 and January 1943. Wages of the working poor consequently lost nearly half of their 1936 buying power.[23] Beggars on city streets became so numerous in 1942 that the Syrian government considered outlawing them. At the same time, infant mortality, a primary indicator of public health, peaked throughout the Middle East.[24]

Hunger marches resumed in September 1941 and quickly turned into bloody bread riots and strikes, peaking in the summer of 1942 and again in the spring of 1943, in all major cities. Communists, labor unions, paramilitary groups, and nationalists took credit for organizing them. The prominence of women in French police reports is also striking: Women led at least ten demonstrations in Beirut and Aleppo during the summer of 1942 alone. Aleppo was shut down in early June 1942 when hundreds of women marched for several days, shouting "We're hungry, we want bread!" One day, four veiled women carried a coffin on which they had printed the slogan, "Death to Governor Nabih Martini!" Twenty other women marched through the marketplace forcing merchants to close their shops. Several women were injured in scuffles with police. At the

same time, 300 women in Damascus staged a rally against hunger and for democracy and independence at the Orient Palace Hotel, while 2,000 women and children blocked traffic in Beirut to demand lower bread prices. As late as May 1943, a Muslim woman started a demonstration in central Beirut, forcing shops to close, after officials at city hall dismissed her complaint about poor distribution of flour.[25]

Thousands of workers also staged increasingly disruptive strikes. French police recorded major work stoppages in nearly every month of 1942–1943, especially among textile and public sector workers seeking pay raises. Unemployment actually declined in 1942, because the needs of the British military fueled the creation of 30,000 jobs. But wages remained low, rising by 1943 at only half the rate of inflation. Workers also protested import-export bans of cotton and silk, which curtailed production.[26] With each month, the size and number of labor unions grew, from about 20,000 members in 1939 to about 50,000 in all of Syria and Lebanon by 1945. As in the 1930s, labor federations coordinated united actions that targeted not just individual employers, but the state as well.[27]

In the meantime, the Communist Party launched a campaign for a democratic welfare state, posing as a defender of the poor to attract members.[28] The party demanded workers' rights and reform of the regressive tax system to redistribute wealth.[29] Communists had gained new legitimacy and the freedom to campaign openly under the rubric of anti-fascism when the Soviets switched to the Allies' side after the June 1941 German invasion. They gained further popularity through two widely read periodicals: *al-Tariq* and *Sawt al-Sha'b*. In late 1942, the party began to draw crowds of 400 or more in Damascus and Beirut to rallies held in cinemas and hotel ballrooms. In February 1943, a Beirut rally drew 2,000 people, and just before the summer 1943 elections, "monster" rallies in Damascus and Aleppo each drew up to 5,000 people. Membership surged from 2,000 in 1939 to reach more than 10,000 registered members by war's end, in addition to thousands more sympathizers.[30]

Labor unions, Communists, and other subaltern movements built organizations that were more centralized and ideologically coherent than those of the nationalists. In Syria Islamic populists united groups that before the war had been scattered in various cities into a centralized movement based in Damascus, forming in 1944–45 the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood.[31] In Lebanon, the Phalanges and Najjada used their campaigns to feed the poor to enhance recruitment. By 1943, the Phalanges abandoned their former pro-French stance and expanded their membership to 35,000, mostly from

among the Maronite middle class on Mount Lebanon.[32] The Najjada's membership reached 13,000 in 1944.[33] The devoutly anti-sectarian SNP reorganized as well, in Sa'ada's continued exile, to boost its membership by 1941 to 40,000 in both countries, mostly urban students.[34] The women's movement also reorganized and mobilized in unprecedented numbers, as will be discussed below.

The Politics of Bread and Wages (1941–43)

In anticipation of mass unrest, Catroux took the initiative in the late summer of 1941 to establish a new department in his cabinet called the Social Section. By September, the section began producing numerous social studies and legislative proposals to provide security and benefits to workers and families.[35] Similarly, in early 1942, Catroux founded a Wheat Office under the auspices of the Common Interests administration to regulate the delivery of grain to Lebanon, which still depended on Syria for half of its needs.[36] Both initiatives moved toward a substantive redistribution of power in the civic order, because they aimed to bypass paternalistic intermediaries—employers and landowners— to secure direct state contact with poorer citizens. Catroux's apparent goal, like that of de Martel in the 1930s, was to neutralize the nationalist leadership before the elections.

Catroux's effort to impose grain controls directly on Syrian peasants, however, was thwarted by British minister Edward Spears, who sought to assure MESC control, and by his own handpicked Syrian leader, Shaykh Taj, who demanded sovereignty over a vital national resource. In May 1942, Catroux, Spears, and Taj struck an unstable power-sharing compromise, and the first collections of grain were made by the renamed Cereals Office (Office des Céréales Panifiables). But landowners and peasants balked at state-set grain prices, and hid the grain from Cereals Office collectors. Catroux then proposed to extract the grain by force with French troops. Spears moved quickly to subvert Catroux's plan. Apparently under his influence, a Congress of Syrian Farmers protested the low official price of wheat, sales to Lebanon, and French control of grain supplies, calling instead for British control.[37] Spears then approached the prime minister, Husni al-Barazi, himself a large landowner from Hama, and struck a deal to hold landowners responsible for grain collection from their peasants, under threat of deportation. Spears thus undermined Catroux's plan for direct rule by reinforcing paternalism in the state's most important economic sector. In

compensation for their compliance, Syrian and Lebanese landowners would emerge from the war tremendously enriched by MESC schemes to increase local production, while peasants continued to live at subsistence levels under landlords' mediating power.[38]

In the meantime Shaykh Taj, a populist known for his fiery speeches, introduced a system of subsidies that strengthened direct rule in the cities. Employing the rhetoric of the welfare state, Husni al-Barazi proclaimed a cut in bread prices for the poor to half the rate paid by the middle class: "The poorest class will now have the *right* to bread at 10 piastres, sold at all bakeries" (emphasis added).[39] Shaykh Taj also curried popular support through public works and literacy programs. However, this assertion of direct rule was mitigated by Taj's coalition of paternalistic mediators like the Society of Ulama, merchants (among them war profiteers), and rural 'Alawi and Druze leaders. And by manipulating finances, Shaykh Taj plunged the state into debt; the bread subsidy program alone cost 8–10 million LLS per year.[40] This would become the regime's Achilles' heel in bargaining with nationalists.

As the prospect of elections brightened, the nationalist opposition mounted an offensive against Shaykh Taj's conservative coalition. Their opportunity came after Shaykh Taj died in January 1943, his funeral drawing huge crowds of the urban poor. Shukri al-Quwwatli again took leadership of hunger marches from labor unions, women, and others, and allied with middle-class interests to discredit Taj's populist policies with charges of corruption. Taj's successor, Jamil al-Ulshi, tried to shore up support among the poor by financing their bread subsidies through a new income tax and by raising the price of bread paid by the middle class. In response, the Bloc organized middle-class students and merchants in a series of strikes in February and March, accusing Ulshi of pocketing the new revenues and of sending needed grain to Lebanon.[41] Seven people were killed and at least 50 wounded by police between March 20 and 22, when crowds attacked government offices and stormed bakeries in Damascus. To end the crisis, Catroux dismissed Ulshi on the pretext of disobedience, reinstated the constitution, announced elections in July, and appointed a transitional government.[42] Quwwatli and the nationalists had successfully exploited the bread issue to discredit their main opposition in the upcoming elections, but at the cost of more firmly allying their cause with middle-class interests.

Syrian bread politics had repercussions in Lebanon, where hunger marchers demanded bread subsidies like those instituted by Shaykh Taj. And like the Syrian National Bloc, Bishara al-Khuri and his Constitutional Bloc pounded Catroux's head of state, Alfred Naqqash, for ineffectual government.

In July 1942, Naqqash's government fell during a general strike in Beirut against bread shortages led by the Najjada, Phalanges, the Committee of Ulama, and the prominent Muslim nationalist Riyad al-Sulh.[43]

While Catroux had gained little prestige on the bread issue, he exploited to better effect the wage/inflation issue as a means of securing the loyalty of civil servants and the urban masses. Labor unions, especially in Lebanon, acted quickly to push the state's initiatives far beyond their original intent, and elite nationalists were thrown on the defensive. In late 1941, when the Social Section warned of low morale in the public sector, Catroux decreed significant increases in cost-of-living allowances for civil servants and a minimum wage for all workers in the Syrian and Lebanese public sector.[44] Lebanese unions immediately demanded extension of the pay raises to the private sector. When employers blocked such legislation, they staged a series of strikes that crested in March 1942. They finally won a compromise law that granted private sector workers a smaller pay increase. Again in October 1942, when the Lebanese government decreed family allowances to offset inflation for married civil servants, with premiums for one spouse and each child, the unions demanded their extension to all workers.[45] In response, a January 1943 Lebanese law established the Social Affairs Service (Service des Affaires Sociales) to arbitrate labor disputes, prepare labor laws and provide assistance to workers' families.[46] The state's political motives were made clear in March 1943, when Catroux's announcement of a return to constitutional government coincided with the Lebanese state's donation of 500,000 LLS to workers' mutual-aid societies.[47]

Union demands were met in May 1943, three months before elections, when the Delegation General and Lebanese government promulgated an omnibus wage law that guaranteed workers in commerce and industry higher minimum wages, family allowances, and cost-of-living allowances.[48] The Lebanese state, following French recommendations, also granted accident insurance to workers in the public sector and industries deemed public services.[49] The May laws were decreed in the fervor of the 1943 election campaign by Ayyub Thabit, interim Lebanese president. Their apparent intent was to sway workers' support away from the opposition nationalist party, the Constitutional Bloc, which represented a large portion of the commercial-industrial bourgeoisie opposed to the laws. Indeed, like the 1930s labor laws, they were decreed while the bourgeois-dominated parliament was suspended. The laws unleashed strikes throughout Lebanon, as employers resisted workers' demands to implement their provisions. Workers fought tooth-and-nail, factory-by-factory, to claim their rights.

Labor legislation was pursued much less vigorously in Syria, due to differing political circumstances. Under pressure from striking unions, Communist rallies, and French labor decrees, Shaykh Taj had promulgated several wage laws in 1942 on severance pay, family allowances, and minimum wage standards. The laws were evidently intended to appeal to workers in large industries owned by members of the National Bloc, for they exempted constituencies loyal to Shaykh Taj: landlords with agricultural workers, employers of domestic servants, and artisanal and family businesses.[50] But in 1943, after Taj's death, there was no Lebanese-style explosion of labor legislation, despite continued worker unrest. The lack of initiative on wage issues was likely due to the fact that the outcome of the elections had been virtually decided with Ulshi's dismissal in March. `Ata al-Ayyubi, the elderly interim head of state, was on good terms with many National Bloc leaders.[51]

By mid-1943 Catroux could claim a partial victory, in that the wage increases and bread subsidies had averted the revolt he had so feared two years before. In addition, France's manipulation of the inflation/wage issue had driven a wedge between its nationalist opposition and urban workers in Lebanon. In Syria, where the urban bourgeoisie was tied much more closely to the landowning elite, bread subsidies had driven a similar class-based wedge. However, the legislation also provoked an unforeseen backlash among conservative interests who read in them the disruption of the social order. As in the past, this dissent targeted gender issues.

Mothers and Women Workers: Disputed Gender Roles in the Family

Not surprisingly, issues of inflation, work, and food amplified the gender-centered conflicts of the prewar years, for they directly affected families' economic strategies. Women of all classes mobilized as mothers and as workers to protect and support their families. While lower-class women joined bread marches, elite women multiplied charities to aid the thousands of families who found it difficult to clothe and feed their children. And as prices soared, women's contributions to family income also became vital. The war returned employment to thousands of women who had lost jobs in the previous two decades to competition from foreign imports. When the war cut those imports by as much as four-fifths, Syrian and Lebanese women stepped in to produce at home much-needed clothing, handicrafts, and food products. Several thousand more women worked outside the home in the

tobacco, textile, and food-processing plants that expanded in wartime, especially in Lebanon.[52]

Free French policy on women's work was contradictory. On the one hand, they vowed to reverse Vichy's social conservatism and particularly its discouragement of women's work. In London, the Free French had set up committees in 1942 to prepare legislation to improve the status of women, children, and families, in an effort to make France "catch up" to other welfare states. Free France's territories became laboratories for the new spirit. From late 1941 Syrian and Lebanese government agencies advertised jobs for women in clerical and administrative positions.[53] In 1942–43 the Syrian Ministry of Social Affairs subsidized women's work programs by the Women's Association for the Encouragement of National Industry, which also began calling for social laws.[54] In May 1943 the Lebanese omnibus wage law decreed equal pay and minimum wages for men and women doing the same work, a radical departure from current practices where female factory workers and teachers routinely earned half the wages of men.[55] The same month, the Free French publicized a showcase munitions complex called De Gaulle Park, featuring 100 Lebanese women in white laboratory coats manufacturing truck parts. One was quoted in a newspaper: "I would have been a typist. It's certainly a more proper job. But here we are well paid and we work under the same social laws as in France."[56] Just before the elections, francophone newspapers proclaimed women's work as a hallmark of anti-fascism, and the Lebanese head of state warned employers to improve the condition of female workers.[57]

On the other hand, the labor laws and bread-supply programs also reinforced women's secondary status as workers and the ideal of the male family breadwinner. Thousands of domestic maids in Beirut were arbitrarily deprived of ration cards in 1943 simply because they couldn't return to their home villages on distribution day.[58] Family allowances, minimum and equal wages, and cost-of-living increases did not apply to the majority of women workers because they were employed at home or in small shops, not in sectors covered by the laws like the civil service and big industrial plants. Women had been excluded from industrial work, it may be recalled, by the government's own policy under the 1935–36 protective labor laws. Moreover, family allowances were implicitly awarded only to male breadwinners. Government documents routinely referred to the recipient as the "père de famille" (father of the family), or as his wife or widow. The largest group of female civil servants, schoolteachers, were virtually excluded from family allowances because they were still pressured to quit their jobs when they married.

Indeed, there was great pressure to exclude women from work entirely. In May 1943, the same time that the Free French promoted De Gaulle Park and promised equal wages, the French-subsidized and Jesuit-run St. Joseph University in Beirut staged a highly publicized, week-long lecture series entitled "The Lebanese Family." Prominent speakers denounced individualism and called on women to quit their jobs and have more children. While they promoted the family as the pillar of society, they did not criticize state intervention as prewar groups had done. Instead, speakers embraced the welfare state as a primary means of stabilizing paternalistic families, with calls to increase family allowances paid to fathers and to promote marriage and large families. Because the strength of the nation rests on the family, said the director of the Beirut law school, "mothers of large families deserve the gratitude, respect and admiration of the nation."[59] The spirit of Vichy had apparently struck a deep chord of support. That same year, the new Lebanese criminal code outlawed birth control.[60]

The Free French directly supported the ideal of domestic, patriotic motherhood by appointing Mme Catroux to head a committee coordinating all major charities in the two countries.[61] No previous high commissioner's wife had played such a visible, symbolic role. She was regularly portrayed in newspapers attending Red Cross meetings, visiting military hospitals and soup kitchens, dedicating clinics, and so on. The wife of Lebanese President Alfred Naqqash projected an even stronger maternal image in a December 1941 magazine interview, where she said, "[I have] only two children and I lament it; I love all children and am, myself, a member of a family of 16 children." When asked about her volunteer work, she replied, "No, I don't have very important work, but I seek to aid all who request my help."[62] At about the same time, in Syria, the Free French banned Asmahan's film, where she starred as a career singer, at her family's request (see chapter 12).

It was perhaps no coincidence that Lebanon adopted Mother's Day as an official holiday in 1942. The day was intended to promote motherhood as a public and patriotic duty, in contrast, a newspaper claimed, to the Syrian habit of confining women to the kitchen.[63] Popular culture, however, imbued Mother's Day with an anti-work ideology that displaced women's direct role in the civic order in favor of a status mediated through their sons. The newspaper *Bayrut* recognized the holiday in 1943 by asking: "Wasn't it mothers who gave birth to heroes . . . who gave us the likes of Moses, Jesus and Muhammad . . . Pasteur, Newton and Shakespeare?. . . . If we honor them today, it's because we honor the education and principles [that they gave us] and the heroes who die in the name of their mothers in all battlefields."[64] The flip side of praise

was contempt. The satirical weekly *al-Dabbur* observed Mother's Day by announcing that it would withhold honor from mothers who hire nannies, who let their daughters work, and who teach them to dance before teaching them to cook.[65]

The issue of work split the women's movement in the months before the elections. In January 1943 Lebanese schoolteachers paradoxically founded the Women's Social Democratic League to campaign against working mothers, whose child neglect they blamed for a variety of social ills. The League, which established 11 branches in Beirut and towns of northern Lebanon, was funded primarily by the Free French and Beirut businessmen. Mme Catroux, as honorary president, presided over the opening of the group's school-lunch program in May 1943. 'Iffat Qabbani, an officer of the League, called on the state to create jobs for men and to increase their family allowances. "To combat women's work," she added, "we must encourage girls to marry, and it will be the husband who will have to provide the needs of the wife."[66]

While the women's unions took no public stance on the issue, Communists actively promoted women's right to work.[67] The party claimed to represent not only peasants and workers, but also "mother-workers." Communists insisted that work and motherhood need not conflict with one another, in propaganda that posed the mythical model of the Soviet woman who works in the morning, does public service in the afternoon, reads before dinner, and cares for her children in the evening.[68] Communist women were at the forefront of the campaign. In early 1943, a group called the Committee for the Defense of Lebanese Working Women personally presented a petition to the Lebanese president and prime minister that condemned bias against women workers, demanded wages equal to those of men, and larger family allowances.[69]

In Syria two Communist women were especially prominent: Maqbula Shalaq, who in 1941 began attending Syrian University unveiled, and Falak Tarazi, a well-known Syrian journalist active in Damascene women's clubs.[70] They wrote articles for the party's magazine, *al-Tariq*, and gave speeches in cities around the country to mixed audiences, exciting little of the controversy that had beset women orators in the 1920s. Shalaq rallied women to leave their homes to fight Nazism, "the enemy of women, freedom and culture." She argued that work outside the home was crucial to gaining women's rights because only by working could women buy their own books, and so engage effectively in public debates on women's status. But Shalaq did not renounce women's homelife. Childrearing went hand-in-hand with work and politics in women's mission to help build a new society. The symbol of the melding of

these two roles, Shalaq argued in a manner reminiscent of Nazira Zayn al-Din, would be the abandonment of the veil, which represented a wall between home and society.[71]

Tarazi also vaunted the value of women's work in the home, calling women social "engineers" who would be pillars of the new, postwar society. But the home is not kingdom enough for twentieth-century women, she said in a speech on the 1942 anniversary of the French Revolution. Contrary to the contention of "reactionary" ulama, she averred, women in public would also fulfill their female responsibilities toward home, society, and nation, and not transform themselves into men by doing so.[72] In June 1943, a month before the Syrian elections, Tarazi gave an explosive speech to an overflowing Damascene audience that included prominent nationalists like Faris al-Khuri and Jamil Mardam Bey. She condemned attitudes that marginalized women in society and called for immediate bans on polygamy and instantaneous divorce. Most Arab women had the status of mere slaves, she asserted, but the war offered them a ray of hope, an opportunity to show that they can work just as men do. Some journalists mocked Tarazi for her radical ideas, while others praised her "civic courage."[73]

In mentioning "reactionary" ulama, Tarazi was likely referring to recent actions by Islamic populists in Damascus, who renewed their crusade against women in public with new vigor. By mid-1942, al-Gharra was attracting crowds of up to 400 to its weekly meetings at the Tankiz mosque and, according to British observers, had established "its hold over the illiterate masses."[74] In May 1942, al-Gharra petitioned President Taj al-Din against "the excessive liberty of Muslim women." The Free French suspected the former Vichy head of state, Khalid al-'Azm, of exploiting al-Gharra to undermine Shaykh Taj, who promptly cut off state subsidies to the group's charities.[75] That the counterattacks by Tarazi and Falak resonated with Syrian women is evident in the petition submitted by a group of women in Hama in June 1943, asking the government for official authorization to unveil. This unleashed vigorous protests by Islamic populists, and apparently no government support for the women.[76] In Damascus at about the same time, Thuraya al-Hafiz led a march of 100 women to the government palace in Marja Square, where they collectively unveiled. "I stood there and gave a speech in which I averred that the veil we wore was never mentioned in God's holy book or by the Prophet Mohammad." She recalled exhorting the crowd: "So as our religion doesn't ask us to veil ourselves and expects us to show our faces and be men's equals, we now take the veil off."[77] The taboo on the veiling issue since Zayn al-Din's 1928 controversy disappeared as war conditions reignited the discourse of rights.

But as the Soviet model of womanhood clashed with the Islamic populists' and Catholics' model of the paternal family, gender again became a battleground, now between proponents and opponents of the extension of equal social rights in the colonial welfare state. While Communist leader Khalid Bakdash avowed that his party respected religion, Islamic populists insisted that it was a grave threat. In Homs, violent clashes broke out between Islamic populists and Communists in winter of 1942–43, just as Shalaq and Tarazi were joining Khalid Bakdash in Communist rallies.[78] Similar violence would spread to Damascus and other cities by 1944.

Conclusion: Climax of the Colonial Welfare State

On the eve of the summer 1943 elections, the colonial welfare state had been not only rebuilt from the "scorched earth" Catroux said he had found after Vichy's departure,[79] but also expanded well beyond its 1939 limits. The state had assumed new financial commitments toward the poor masses and new legal guarantees for the protection of workers, in the form of bread subsidies, minimum wages, family allowances, cost-of-living increases, and severance pay. Election pressures and wartime exigencies promoted welfare expansion in other areas as well, particularly public health. In February 1943, the Delegation General inaugurated a new Pharmaceutical Office, which distributed medicines and baby food to the population and policed overpricing by profiteers.[80] Most importantly, the May 1943 work accident law formally placed the burden of medical care on employers.

Welfare disbursements were quite substantial: In 1943 the Syrian government expected to spend 570,000 LLS on family allowances for all civil servants, equivalent to one-third the amount allocated to public health and to 1.5 percent of the state's total budget.[81] And while inflation and revenue shortages plummeted state budgets that year to only 70 percent of 1939 levels (in real terms, adjusted for inflation) spending cuts were made mainly outside of welfare programs. Health and education spending actually rose as a proportion of state budgets from 16 to 19 percent between 1939 and 1943. The number of students enrolled in state schools rose in the same period by 13 percent in Syria, and by 22 percent in Lebanon.[82] In addition, public works became a major welfare agency, as Allied funds were used to hire thousands of workers to improve transport for grain supplies. Regular public works budgets in Lebanon jumped by more than one-third from 1942 to 1943, and with extrabudgetary allocations exceeded 1939 levels by 26 percent (adjusted

for inflation).[83] Above and beyond regular state budgets, the Allies pumped $242 million, or 8.6 billion LLS, (adjusted for inflation) into the Syrian and Lebanese economy between 1941 and 1944, spent not only on military needs, but also food subsidies, jobs, and other vital services.[84]

The new laws and state services armed workers and families with unprecedented rights, despite their origins in often cynical pre-election bargaining. They addressed demands made by the women's and labor movements for years. They also represented the gravest assault yet on the colonial edifice of mediated, paternalistic rule, as the state intervened directly in employee-worker relations, and on behalf of poor consumers in an economy long dominated by the bourgeoisie. The political horizon once more opened to the transformation of the paternalistic civic order into one in which subaltern citizens might enjoy equal rights and unmediated relations with the state. However, in practice the welfare laws and subsidies still fell short of a full reversal of paternalism because they retained gender distinctions. Due to pressure from religious and other conservative interests, and perhaps due to rulers' own gender blindness, the welfare measures did not erase the distinction between male and female citizens. Women received fewer benefits and were constructed as dependents on male breadwinners in labor policy, despite legal guarantees of equal pay and the right to work.

In sum, the 1943 elections were to be more than a vote for or against the French: They became a referendum on the postcolonial civic order. The expansion of welfare and liberalization of the political arena had mobilized opposing parties in a rivalry to capture control of the now-powerful state, each seeking to implement radically different visions of citizens' relationship to that state. Workers emerged for the first time as a politically self-conscious movement. "There exists in Syria a conscious working class and it is organized in part into unions. This working class has evolved since the Allies arrived in 1941 into an important class of citizens," observed a Damascene paper in June 1943.[85] The paper *Bayrut* similarly noted a "social revolution in Lebanon" and urged the government to reconcile the interests of workers and capitalists with new labor laws.[86] Simultaneously, wartime economic dislocations undermined paternalism at home, as families came to depend more on women's income from work. While to many women's work was an odious necessity, it was increasingly promoted as an ideal, and not just in Free French and Communist anti-fascist propaganda. Images proliferated in newspapers of women around the world working for the war effort. American films, which dominated screens, also promoted the image of Rosie the Riveter. "His

Girl Friday," for example, showed in local theaters in the summer of 1942, offering the divorced star reporter played by Rosalind Russell as a model of new womanhood.[87]

These class- and gender-based challenges to paternalism deeply unsettled many Syrians and Lebanese. Conservative opponents were forced, by 1943, to engage welfarism in the political arena. Alternate forms of social justice and order espoused by Islamic populists and Catholics attained new resonance, as demonstrated in the large audiences for the Lebanese Family lectures and al-Gharra's meetings, and in the emergence of the Women's Social Democratic League. Islamic and Catholic movements embraced the welfarist state, but envisioned its use to buttress a paternalistic society based on male-headed families and the exclusion of women from the public arena. Likewise, even nationalists were forced to give lip service to social welfare, while avoiding the rhetoric of rights. Just before the Syrian election in July 1943, for example, Shukri al-Quwwatli hosted a fundraising event for a new hospital for the poor, declaring: "Unity around humanitarian issues should be carried into politics."[88]

However, elite nationalists still fundamentally adhered to their 1930s agenda, which was simply to capture the state from the French and maintain the status quo. Their power depended fundamentally on the control of subalterns through patronage and alliances with other mediating elites; that is, on the pillars of paternalism. They posed perhaps the greatest obstacle to transformation of the civic order. Even as the state had intervened to pacify and woo the masses, it had enriched landowners and the bourgeoisie. Many of them profited from the MESC's promotion of local agriculture and industry to supply the military and to offset wartime drops in civilian imports.[89] These enriched elites, denied formal political power while parliaments were suspended, informally resisted welfarism by refusing to pay new taxes on income and war profits.[90] They no doubt correctly saw Catroux's welfarism as principally a means to undercut the power of the nationalist opposition to French rule.

As a result, the future of the colonial welfare state remained tied to the continuance of French rule and Allied spending, unless workers and women could mount a viable, welfare-friendly alternative to the nationalists in the elections. The Free French had reason for optimism. They had managed to postpone elections until 1943, when fear of famine subsided and when the Free French had secured their own security, by rebuilding troop strength and establishing a firm base in Algeria after the Allied invasion of North Africa.

While Catroux embraced the welfare bargaining required in the peculiar circumstances of wartime electoral politics, his superior Charles de Gaulle clearly chafed at these seemingly wasteful methods of civilian rule: "I came to think his [Catroux's] desire to charm and his leaning toward conciliation did not always answer to the kind of sword play which was imposed upon him."[91] De Gaulle spoke with the wisdom of hindsight, as the next chapter will show.