The first and most profound effect of World War II on Syria and Lebanon was fear—fear of famine. “In early September 1939 we were preparing for the new school year when the airwaves carried terror to our souls, pounding us all day with news reports of the Second World War,” recalled a Lebanese schoolteacher. “In the next few days, I saw acute pain rise in the breasts of the generation that had lived through the catastrophe of the First War. . . . Work stopped, and business dwindled as a wave of profound pessimism engulfed the country.” The famine of World War I had killed as many as five hundred thousand Lebanese and Syrians. With blockades and poor harvests, fear of its morbid return reigned for the first three years of World War II, fueling riots, hunger marches, and opposition movements.

Déjà vu struck rulers as well as the ruled. General Georges Catroux, the leader of the Free French forces in the Levant who claimed rule of Syria and Lebanon in 1941, recalled his earlier term of service in these countries after the last war. As in 1918, the French were outnumbered by British troops and competed with them for prestige and power, through the delivery of foodstuffs and aid. In 1941 as in 1920, Catroux faced the task of imposing French rule on a hostile population. And as he did so, he recognized many familiar faces among French sympathizers and the nationalist opposition.

But Syrians and Lebanese confronted war and French rule in a manner radically different from twenty years before. Most salient was the emergence of new mass movements organized by political parties, labor unions, religious groups, and women. These movements aimed most of their demands at the government—for political freedom, decent wages, and full
education and health care. While women in World War I typically had suffered alone, portrayed in numerous photographs as lone mothers dying of hunger with their children, women entered World War II armed with charitable, educational, and political organizations that would mount incessant protests claiming not only their right to bread but their political rights and right to national independence. While men in the last war had been drafted into the Ottoman army and sent far from home, in this war they were not mobilized. They too entered the war with highly organized movements that would demand government intervention on behalf of workers, families, and business.

And the French position had radically changed since the last war. In 1918, the French had sought to aggrandize their empire; in 1941, they struggled to reconquer it, to take it back from the Vichy government and fend off encroaching German occupation. In June 1941, Syria and Lebanon were the first major territories outside of Africa that the Free French reclaimed by force, a year after Charles de Gaulle founded the movement in London and a scattering of colonies. The Free French were still weak because of their small numbers, and they had had to rely on overwhelming British support in the Syrian campaign. Moreover, they were still either unknown or suspect in the eyes of most French, and they sought desperately to justify their claim to represent true France. Syria and Lebanon were thus to become Free France’s “city on a hill.” There, Catroux sought to realize the ideals the Gaullist movement claimed were authentically French (and absent in the Vichy regime): republicanism, honor, and a fighting spirit. Free France had little materiel and only “moral capital” with which to recapture the prestige of being a Great Power.²

The combination of these three wartime phenomena—fear, social solidarity, and French weakness—produced a critical political opening for change in the relations between the mandatory state and society. This change has been described mainly in terms of how Syria and Lebanon achieved independence during wartime. In 1943 the nationalist opposition won elections, and in 1944 it took over the reins of the states’ most essential services. In these accounts, independence was the start of a new era, as the organization of national governments touched off a boom in spending and a mobilization of new political interests.³

In many of these standard histories, however, a subnarrative exists on the broader nature of the mass mobilization that occurred in both countries, beginning in the 1930s, which suggests that the nature of the war’s political opening was more complex than a simple confrontation over independence. While bourgeois nationalists demanding independence were the most prominent among 1930s opposition movements, they had allied with, and depended upon, other social groups who were virtually excluded from the halls of parliament and French negotiating tables: workers, women,
Muslim leaders, and minorities. These groups sought more than independence: they demanded reform of the regime and inclusion in the civic order, the norms and institutions that shape state-society interaction. By the mid-1930s, pressure from these groups brought bargaining over the extension of social rights and state services to the center of politics, establishing the basic outlines of a colonial welfare state. However, by 1939 this bargaining had reached a stalemate, as bourgeois nationalists elected to parliaments balked at guaranteeing the right to welfare, and as the French suspended all politics at the outbreak of war.

The political opening created by wartime conditions did not merely strengthen opposition to the French but also altered the prewar pattern of political bargaining and, consequently, the trajectory of state formation at independence. The changes occurred in two phases. In the early years of the war, welfare not only expanded but its colonial attributes were also challenged. Between 1941 and 1943, social mobilization and French weakness combined to establish welfare as a right, not as a gift of paternalistic colonial rulers. Also the state committed itself to delivering benefits directly to citizens, challenging the colonial privileges of the bourgeoisie. In the second phase, from 1943 to 1946, spending on key social services like education and public health boomed, reaching levels never attained under the French. However, the 1943 election of nationalist elites and achievement of partial independence shifted the terms of bargaining once again. With the French out of their way, ruling nationalists faced less pressure to cede to the demands of the social movements, frustrating aspirations of those who sought revolution along with independence.

The war thus brought the colonial welfare state both to a climax and to a crisis. Wartime conditions had strengthened both the nationalists and the social movements but had also transformed their relationship. While in the 1930s the social movements were weakly organized, dependent allies of the nationalists, they became by war’s end powerful rivals who wielded significant influence over the urban masses. The civic order polarized anew around the fate of the colonial welfare state. Nationalists sought to defuse the crisis in divergent ways: Syria adopted a more etatist approach to social policy, Lebanon a more liberal one. Each of these policies was rooted in the hybrid attributes of the colonial welfare state, which had relied heavily on a mix of public and private institutions.

In sum, a focus on mobilization around social rights suggests that the war not only inaugurated a new era of independence but amplified and polarized prewar debates about the state’s obligations to its citizens. The welfare model is useful not only in tracing the trajectory of state formation from French rule to independence but also in placing Syria and Lebanon in a comparative historical context. The linkage between war and the rise of the welfare state has been explored mainly in the context of industrialized
countries. These studies commonly observe that wars accelerate the expansion of welfare states. The Syrian and Lebanese cases challenge such a linear model, in that wartime expansion of their welfare state was halted late in the war. Study of welfarism in a colonial context, both in its similarities to and departures from Western European cases, is a potentially valuable contribution to the revisionist literature on welfare states.

**Prewar Origins of a Colonial Welfare State**

In the years 1920 to 1945 the intimate matters of the Syrian and Lebanese household became the target of sustained and intense public scrutiny: how much food families could buy; whether they were giving their babies sterile milk; how clean mothers kept their homes; how much time families allowed for their children's education; whether mothers or children should be permitted to work; and whether fathers should be the sole breadwinners. These and similar issues were debated at political club meetings, labor union rallies, ladies' charity socials, and feminist conferences, and in newspapers, cafes, and government offices.

Such public discussion had arisen before World War I, in the context of Ottoman reform and the need for social progress to safeguard the empire. But after 1918, the arena for debate was widened and utterly transformed by three new factors: prolonged social dislocation after the war, the construction of sovereign nation-states from former Ottoman provinces, and foreign occupation. Newly organized states hurried war relief to citizens to justify their rule: While Faysal's Syrian government heralded health relief and the building of schools as a new era of progress and liberation for the Arab peoples, the French in Lebanon hurried to deliver relief in the name of their civilizing mission. The French used their war relief to win the award of Syria and Lebanon as French mandates by the League of Nations in 1922. Social services would remain a cornerstone of French claims to rule.

By 1939, the mandatory states had committed themselves to a variety of social policies that struck deeper into society than the Ottomans ever had. But the transformation was not merely one of degree: the spirit of that commitment had begun to change. Whereas in the immediate postwar years the state had provided relief in the spirit of exceptional charity by a Great Power toward what it perceived as a backward society, by the 1930s Syrian and Lebanese citizens were demanding state services as a right. Social policy came to be formulated not in French bureaus but in what may be termed the civic order, the arena of interaction between the state and non-state spheres that shapes public life. The key components of the prewar civic order were, first, the formal, centralized state apparatus built by the French; second, the state's mediating networks of local collaborators and agents; and third, the state's clients and engaged opposition, who mobilized
to extract more benefits from, and win greater participation in, government.

The French ruled Syria and Lebanon from their headquarters in an Ottoman palace in Beirut. The two countries were in practice Siamese twins, joined by a common, centralized administration, the French High Commissariat. The commissariat employed roughly one-third of all French officials in the territories and wielded complete control over the hefty Common Interests budget, mostly derived from customs dues. Its 1928 budget amounted to about 10 million £LS (Syrian and Lebanese liras), compared to the budget of 19 million £LS that year for all local governments. In addition to customs duties, the High Commissariat disbursed extrabudgetary sums allocated directly from Paris to pay for administrative and military costs and to subsidize quasi-public French hospitals and schools, averaging an additional 14 million £LS per year before the war.

The High Commissariat built its local administration by recruiting the remnants of Ottoman bureaucracy willing to serve them, and by establishing alliances and clienteles with the most conservative, pliable, and Francophile elements they could find. In Lebanon, the French quickly replanted the hundreds of French missionaries ousted by the Ottomans during the war, and cultivated the Maronite Church, with which the French had long historical ties. They also cultivated the urban bourgeoisie in Beirut with the award of contracts and trade opportunities. In Syria, the French had little previous loyalty and a far more organized opposition to confront. They cultivated a clientele of mostly rural notables—landowners, tribal chiefs, sympathetic religious patriarchs, and minorities. In contrast to their policy in Lebanon, they sought to isolate and disarm the urban bourgeoisie, which mounted stiff nationalist opposition to the mandatory regime. In both countries, French collaborators became agents and mediators between the central state and the populace.

The third component of the civic order, nonstate actors, was a highly varied group. It consisted of both recipients of state services and opponents to the regime. In the 1920s, the state clients who mobilized most vigorously were workers employed by foreign concessionary companies and consumers of the public utilities that these companies ran, who organized strikes and boycotts, respectively, to protest unfair labor practices and utility rates. In addition, opposition newspapers and women’s charities mounted campaigns for more stringent public health protections. This fledgling civic order was besieged in these years by those who opposed its very existence. Syrian notables and tribal leaders organized armed resistance against the French, culminating in the massive revolt of 1925–27, which was begun by the Druze and then spread to major cities.

Two factors—one political, the other economic—transformed the civic order from an arena defined in the 1920s by patronage and military re-
pression to an arena animated primarily by demands for political and social rights in the 1930s. Political change resulted both from the Syrian rebels’ defeat and from the League of Nations’ requirement that a constitution and elected government be installed in the mandates. With force and persuasion, the French imposed constitutions in Lebanon in 1926 and in Syria in 1930, and conducted carefully orchestrated elections of handpicked favorites soon afterward. This process provoked the organization of political opposition among Lebanese Sunnis seeking unity with Syria and among Syrian nationalists opposed to French rule altogether. In Syria, the unification of nationalists into a loose federation called the National Bloc was a watershed, marking a transition from armed, military opposition to political means of opposition. Lebanese Sunnis gradually abandoned their policy of abstention from politics as well. By the mid-1930s, rudimentary political parties would open offices in major cities of Syria and Lebanon and recruit thousands of followers, particularly among students.

The economic factors that transformed the civic order were complex, and can be only summarized here. From the mid-nineteenth century, new classes of urban elites arose around the twin pillars of landownership and ties to the Ottoman bureaucracy. An urban middle class emerged shortly before World War I as a political force through the establishment of political, cultural, and sporting clubs. These were largely professional men, often poorer relations of the elite notable families: doctors, engineers, lawyers, and journalists. Bourgeois women’s charities and cultural clubs also emerged as more women attended schools. At the same time government reform and dislocation of the local economy, as the region was drawn into the world economy, transformed the working populations of the cities. By the early 1930s, workers-only labor unions emerged out of former guilds in transport, printing, and public works sectors. With petitions, rallies, and strikes, they confronted both the bourgeoisie and the state as their employers, demanding higher pay and better work conditions.

In sum, the civic order took shape in the 1930s as a triangle of relationships between the French state, collaborating mediators, and their clients and opposition. Virtually excluded from the civic order were the subalterns of mediating elites, such as peasants, children, most women, and the urban poor who were not recruited by active opposition groups. The structure of the civic order influenced the strategies of the three groups as they jostled for power. The supreme power of the High Commissariat made it the dominant player. The division of elites into collaborationist and nationalist camps produced a politics of intense bargaining for political allies and influence. As a result, the French, the mediators, and the nationalist opposition vied with one another for influence over the larger but weaker groups among the urban masses, particularly organized workers, women, and religious groups.
While independence was the most prominent issue to animate the civic order, social policy was also a central terrain of debate, one at first cultivated by the French themselves. Social policy was, from the earliest years of occupation, privileged as a top priority among French officials. The high commissioner played the role as chief relief officer in the days following the Allied occupation in 1918 and retained centralized control of social services in his offices in Beirut, via a partially privatized patronage system. Christian charities (mostly French) administered a large proportion of health services in conjunction with a skeletal public health department. They also ran a large number of schools. As Catroux would later claim during the war, these supposedly private schools, hospitals, and clinics were actually semipublic agencies, as they depended for their very existence on subsidies from the High Commissariat.10

Emergency aid and self-justifying beneficence bestowed upon a populace do not, however, create a welfare state. It was only in the 1930s that popular demand for a sustained state role in social affairs was organized by various actors: civil servants, Syrian and Lebanese philanthropists, nationalist seekers a broader political base among lower classes, labor unions, the Communist Party, and women’s organizations. Social services were claimed by these groups as a matter of right, in the course of massive strikes and demonstrations between 1934 and 1939; these were fueled first by economic depression and the dismissal of parliaments and boosted in 1936 by sympathies with the Arab revolt in Palestine and by rising expectations, with the reinstatement of national governments and the resumption of treaty negotiations.

Social rights were by no means, in the minds of agitators, the principal goal. Under nationalist leadership, the protests were framed primarily in terms of demands for self-government and independence from French rule. Workers’, women’s, and parents’ 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; with chronic shortages of schools; and with low levels of health care. Many of these grievances were sent by petition to the League of Nations in Geneva, as proof that the French had betrayed the terms of the mandate charter awarded by the League, and so ought to withdraw.

In response, French strategy sought to convert challenges based on political claims into bargains over social rights. The willingness of the state to bargain over social rights was enhanced in the mid-1930s by the election of the left-leaning Popular Front government in France. However, idealism was not likely the main impulse to bargain. By introducing social policy initiatives, the French were able to exploit the ambiguity latent in the opposition’s demands. For even as the groups rejected the very fact of French rule, they continued to demand more state intervention, not less, in social af-
fa\textup{irs}. Amid criticisms of the emphasis on French language in schools, there were constant calls for more state schools. Amid criticism of industrial policy favoring concessions to French firms, there were calls for state support of a national economy and for state protection of workers. The French responded in piecemeal fashion to these specific grievances and sidestepped fundamental challenges to their rule. To complaints about the lack of schools, they funded more schools. To complaints about poor safety regulations, they stepped up inspections. To complaints about unemployment, they created jobs. In sum, the French responded to the mid-1930s challenges by augmenting their long-standing policy of paternalistic social spending.

In the process, the French were forced to expand their skeletal system of social services well beyond what they had understood to be their commitment when the mandate was assigned. The transformed civic order thus planted the roots of a colonial welfare state. Basic financial and legal commitments won from the state further nurtured the notion of citizens’ social rights. Workers’, parents’, and mothers’ claims to those rights were incorporated into nationalist ideology (if not practice) and into the language of government officials themselves. A closer look at the main branches of social policy—public health, education, and labor protection—will illustrate how the process of political bargaining extended state commitments to welfare.

\textit{Public Health}

Beginning in the 1920s, women’s groups and newspaper columnists badgered the French to increase funding for public health and speed responses to epidemics. Pressure was also exerted in the international arena, where doubt was cast on public health statistics reported to the League of Nations. In response, the state built a basic, if rudimentary, system of hospitals and clinics from virtually nothing after the war. By 1939, there were about one hundred hospitals, clinics, orphanages, and asylums, both public and private (the French ones subsidized by the state). Local state public health departments were reorganized and their staff of inspectors enlarged and empowered with stricter regulations on food vendors, restaurants, schools, and other public places. The high commissioner’s budget for public hygiene and assistance averaged in the 1930s about 500,000 £LS, rising from 2.0 percent to 2.6 percent of combined global budgets for Syria and Lebanon between 1929 and 1938, a time when most departments’ budgets were slashed. In addition, hundreds of thousands more liras were spent through the early 1930s on relief to refugees, particularly Armenians and Assyrians. More important for our purposes was the growing public sentiment that state-subsidized health care was a right, not a gift from the state. Writing in
the quasi-official journal *Dimashq* in 1940, Dr. Joseph Aractingi, who had headed the public health administration in Syria since the early 1920s, stated that sound hygiene laws were “the right of the Syrian people.”

**Education**

The number of schools and students in all territories under French mandate—state and private—roughly doubled in the fifteen years prior to the war, totaling 2,554 schools with about 280,000 students in 1938, compared to 1,590 schools with 126,000 students in 1924. As in public health, the delivery of publicly funded benefits was channeled through both public and private institutions. Of the 280,000 students in 1938, only 92,000 were in state schools. Another 55,000 attended the semipublic French schools that were closely regulated and heavily financed by the High Commissariat. And 120,000 students attended local private schools run by Muslim and Christian groups.

And as with public health, pressure to expand state educational services came from the population and, in turn, from the League of Nations. In the mid-1930s, thousands of students each year were being turned away because there was no room in existing state schools. Nationalists demanded universal education as not just a social right but a political right, claiming that an educated citizenry is a precondition of democracy. Parents’ groups, particularly among urban Muslims, sent dozens of complaints to the League of Nations’ Permanent Mandates Commission. 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 required portions of funds for the construction of schools, required by existing law dating from the Ottoman era.

The pressure apparently had some effect. In 1938, the French used extrabudgetary funding to open twenty-eight new government schools in Lebanon, the first new schools in years. Moreover, as with public health spending, education spending rose throughout the 1930s, when the depression was forcing deep cuts in administrative and public works budgets. Education spending in all of the Levant states rose from 4.6 percent of global budgets (1.4 million £LS) in 1929 to 8.6 percent (2.4 million £LS) in 1938. The figure rises to 9.2 percent if subsidies to French missionary schools are included.

**Labor**

State involvement in labor issues took three main forms: job creation, labor regulations and protections, and cost-of-living allowances. Labor unions’ strikes and demonstrations against unemployment pressured the state to adopt a major job-creation program in 1933. High Commissioner Damien
de Martel inaugurated a public works program to combat unemployment, with a budget of 10 million £LS, and ordered a further study to develop import substitution industries. Funding for workers’ technical education was also increased, and, after the franc was devalued in 1936–37, De Martel introduced cost-of-living wage increases for civil servants, including teachers.

The unions also called for safer workplaces and for social security. Under pressure as well from the International Labor Organization, the High Commissariat decreed laws on industrial hygiene and the protection of working women and children in 1935 and 1936. Unions heralded the laws as a first step toward comprehensive labor laws protecting workers against long hours and accidents. Between 1936 and 1939, the unions united into (illegal) federations to pressure the reinstated parliaments into adopting such labor codes, which would include unemployment and work accident pensions, minimum wage standards, and the legalization of their federations. Syrian and Lebanese unions, as well as leaders of the women’s movement, explicitly invoked as a 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.17 By 1937 workers won virtual state recognition of their right to organize against their employers.18 The proposed labor codes, however, foundered in parliaments dominated by the bourgeois owners of businesses that employed the union members.19

With the establishment of rudimentary 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 growing acceptance of the notion of social rights in Syria and Lebanon mirrored 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. The etatism of the era spread internationally the idea that citizens should claim from the state a commitment to improving their welfare.

However, the nature of state commitments by 1939 was limited. Only under external pressure did the state formulate benefits in terms of legal right, in the exceptional case of the 1934–35 protective labor laws. Even as the French government increased education spending, it continued to claim that it was not the state’s obligation to do so. Although the language of rights was increasingly employed, it was more a political ploy than a description of institutionalized reality. Second, there was a profound reluctance on the part of nationalist elites to make good on demands for social rights. The parliaments they controlled after 1936 refused to adopt labor codes and made no significant allocations of funds for education or health. The level of state commitment may be compared those made by the British
and French states to their own citizens prior to World War I, when the first legislative guarantees and financial entitlements were established.

Moreover, the way in which services were delivered and funded was distinctly colonial. In stark contrast to the situation in metropolitan France, social welfare in Syria and Lebanon was not primarily funded through taxes on the middle and upper classes. Syrian and Lebanese elites resisted taxation, especially by a foreign ruler, and constituted such a thin layer of the population in their unindustrialized societies that potential revenues were limited anyway. Social spending in the mandates was financed, as a result, primarily through the High Commissariat, via Common Interests’ customs revenues and subsidies from Paris. 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 through a commitment to higher taxes.

Another distinctively colonial feature of Syrian and Lebanese welfare was the mediated delivery of what were largely state-funded services. In diverting political grievances into social claims, the French turned to their post–World War I legacy of paternalistic social spending, which was funneled preeminently through the loyal constituencies they had cultivated: rural landlords and tribal chiefs, missionaries, indigenous religious leaders. These elites were the civilian pillars of French rule. They were cultivated with the award of power over other citizens and with financial support. As the French were pressured into expanding social policy, these elites became important 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 need both to award power to mediators and to appease demands for social rights. In addition, mediators were often bargains. Nuns in French schools, for example, did not require full salaries.

The corollary of mediated state services was a hierarchical bias in benefits, which tended to favor the urban bourgeoisie, landowners, Christians (particularly in Lebanon), and males more than peasants, workers, Muslims, and women. European welfare states were closely tied to states’ needs for healthy, literate military recruits, and needs to pacify growing numbers of industrialized urban workers. These conditions did not hold in Syria and Lebanon, where the indigenously recruited Troupes spéciales were not used for foreign wars, and where the urban workforce remained a small percentage of the population. On the other hand, as we have seen, the state did need to appease urban middle classes and elites who could potentially lead an armed rebellion, as Syrians had done in 1925–27. Elites were not only taxed lightly but enjoyed disproportionate use of public services. They were the main clients of state-funded hospitals and French institutions of higher education. Even oppositional nationalists sent their children to state-subsidized schools like the Maristes’ lycée in Damascus and the Jesuit
St. Joseph’s University in Beirut. Conversely, school shortages afflicted rural and Muslim areas most, while state labor policy continued to discourage unionization of workers against their employers and landlords. And existing law not only permitted lower pay for women workers but sanctioned their exclusion or marginalization in higher education, teaching, the civil service, and industry. Mediation and hierarchy of benefits contrasted with European welfarism, which aimed to level differences through the direct delivery of universal benefits to citizens. Welfare remained in Syria and Lebanon a privilege, not a right.

By late 1938, the bargaining process that had produced the colonial welfare state reached a critical juncture. Workers and women sought a far more radical transformation of state duties and citizens’ rights than had so far been attained in the emergent colonial welfare state. In late 1938, frustrated Syrian unions sent an ultimatum to parliament, threatening a general strike unless it passed the proposed labor code. Women’s unions, too, showed impatience with their alliance with nationalists, as the nationalist governments continued to ignore their calls for women’s suffrage, increased employment of women in the civil service, and reforms in personal status law.

But in 1938 workers and women lacked the power to pressure the governments into adopting a more egalitarian, rights-based social policy. Ruling nationalists refused such reforms, in part due to their self-interest—as employers, fathers, and husbands of workers and women—and in part because of the greater pressure they felt from conservative religious interests that had a stake in mediated government. Syrian Islamic groups contributed in the winter of 1938–39 to the unrest that brought down the National Bloc government, with protests against reforms in the personal status code that would have virtually permitted civil marriages for the first time and appeared to undermine the historical priority of Islam among religions. Meanwhile Christian groups in Lebanon, including French Jesuits, staunchly defended their position as mediators in the colonial welfare system, standing in opposition to parents who sought the reallocation of funds from private to public schools and preaching against personal status reforms that would undermine patriarchal families. And the French, who in the Popular Front years were sympathetic to social demands and popular participation in government, withdrew their support as conservative governments took power in Paris. In late 1938 they replaced De Martel with a conservative high commissioner, Gabriel Puaux, who established close ties with religious patriarchs and voiced his preference for installing a monarchy in Syria.

The juncture turned to crisis when the independence treaties approved by the Syrian and Lebanese parliaments were flatly rejected by the French parliament. Labor strikes and mass street demonstrations brought down
the iron hand of Puaux, who suspended the parliaments and constitutions of both governments in the months before the outbreak of World War II in September 1939. The struggle over the colonial welfare state was frozen in place for the next two years.

REALIZATION OF A COLONIAL WELFARE STATE, 1941–43

High Commissioner Gabriel Puaux boasted that it was “easy to govern” in the first year of the war, as his hundred thousand French troops “inspired everyone to respect France’s wishes.”\(^{20}\) Puaux wielded, in addition to this big stick, 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. However, Puaux did not revive De Martel’s bargaining policies. Labor leaders who mounted strikes to protest low wages and layoffs were arrested, as was most of the Communist leadership, by January 1940. The civic order of the 1930s was stilled as it had been in the early 1920s, under martial law and 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 oil flow from Iraq to Tripoli’s refinery, and closed borders to important markets in Iraq and Palestine. To cope with these stresses, Puaux laid the foundations of a state-led wartime economy, while using Vichy rhetoric to discipline an anxious population. In a speech on August 30, 1940, he called on youth to “calm down” and to espouse their duties of “discipline and work,” just as the state would do. He directed the High Commissariat to plan planting of sugar beets and rice and to impose a state monopoly on the transport of necessities to ensure supplies to Mount Lebanon and the rural poor. The Tripoli oil refinery was refitted to process remaining oil stockpiles. Yet shortages and inflation continued, igniting sporadic protests. In November, Puaux decreed harsh penalties for hoarding and black marketeering. The pillar of French claims to rule, its guarantee of welfare, was crumbling, and 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.”\(^{21}\)

The bottom fell out of Puaux’s tenuous social order upon the arrival of his successor, the pro-Vichy General Henri Dentz, in December 1940. More than fifty thousand workers were unemployed in Damascus alone, and breadlines grew long. The cost of living had doubled since the war’s start, without comparable pay raises. The first hunger marches took place in January 1941, in Damascus and Aleppo. In February, the Syrian nationalist leader Shukri Quwwatli seized leadership of protests against unem-
ployment, 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, some of them organized by the few labor leaders not yet jailed. Nationalist leaders used the threat of continued strikes to oust Vichy’s puppet governments and lower bread prices. In April 1941, Dentz dismissed the Puaux-era Councils of Directors. Khalid al-Azm, the new Syrian head of state, promised immediate public works jobs, welfare for youth, an ambitious public health program, and increased supplies of food. In May, bakers were forced to reduce the price of bread. Social pressure and Vichy’s lack of funds had forced the state back to the bargaining table.

Two months later the Vichy government fell to Free French and British invaders. The Free French were even weaker in resources than Vichy had been. Not only did they not enjoy subsidies from the metropole, but their rule coincided with the deepest economic slump of the war, plunging state tax revenues to new lows. They were thus forced not only to bargain but also to adopt a positively liberal policy in order to establish their rule. Under Georges Catroux, from July 1941 to June 1943, the Free French reinstated much of the civic order of late 1930s, with its three-way structure, bargaining strategies, and familiar players.

This proved to be no simple return to the past, however. As political prisoners were released and opposition groups permitted to reform, they attracted more followers than ever among those suffering from wartime hardships. Fearing rebellion during wartime, the French were forced to cater to social demands as never before. They compensated for their lack of funds by taking significant steps toward the direct delivery of state welfare benefits, bypassing colonial mediators, and toward the institutionalization of social rights through legislation. In early 1943, bargaining would reach a new pitch, as the French and their nationalist opponents sought to sway the loyalties of the urban masses in anticipation of the long-delayed parliamentary elections. As a result, the period of Free French rule brought the colonial welfare state to a new climax.

Catroux had no choice but to promise a return to the democratic liberties and colonial beneficence that had been cast aside by Vichy. The Free French were making a barely legal and desperately absurd claim to rule in the Levant, as they still occupied only a few minor colonies and commanded only a few thousand troops. Their claim to the mandate was doubly jeopardized by Vichy’s abandonment of neutrality for collaboration with the Germans, perceived by many as a renunciation of their membership in the League of Nations. Finally, they did not enjoy the confidence of their British and American allies. The Free French had therefore to base their claim to represent true France on antifascist, democratic principles. To rally the population, the government also had to promise war relief. And so on
June 8, Catroux dropped flyers from airplanes proclaiming promises to abolish the mandate, establish independence, and reopen trade within the British-occupied regions of the Middle East: “it 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.” The Vichy rhetoric of “duty” was replaced by claims to social and political rights.

In reorganizing the state and civic order, Catroux made explicit reference to policies of the leftist Popular Front between 1936 and 1938, now constructed in Free French ideology as a golden age before disaster. The independence treaties negotiated then would be revived, and as soon as wartime conditions permitted, elections for parliament would be held. Catroux even considered reinstating the governments dismissed by Vichy-collaborator Puaux in 1939. Under pressure from de Gaulle, however, Catroux postponed such a return as too risky to French interests: democratic symbols would be subordinated to the preservation of empire.

The Free French were too weak in 1941 to control a return to the combative parliamentary politics of the 1930s. They lacked critical funds and staff. Fully one-third of top French bureaucrats and all but 2,500 troops had opted to return with Dentz to Vichy France. The Free French would not fully replenish their civil and military ranks in Syria and Lebanon until 1943. And their tentacles of support among nonstate mediating bodies were attenuated, as most French missionaries were pro-Vichy: Catroux exiled the Jesuit rector of St. Joseph University, Père Chanteur, to Cairo for continuing to lead his students in prayers for Marshal Pétain. In addition, Free France enjoyed no subsidies from Paris with which to rebuild such support. Neither could the High Commissariat rely on customs duties to finance itself, as wartime trade was to remain severely restricted under the guidance of the Middle East Supply Centre (MESC), run by the British and Americans. Indeed, the period of Free French rule was the most impoverished of the war, as total state spending sank, in real terms adjusted for inflation, to roughly half of 1939 levels.

So Catroux reneged on his promise of independence and instead announced a transition period of conditional independence in autumn 1941, wherein he granted more autonomy to local governments and appointed longtime conservative collaborators to head the states: Shaykh Taj al-Din in Syria, and Alfred Naccache in Lebanon. Catroux also maintained the tight control of the High Commissariat (renamed the Délégation générale) over the military, police, and vital Common Interests administration, which included not only the sizable customs revenues but the foreign concessions that owned and managed much of the Levant’s public utilities and transport, the tobacco monopoly, and the Tripoli oil refinery.

However, revived opposition movements mushroomed as soon as Catroux announced conditional independence in autumn 1941. In Leba-
non, the prewar rivalry between Bishara al-Khuri and Emile Eddé would solidify into opposing parties. In Syria, the bourgeois National Bloc/rural landowner cleavage reemerged, as the Bloc attacked the latter associated with Shaykh Taj’s government. Labor federations and the Communist Party in both countries would gain unprecedented strength by late 1943, with revived campaigns for the long-sought labor code and for pay raises. Syrian and Lebanese feminists, too, reignited their prewar women’s unions in a more independent spirit, distancing themselves slightly from their nationalist allies by demonstrating behind their own banners. Syrian Islamic groups, before the war scattered in various cities under individual personalities, would unite by 1945 into a branch of the Muslim Brotherhood.

Inflation and food shortages immediately engaged the reconstituted civic order. The years 1941–42 were the darkest days of wartime hardship. The summer harvest of 1941 was poor, and both public panic and government alarm rose: “Fearing a famine like that of 1917–1918, all of Mount Lebanon speaks of protests and demonstrations,” French police reported on September 9. Ten days later, similar reports came from Aleppo and Damascus. Food prices soared far beyond wage raises (the cost of food rose 450 percent and the general cost of living rose about 300 percent between January 1939 and January 1943). Infant mortality, a primary indicator of public health, peaked throughout the Middle East in 1942. Inflation and food shortages immediately engaged the reconstituted civic order. The years 1941–42 were the darkest days of wartime hardship. The summer harvest of 1941 was poor, and both public panic and government alarm rose: “Fearing a famine like that of 1917–1918, all of Mount Lebanon speaks of protests and demonstrations,” French police reported on September 9. Ten days later, similar reports came from Aleppo and Damascus. Food prices soared far beyond wage raises (the cost of food rose 450 percent and the general cost of living rose about 300 percent between January 1939 and January 1943). Infant mortality, a primary indicator of public health, peaked throughout the Middle East in 1942.

The threat of popular revolt was taken extremely seriously by the weakened French. Urban populations, those with the greatest capacity to unsettle the fragile Free French regime, were hit hardest. The 1942 crop would also be poor, and despite MESC food shipments, fear of famine would not subside until the bountiful harvest in June 1943. Hunger marches began as early as September 1941 and peaked in the summer of 1942 and again in the spring of 1943, in all major cities. Communists, labor unions, and nationalists took credit for organizing them, but the prominence of women in French police reports about the marches is also striking: Women appear to have led at least ten demonstrations in Beirut and Aleppo during the summer of 1942 alone. Aleppo was shut down in early June 1942, and hundreds of women marched to the governorate building, shouting “We want bread!” and “Death to Governor Nabih Martini!” In Beirut, a Muslim woman started a demonstration in May 1943 after officials at city hall dismissed her complaint about poor distribution of flour. She returned to her quarter and led a crowd toward the city center, forcing shops to close and demanding lower prices and larger rations.

Thousands of workers also staged increasingly disruptive strikes. French police recorded major strikes in nearly every month of 1942 and 1943, especially among textile and public sector workers seeking wage raises to match inflation. While Vichy-era unemployment diminished in 1942, as British military demand fueled the creation of thirty thousand jobs, wages
remained extremely low. Wages would rise by 1943 at only half the rate of inflation. Workers also protested import-export bans of cotton and silk, which curtailed production.29 With each month, the size and number of labor unions grew, and labor federations began to coordinate united actions not just against employers but targeting the state as well.

Thus two issues dominated politics between 1941 and 1943: bread supplies and workers’ wages. The French, their appointed heads of state, and nationalist opposition leaders each in turn sought to exploit mass unrest over food shortages and rising prices. These inter-elite rivalries would shape government policy, producing a variety of legal and financial commitments that amounted to the awarding of new rights to a broader array of social groups.

Catroux took the initiative in the late summer of 1941, when he established a new department in his cabinet called the “Section sociale.” By September, the Section began producing numerous social studies and legislative proposals to ameliorate the condition of workers and to offset the hardships of inflation. Their intent, as in French strategy of the 1930s, was to diffuse calls by opposition nationalists for immediate independence and to sway the loyalties of urban masses toward French allies in government. The section’s proposals would result in important legislation granting workers and families unprecedented rights to security and benefits.30

Catroux similarly sought to exploit the bread issue. In April 1942 he established a Wheat Office (Office du blé) under the auspices of the Common Interests administration to impose a state monopoly on grain supplies and assure the delivery of surplus Syrian grain to Lebanon, which depended on Syria for half of its needs. His intent was to make the (French) state the primary and direct provider of this most essential foodstuff. But he was thwarted in this effort by Sir Edward Spears, the British minister to the Levant, who sought to assure MESC (that is, British) control, and by Shaykh Taj, who asserted Syrian control. The parties negotiated to create a new, joint commission to oversee grain collections and distribution, which was eventually named the Office des céréales panifiables (Cereals Office).31

The bread-supply issue was most prominent in Syrian politics because Syria was the main producer of grain. In the summer of 1942 the Cereals Office attempted its first collections of grain, but landowners and peasants balked at state-set grain prices and hid the grain from Cereals Office collectors. Catroux saw an opportunity to recoup French prestige by using French troops to extract the grain by force, thereby bypassing landowning intermediaries. However, Spears checked Catroux’s plan. In August 1942, Spears approached the prime minister, Husni al-Barazi, a large landowner from Hama, and arranged to hold landlords responsible for the collection of grains on their lands, under threat of deportation if they did not produce the grain. At least thirteen landlords were deported and collections in-
creased. However, landowners in both Syria and Lebanon were greatly compensated for their compliance, and emerged from the war tremendously enriched by MESC schemes to increase local production. Peasants, on the other hand, would not reap similar rewards, and lived at subsistence levels.32

The establishment of direct state benefits did, however, proceed on the other end of the bread chain: distribution to urban consumers. The Syrian head of state, Shaykh Taj al-Din, known for his fiery populism in speeches, carved his own wedge of prestige by introducing a system of subsidies to the urban masses. He sold grain for less than the Cereals Office paid for it, at a cost of 8–10 million £LS per year. The deficit was covered by instituting a two-tiered pricing system, wherein the middle class paid more for grain and sugar to offset the discount offered to lower classes. Shaykh Taj also built a coalition of merchants, among whom he tolerated war profiteers and the rural Alawi and Druze minorities. In so doing, however, he plunged the state into debt and opened it to charges of corruption.33

The nationalist opposition mounted an offensive against Shaykh Taj’s conservative coalition beginning in late 1942, upon the return of the National Bloc’s leader, Shukri Quwwatli, from exile. The Bloc took over leadership of hunger marches from unions, women, and others and coordinated a sustained campaign against the alleged corruption of Prime Minister Barazi, ousting him in December 1942. The next month, Shaykh Taj died, and his funeral, significantly, drew sympathetic crowds into the streets. Following Taj’s lead, his successor Jamal al-Ulshi raised the price of bread paid by the urban middle class from 8 to 8.5 piasters per kilo and proposed a new income tax, claiming the need to finance bread subsidies to the poor.34 In early February, the Bloc organized students and merchants in a five-day strike to protest the increase, accusing Ulshi of pocketing the new revenues. The Bloc continued to provoke protests through March, expanding its complaints to include opposition to sending grain to Lebanon. Catroux, fearing Spears’s growing ties with the Bloc, dismissed Ulshi on the pretext of disobedience.35 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 against those of the poor.

Syrian bread politics had repercussions in Lebanon, where Catroux also failed to turn bread into political gold. Lebanese hunger marchers, alarmed by the National Bloc’s calls to stop grain exports, demanded bread subsidies like those instituted by Shaykh Taj in Syria. Through his control of the Cereals Office and Common Interests, Catroux sought to position himself as defender of Lebanese interests. But he gained little ground, for Bishara al-Khuri and his Constitutional Bloc pounded Catroux’s head of state, Alfred Naccache, for ineffectual government.
Catroux exploited the wage issue to better profit, especially in Lebanon. He used it first as a means of securing the loyalty of the underpaid bureaucracy, still laden with pro-Vichy sentiment, and then in an attempt to sway the urban masses toward supporting his conservative allies as the summer 1943 elections approached. Labor unions acted quickly to steal Catroux’s initiative and pushed state wage policies far beyond their original intent. The result was to position the state for the first time as the legal protector of all workers. In contrast to the stalemate of the late 1930s, when nationalist parliaments in both countries refused to enact labor laws, the state now aligned itself with workers against the bourgeoisie.

Legislation began with Catroux’s decrees in October and November 1941 to increase cost-of-living allowances for civil servants and establish a minimum wage for all workers in public sector enterprises in both Syria and Lebanon. Lebanese unions immediately threatened a general strike unless pay raises were extended to the private sector. The Lebanese government issued such a law in December but suspended implementation when employers objected. Unions mounted a series of strikes, which crested in a general upheaval in March 1942. Seven unions combined in a joint committee to advance their cause. An August 1942 law finally granted private sector workers a smaller pay increase, one that fell well below real inflation rates. Also in 1942, the Délégation générale enacted rent control laws and established a Labor and Artisanate Office subsidized by de Gaulle to promote local wool spinning and other industries. In October 1942 the Lebanese government decreed family allowances for married civil servants; and the unions again demanded their extension to all workers.

In May 1943, three months before elections, the Délégation générale and Lebanese government promulgated an omnibus wage law, which guaranteed all workers in commerce and industry increases in minimum wages, family allowances, and cost-of-living allowances. The law also decreed equal pay and benefits for men and women who performed similar work. The Free French had vowed to reverse Vichy policy and advance a liberal position in defense of women’s work. At the time the omnibus wage law was decreed, they publicized a showcase munitions complex called De Gaulle Park in the press, featuring one hundred Lebanese women in white laboratory coats manufacturing truck parts. But while women who worked in factories and for the civil service stood to gain from the labor legislation, the laws did not affect the many more women homeworkers who sewed clothing to substitute for wartime cuts in clothing imports.

Also in May 1943, the Lebanese state promulgated a second landmark law, modeled on an 1898 French law, that guaranteed work-accident insurance in the public sector and a variety of heavy industries deemed essential to the public interest. It required employers in mining, construction, transport, electric, and other industries to pay injured workers a daily pen-
sion during recovery, or permanently in cases where they could not return to work. In the case of death, the worker’s family would receive an indemnity. The law also required first-aid care facilities in the workplace. A third and final 1943 labor law established the Service des affaires sociales in Lebanon to help conciliate labor disputes. It was based on a 1909 Ottoman law on strikes that had never been implemented, but which had required government mediation. And like the Délégation générale’s Section sociale, the Service was to study labor issues and prepare legislative proposals. In addition, it was to undertake assistance to workers for the protection of children, prisoners, and families.

These new labor laws unleashed strikes throughout Lebanon during May and June and for months to come, as employers resisted workers’ demands to implement their provisions. Workers fought tooth and nail, factory by factory, to claim their rights from employers. Workers also sought government intervention to enforce their new rights. In June 1943, the government intervened on behalf of striking tailors, who then obtained a 30 percent raise. Workers at a stocking factory, wool factory, and tobacco plant also sent representatives to the government seeking protection, but obtained only partial compliance in October 1943. The government’s apparent laxity in enforcing the new labor laws may have been due at first to a time lag in setting up the regulatory apparatus. However, it also reflected the politics behind the laws’ promulgation. The work-accident and omnibus wage laws were decreed in Lebanon in the fervor of the 1943 election campaign by Eyub Tabet, the conservative interim president and stiff opponent of the nationalist opposition, the Constitutional Bloc. As the Constitutional Bloc represented a large portion of the commercial-industrial bourgeoisie, the intent of these decrees was clearly to sway workers’ support away from the nationalists. Workers would find that after the August elections, the new Constitutional Bloc government was reluctant to enforce the labor laws.

The wage issue in Syria was not exploited as vigorously by the ruling elite faction, in part because the National Bloc had already destroyed its conservative opposition by May 1943. In November 1942, Shaykh Taj al-Din issued two decrees guaranteeing severance pay and setting minimum wage standards, the latter in compliance with Catroux’s 1941 decree. Cost-of-living laws were also issued, although they covered only civil servants. The decrees may be read, like Shaykh Taj’s two-tiered bread policy, as part of his effort to woo the urban workers away from the National Bloc. Moreover, the laws were primarily designed to appeal to workers in large industries, many of which were owned by members of the National Bloc. They significantly exempted constituencies loyal to Shaykh Taj: landlords with agricultural workers, employers of domestic servants, and artisanal and family businesses did not have to comply with the new wage and severance standards.
Like their Lebanese counterparts, Syrian workers staged numerous strikes in Aleppo, Homs, and Damascus to extend the labor laws, but to less effect. This was likely because the outcome of the elections had been virtually decided with Ulshi’s dismissal in March. Ata al-Ayyubi, the elderly interim chief of state, was on good terms with many National Bloc leaders.45

On the eve of the summer 1943 elections, the colonial welfare state ruled by the Free French had not only been rebuilt from the “scorched earth” Catroux said he found after Vichy’s departure, but significantly transformed. The state had assumed new financial commitments to the population at large, in the form of bread subsidies, and new guarantees of legal protection for workers, in the form of minimum wages, family allowances, equal pay for men and women, cost-of-living increases, and severance pay. Despite their limitations and often self-serving origins, the new labor laws armed workers with unprecedented rights. These laws positioned the state as the primary guarantor of families’ economic welfare in a way undreamed of in the 1930s. The change was made possible only by the peculiar circumstances of the war that had transformed the civic order and the roles that the French and the urban masses played in it. The masses were far more organized, and the French needed their support, and feared revolt, more than before. The laws and subsidies represented, finally, a clean break from France’s former colonial paternalism and a true commitment of the state to social welfare.

The nationalists, meanwhile, had been pushed to show their allegiance to their own bourgeois interests, which drove a wedge in the cross-class nationalist coalitions of the 1930s. The Communist Party and Islamic groups both positioned themselves as the true defenders of the poor; their memberships soared in this period. Because of this split, and growing food supplies, the Free French no longer feared revolt by the spring of 1943. Also by that time, they had secured a government base in reconquered Algiers. Catroux felt confident enough to call elections for the following summer, although his boss, Charles de Gaulle, was uncomfortable with the extent of bargaining required: “I came to think his desire to charm and his leaning toward conciliation did not always answer to the kind of sword play which was imposed upon him.”46

It is well-known that the nationalists won the 1943 elections; it was, however, neither a resounding victory nor a referendum against state welfarism. Nationalist candidates won through their manipulation of a two-stage electoral system designed in the 1920s to favor rural and urban elites over unknown and poorer candidates. The list system promoted patronage politics of personal clienteles, and it disadvantaged formal political parties.47 Voter turnout tells the story. Most of the urban masses did not vote in the summer 1943 elections (turnout was as low as 33 percent in major Syrian cities and 25 percent in Beirut). Nationalists won their biggest majorities in the coun-
tryside, where peasants were corralled to vote for local notables—except, significantly around Hama, where Akram Hawrani won a seat in parliament on promises of land reform. The nationalist Constitutional Bloc actually lost in Beirut to its Francophile opposition. And a significant number of urbanites voted for Communist candidates. The Communist Party, through its organizing of hunger marches and labor unions, had won the reputation of defender of the poor. The joint Syrian-Lebanese party fielded six candidates on a platform of workers’ rights, democracy, and independence, while several more sympathizers ran independently. Procommunist candidates earned forty thousand votes in all of Syria and Lebanon, and nearly 12 percent of all votes cast in Lebanon alone, a show of promising strength, although they failed to win a parliamentary seat.48

The nationalist victory would nonetheless transform the civic order for a second time during the war. The new governments’ disinterest in social bargaining was made immediately clear. In Lebanon, President Bishara al-Khuri, a Maronite Christian, and Prime Minister Riad al-Sulh, a Sunni Muslim, cemented their victories with a pact that would unite a significant portion of the Muslim and Christian landowning bourgeoisie. In October 1943, workers petitioned the Lebanese government to enforce the neglected May 1943 labor laws and to increase subsidies, schooling, and protections for workers and their families. In response, Sulh merely called on workers to cooperate with their bosses in the national interest.49 Similarly, Khuri dismissed petitions from women for the right to vote. In Syria, President Shukri Quwwatli, a landowner and industrialist himself, would bring the National Bloc’s urban, Sunni, and bourgeois constituency closer to their erstwhile rivals, rural elites, in face of growing challenges from Communists and Islamists. As in Lebanon, Quwwatli’s government urged the population to withhold their demands until the war was done and full independence achieved.

The year 1943 was, then, another turning point in the evolution of the colonial welfare state. Would workers, women, and others succeed in expanding their social and political rights and the scope of direct state benefits? Or would they confront the same resistance from national governments as in 1938–39?

NATIONAL GOVERNMENTS AND THE LEGACY OF COLONIAL WELFARE, 1944 – 46

Catroux left the Levant to take up a position with the Free French government newly established in Algiers in June 1943. With him departed the brief and final effort to reignite French prestige through bargaining over social policy. His successor, Jean Helleu, showed little interest in such a project and instead engaged in brute efforts to promote French cronies and
to withhold power from the recently elected Syrian and Lebanese governments. Upon these governments’ reasonable and expected demand to revise their constitutions, Helleu stonewalled. To their demands to acquire control of the police, military, and Common Interests, he turned a deaf ear. Helleu’s intractability only raised the ante. When in November the Lebanese parliament proceeded unilaterally to amend the country’s constitution, expunging references to the mandate, Helleu staged a coup; arrested President Bishara al-Khuri, Prime Minister Riad al-Sulh, and other cabinet officials; and precipitated the biggest political crisis of the war. Thirteen days of protest began on November 10 with crowds tearing down pictures of Charles de Gaulle from public walls.

Allied pressure forced the French not only to reinstate the Lebanese government but also to relinquish their civilian powers in both countries. On January 1, 1944, the French transferred to the national governments the main pillar of their rule: the Common Interests administration. By the end of 1944, the only important institutions still left in French hands were their own army, the Troupes spéciales (the locally recruited military), and the Serail building, French headquarters since World War I. Journalists, women’s leaders, labor organizers, and politicians alike heralded the dawn of a new era, wherein imperialist obstacles to social and economic progress were finally cleared.

There was no instant revolution, however. In the years 1944–46, the civic order was decolonized with ambiguous implications for the colonial welfare state. On the one hand, major players in the civic order continued to follow strategies set in the 1930s. Labor unions, Communists, and feminists continued to make demands in the belief that the key to equality and social well-being lay in extending state regulation and benefits. Islamists and the Maronite Church intensified their critique of direct state intervention in society. Nationalists in both countries continued to appeal for cross-class unity with calls for full independence, in 1945 mounting campaigns to claim control of the Troupes spéciales and to oust French troops.

On the other hand, decolonization transformed the triangulated structure of the civic order that had produced the colonial welfare state. First, nationalists now filled the shoes of the French, occupying the state apparatus and controlling the ranks of state mediators. Withdrawal of the French removed the rationale for a split between nationalist and collaborationist elites that had fueled their rivalry for mass loyalty and social bargaining. Second, nationalist rulers were insulated from social pressure in a way the French had not been: the British had strongly backed them against the French, and as long as their troops remained on Syrian and Lebanese soil, pressure from highly mobilized labor unions, Communists, Islamists, and feminists could not seriously threaten the new regimes. Third, the states were administratively weakened in 1944, as less experienced Syrians and
Lebanese replaced the ubiquitous French advisors throughout the bureaucracy. Links between the state and many of its quasi-public mediating agencies were broken: French schools, hospitals, and concessionary companies that had delivered a large portion of state-subsidized services were now clearly private agents of a foreign country. Both states focused less on promoting social change, and more on internal administrative, fiscal, and judicial reform, particularly on abolishing inefficient dual French and Arabic procedures. Fourth, as result of the above, the state’s opposition, once a cross-class coalition, now distinctly represented those groups marginalized or excluded from power—workers, women, and Islamists—and they were more frustrated and disgruntled than ever.

The polarization of class interests altered political bargaining strategies. The former strategy of French rulers, who employed social policy to divert calls for independence, had no place in this civic order. Indeed, at times the nationalist rulers would reverse the French tactic, using the need for full independence as a reason to postpone fulfillment of social demands. The opposition, no longer bound to elites by the cause of independence, now amplified their own demands. In Syria, the opposition was now split between two powerful movements: secularist Communists who looked to the state to guarantee social rights, and Islamic groups that defined social rights in terms of limitations on the state. In Lebanon, a powerful federation of labor unions coordinated protests across the country. While bread was now plentiful, inflation still depressed most families’ standard of living. In both countries, women’s unions launched all-out suffrage drives, uninhibited by their former deference to nationalists’ insistence on independence first. Fearful especially of the Communists, Syrian and Lebanese nationalist elites responded by forming closer alliances with the very conservatives they once opposed, especially religious interests.

In the years 1944–46, ruling nationalists’ efforts to reduce tensions in the civic order would modify the colonial welfare state but not alter its basic attributes. First, the states responded to demands to expand welfare with two major social policy initiatives: expansion of public education and adoption of comprehensive labor codes. Initial efforts were made, too, to finance social services through taxation, now that extrabudgetary subsidies from Paris had disappeared. Social spending, particularly on education, expanded rapidly. However, as will be shown below, no substantial new initiatives in welfare spending were undertaken, and the proportion of state budgets devoted to health and education would remain at levels characteristic of the colonial welfare state. Second, in keeping with past practice, mediation of services and rights continued. But it took new forms, marking a divergence in the state formation of the two countries. While Syria adopted etatist and corporatist policies, Lebanon adopted liberal ones. In sum, while the states were no longer colonial, they retained the low funding of
social services, mediated structure, and obstacles to direct access to rights and privileges associated with the colonial welfare state. This limited response produced a precarious balance of forces that would inform the politics of both countries in postwar years.

The states’ major new legal commitment to enhanced social rights was the passage of comprehensive labor codes. In January 1944, Lebanese labor unions united in a general federation and demanded credit for mobilizing many of the thousands of protesters in November 1943. They petitioned the government to recompense them for their national service by reducing inflation and reviving the 1930s labor code proposals. Unions in both countries brought far greater strength to bear on the issue than they had five years before: Wartime industries had swelled their ranks and Communist party membership ballooned on the heels of Red Army victories. Membership in unions is estimated at fifty thousand, and in the Communist party ten thousand, by war’s end. In 1944–45, the unions and Communists staged continuous strikes, demonstrations, and conferences with parliamentary representatives, and finally achieved the passage of labor codes in both countries in 1946. The labor codes formally legalized workers-only unions and the right to strike (except in the public sector). They also instituted demands made since the 1930s, including eight-hour workdays; overtime, sickness, and severance pay; retirement pensions; vacations; and the reinforcement of rights already won, like the minimum wage and work-accident protection.

Women, too, campaigned for new rights on the basis of their contributions to the independence struggle. By 1944, the Syrian and Lebanese women’s unions had achieved a much higher profile than in 1939. The Lebanese women’s union capitalized on the mass mobilization of women over bread supplies to organize prominent demonstrations by hundreds of women in November 1943. The union used that momentum to stage a successful boycott of Beirut markets in 1944, forcing merchants to reduce food prices. Both the Syrian and Lebanese women’s unions positioned women as defenders of the family, supporting campaigns to win family allowances, to fight corruption in rationing programs, and to increase vigilance against epidemics. Women workers also mobilized in labor unions and the growing women’s wing of the Communist Party, which explicitly linked women’s work to claims for rights as full-fledged citizens. Imilie Faris Ibrahim, a prominent Lebanese Communist and feminist, argued in an article published in December 1943 that women deserved the vote because they worked hard for the good of the country at factory jobs and in the fields. At the end of 1944, the two women’s unions sent delegates to the highly publicized Arab Women’s Conference in Cairo, which called on Arab governments to grant women the vote, hire women for government posts, and expand girls’ education and welfare for poor women and children. They
also demanded that states adopt newer interpretations of Islamic law on personal status that granted women more rights in marriage, divorce, and child custody.53

Because of their ties to the powerful labor movement, women did win new rights in the labor codes, to equal pay, paid maternity leave, and severance pay if they quit their jobs to marry. They also won state commitment to girls’ education because it fit with nationalists’ ideas about the need to educate mothers for social progress.

However, women’s grassroots support was much weaker than that of labor, and they would fail to gain the political and civil rights that were so necessary to furthering their welfare. Even though leaders of the women’s movement were relatives of powerful nationalists, they could not compete with an opponent that posed a greater potential threat to nationalist rule: religious groups mobilized vigorously against the women’s movement. In Lebanon, Catholics and Maronites held conferences calling on women to respect their traditional domestic roles and give up their jobs. The Lebanese parliament killed proposals in 1943 and 1946 to grant limited suffrage to educated women. In Syria, Islamist groups protested Muslim women’s increasing presence in public and against reforms of personal status laws. Islamists had allied with Shukri al-Quwwatli in the 1943 elections, and expected a payback. When Quwwatli did not block social mixing of men and women, protests led to violent clashes. Islamist pressure, however, made the government reluctant to move on women’s reforms. When delegates returned from the Cairo women’s conference, they met ridicule in the press and condescension from government officials. In sum, women’s nationalist allies in both countries let them down after independence.54 Women would not fully attain the vote until the 1950s and would never achieve the personal status reforms they sought.

Education was a less inflammatory issue and so became the second major initiative taken in social policy, although not without intense bargaining. Universal education had, as we have seen, long been claimed by nationalists as both a political and social right of citizens in a democracy. Between 1944 and 1946, the Lebanese state opened nearly 150 new schools, raising enrollment from 30,000 to 41,000. In 1943–1945, Syria opened 30 new state schools, also adding about 10,000 students to state rolls.55 The Syrian state went beyond expansion of the mandate system: the education advisor Sati al-Husri, who had designed the Iraqi school system, revamped the national school curriculum to standardize and Arabize it. In a nod to the demands of women and labor, al-Husri’s guidelines also called for equal educational opportunity for boys and girls and for more technical schools, although these were long-term goals not fulfilled during the war. Education would become the strongest pillar of postwar social policy in Syria. The number of state schools and students enrolled in them would
quadruple in the fifteen years following the war, twice the rate of expansion under the French between 1924 and 1938.

The Lebanese did not expand or reform state education to the same extent. They did little to alter the state system’s French-style curriculum or the balance between public and private schools, limiting reform to a 1946 law stiffening the state’s regulation of foreign and private schools. In 1945, only 21 percent of Lebanese students attended state schools, compared to 58 percent of Syrian students, and the gap would grow after the war. One reason for the differing policy was the legacy of a century of educational policy. Ottoman reforms had supplanted Islamic schools while permitting foreign and Christian schools to flourish. The French had, as we have seen, encouraged Christian institutions and relatively neglected state schools with their Muslim majorities. So while Syrian Islamists had long ago lost a firm foothold in education, weakening their quest to assert greater control over education, their Christian counterparts in Lebanon were in a much stronger position to protect their mediating role in educational affairs.

New financial commitments to citizens’ welfare resembled patterns in legal commitments: they tended to amplify rather than modify colonial welfare policy. While their scope was initially restricted by the wartime economy, beginning in 1946 state spending in all areas boomed. The most significant factor was the availability of new sources of revenue: customs duties that had once flowed to the French, and income taxes, both of which would grow rapidly once wartime restrictions on trade were lifted. Syria had adopted an income tax in 1942; Lebanon adopted a war profits tax in 1942 and an income tax in 1944. The income taxes replaced Ottoman temettu taxes, which had been levied only on certain professions, with general levies. Direct tax revenues jumped by nearly 40 percent in Syria and 50 percent in Lebanon from 1945 to 1946, signaling the transition from wartime trade restrictions. These revenues would more than quadruple in Lebanon and more than double in Syria, in real terms, between 1944 and 1951. A third potential source of revenue was loans: between 1947 and 1951 the Syrian state would run deficits, a fiscal tool shunned by the French, who in the prewar years remained committed to balanced budgets.

Both the Syrian and Lebanese governments heralded expanded budgets, particularly in public works and education. Figures 1 and 2 show that by 1945 state budgets had nearly recovered from devastating wartime cuts: spending rebounded to 1939 levels, totaling about 30 million £LS for both states and the Common Interests budget, when adjusted for inflation. The trough in wartime spending during World War II, shown in figure 1, reflected mainly the precipitous drop in customs revenues to the Common Interests budget controlled by the Délégation générale. From 1944, the steep rise in state budgets reflected the reprise of trade and the transfer of Common Interests revenues to the states. The Common Interests, once the
mainstay of the common administration binding the two countries, would be formally abolished in 1950, when Syria and Lebanon dissolved their customs union.

The years 1944–1945 were also a honeymoon period, allowing for higher rates of social investment. Inflation increases leveled off after rising steeply each year since 1939, and the cost of living would actually begin to fall in 1946. Nominal increases in budget allocations, therefore, from this point onward did more than merely compensate for inflation (see fig. 2). Second, the states did not yet face prohibitive military costs, which they would after the French withdrawal in 1946. As a result, spending on health and education reached unprecedented highs before the war’s end. In
1945, Syria’s spending on health and education totaled 2.8 million £LS (adjusted for inflation to 1939 levels), higher than the previous peak of 2.3 million in 1939. Likewise, Lebanon’s budgets for health and education, totaling 934,000 £LS (adjusted to 1939 prices), surpassed its 1939 peak of 781,000 (figure 3). Public works spending showed the same patterns.

Postwar spending skyrocketed: By 1951, global spending by both Syria and Lebanon dwarfed the highest levels of spending attained in the mandate period, at about 106 million £LS, adjusted for inflation.57 By 1951, health and education spending had increased, in real terms, eight times over 1943 levels in Syria; six times in Lebanon. The major portion of new government spending, however, covered new military and administrative costs. By 1950–51, 44.4 percent of Syria’s budget was allocated to the Ministry of Defense, up from .10 percent in 1944 and 16.5 percent in 1945.58 Lebanon’s defense spending rose from virtually nothing to 20 percent of the ordinary budget in the same period.59 As figure 1 suggests, the postwar spending boom substantively incorporated into state budgets for the first time the extrabudgetary military spending of the French through 1940, and of the Allies during World War II.

Did postwar economic expansion fuel the long-sought expansion of the
colonial welfare state? Increases in postwar social spending were real, but they remained within ranges familiar in the colonial welfare state. Between 1944 and 1951, Lebanon's education budget grew from 2.6 million £LS to 9.8 million £LS (when adjusted for inflation, from 484,000 to 2.5 million in 1939 £LS); but as a percentage of overall spending in the ordinary budget, it grew only from 8.9 to 10.8 percent. Syria's education budget in the same period grew from 9.8 to 46.8 million £LS (1.8 million to 12.2 million in 1939 £LS), an increase from 16.4 to 17.6 percent of state spending. Figure 4 shows that the percentage of combined state spending on education and public health in the two states peaked in 1943 and 1944 and then leveled off in the 1950s, at just under 20 percent in Syria and 13–15 percent in Lebanon in 1951. These levels were slightly above those of the 1930s, but not dramatically so. Similarly, public works spending in Syria ballooned from 9.6 percent of the state budget to 25 percent between 1943 and 1947, but then fell back to 7.3 percent in 1950–51, slightly lower than the prewar average.

More important, while there was a quantitative expansion in social spending, there was no qualitative expansion. Public health and education remained the sole major areas of social spending into the 1950s. In Syria the supply budget, which encompassed subsidies for food rations, dwindled after the war. The Social Affairs budget disappeared in 1944. A new budget line for the Ministry of Labor was established in 1948, following the adoption of the labor code, to finance mediation and subsidize union services.
But the ministry’s expenditures remained quite low: 279,000 £S in 1949, rising to 836,000 £S in 1957, less than 1 percent of the state’s budget. In Lebanon, cost-of-living subsidies disappeared. And while a Ministry of Social Affairs was established in 1952, its budget barely reached 3 million £L, just over 1 percent of total spending, in the 1950s. A Ministry of Finance official noted in 1961 that Lebanon’s only real social services remained health and education: “Not only is the relative expenditure on social services low in Lebanon but also the standard of service is very poor.” He lamented that Lebanon had not followed the example of Sweden, where in 1957 spending on social services had represented 41 percent of state expenditures, compared to Lebanon’s 17 percent and Syria’s 21 percent. The difference was due not to levels of spending on health and education but to the lack of social security and cost-of-living allowances. The official blamed the tax system set up at the end of the war for taxing the wealthy only lightly, thus providing only 11 percent of state revenues by 1957.61

In sum, aside from Syria’s massive investment in education, there was no permanent reapportionment of state funding to welfare, either in the later years of the war or afterward. As before, legal and financial benefits to workers remained limited, women remained excluded, and elites continued to enjoy a disproportionate share of state largesse. Substantial public works investments and allocations to ministries of economy and agriculture may have promised long-term benefits to all, but they profited bourgeois merchants and industrialists first. Income taxes were levied mostly on

Figure 4. Health and education as a percentage of overall state spending, 1929–1957: postwar trends compared to the period of French rule. Each line represents the combined budgets for the ministries of public health and education, as a percentage of the total budget, for each year in each country.
poorer wage earners. Unions and the two Communist parties vigorously opposed the new income taxes as regressive violations of the rights of lower classes. And financial commitments that might have reinforced new legal rights of workers were neglected. The labor codes provided for old age, sickness, and accident pensions, but neither state allocated funds for them. Moreover, the codes excluded other social security benefits demanded by workers, such as low-cost health care. Feminists’ calls for a comprehensive welfare system for poor women and children went unheeded along with their other demands.

The Syrian state did formalize support for women and workers by establishing official umbrella organizations. The Syrian General Union of Workers’ Syndicates was created in 1948 to oversee implementation of the labor code. The Syrian Women’s Union combined the dozens of women’s organizations active in the country, and by 1946 published an official women’s magazine. The official unions were modestly funded, and appear to have served more as regulatory and policing bodies than as vehicles of social support. They each usurped the powers of the grassroots-organized national labor federation and Syrian women’s union. Their intent appears to have been corporatist, binding these groups to state patrons and so blunting their opposition.

The Lebanese state also repressed the labor movement, but its methods were less etatist. While the Service des affaires sociales, established by the French in 1943 to mediate labor disputes, languished, the 1946 labor code was viewed by critics as primarily a policing instrument. Membership and activities of labor unions were highly controlled. Passage of the code coincided with a government anti-Communist campaign, and in 1948 the Communist Party would be outlawed. Although it would continue to operate illegally, the Lebanese party would not play the political role that it had in the 1943 elections or that the Syrian party would in the postwar period. No official women’s union was established in Lebanon, but the preindependence women’s union remained firmly in the grasp of women from prominent nationalist families and devoted largely to charity works.

From 1944 onward, Syrians and Lebanese both struggled over the extent of state intervention in social and economic affairs. Differences of opinion and interest were deeply rooted in the hybrid legacy of the colonial welfare state, which, as we have seen, combined direct state intervention with mediated and privatized agencies. While the war had vastly increased state controls to the benefit of many, powerful private interests also resisted a permanent extension of the public sector and state welfare. While it is beyond the scope of this essay to examine fully the postwar conflicts over the issue, a general observation on the linkage of variant outcomes in Syria and Lebanon may be advanced. It comes as no surprise that Lebanon would follow a nonstatist, liberal approach to social policy, given the much higher
degree of privatization in education and health care in the period of French rule. Syria, on the other hand, had not had nearly the same density of missionary activity and had built much stronger state education and health systems before the war. As a consequence, antistatist interests were much weaker in colonial Syria. Moreover, Syrian nationalists, to a greater degree than their Lebanese counterparts, had centered their ideology on the need to capture the state in order to advance social progress. This ideology reflected the Syrian bourgeoisie’s bases of wealth in agriculture and industry, which required state subsidies. The strongest wing of the Lebanese bourgeoisie was commercial, and it saw greater profit in laissez-faire policies.

While Syria pursued a stronger commitment to state welfarism, both countries retained essential features of the mandate-era civic order and colonial welfare state until well after the war’s end. The principal players remained, and bargaining over social policy continued to inform political conflicts. Mediated delivery of social services also continued, whether through corporatist state bodies or privatized organization, as did basic patterns of spending on health education and public workers that were biased toward elites and against women, workers, and peasants.

While World War II was heralded in Europe as the springboard of full-fledged welfarism, the war appears to have had a more somber effect in Syria and Lebanon. Most evidently the reason lay in the precarious economic basis of the colonial welfare state, where social spending had been covered disproportionately through French subsidies rather than through taxes on the middle class and elites. Industrialized Europe, aided by the Marshall Plan, was simply in a stronger position to raise vast revenues and redistribute national income. Nationalists in government reasonably argued that Syria and Lebanon had first to broaden investment in production in order to generate levels of wealth that might fund expanded welfare. Groups mobilized after the war to demand welfare were also stronger. European veterans could demand a payback for the sacrifices their governments required of them in wartime. In Syria and Lebanon, males had not only not been recruited to military service, but the French rulers who had demanded wartime sacrifices of the civilian population had departed. Social demands had their biggest impact in Syria and Lebanon during the war, not afterward, as a disgruntled, unscripted male population organized national, grassroots movements. Civilian social mobilization in protest of wartime policies must be distinguished from military mobilization in wartime when we examine the impact of wartime mobilization on state expansion.

We must also account for the effect of wartime decolonization, in contrast to European experience. The linkage between war and state expansion was decoupled in the colonial context. While the war effort bloated
states in Europe and North America, state expansion in Syria and Lebanon was primarily within administrative, military, and economic organs controlled by the French and British, organs that they would take with them when they departed. The withdrawal of the MESC and Allied military forces left an institutional vacuum in 1945–46, one that was not fully reconstituted until the 1950s. The departure of the French High Commissariat, which had been the primary agent of social policy under the French, left a more enduring vacuum with profound consequences for welfare.

The legacy of wartime expansion was thus selectively nurtured, and so cannot be explained solely via the particular structural constraints of less industrialized, colonized countries. Indeed, the choices made in expanding the postwar states owed much to the politics of social spending during the previous decade. As we have seen, varying strengths of statist and privatist interests determined that Lebanon would choose to fill the social policy vacuum only minimally, whereas Syria devoted much larger resources to rebuilding the welfare state. Also, the fact that the states did not allocate increased revenues to the poor cannot simply be explained away as the result of lack of means. While we have seen that the states’ capacity to fund social investment rose sharply at the war’s end, we must also take account of how funds were actually spent: investment in postwar development mirrored prewar and wartime policies that had funneled crucial subsidies and economic privileges to elites and left workers greatly impoverished by inflation. And we must also view spending patterns in the context of contemporaneous legal commitments to social rights, where state policies explicitly sought to limit their extension to workers, women, and peasants in a context of class polarization induced by the war and independence.

In sum, while the war undoubtedly fueled the general postwar expansion of the states, it also generated a transformation in the nature of the states. By 1939, social groups and state policy had converged around a politics of social rights poised to produce a colonial welfare state. In 1946, the now-independent states began to steer politics away from rights-based welfarism, toward liberalism and corporatism. The war may be said to have triggered, in its first phase, the realization of a colonial welfare state, and in its later years, a crisis of that state, as newly empowered and polarized forces conflicted over social policy and the expansion of rights and state services. While the colonial welfare state’s initial expansion mirrored trends in Europe, the subsequent leveling off of social spending (as a percentage of total spending) stood in contrast. This contradictory effect of the war on the welfare state resulted from the conditions specific to colonial rule and de-colonization.

Contrary to top-down arguments about the effect of war on welfare states, grassroots social mobilization was, as we have seen, the primary motor of institutionalizing the colonial welfare state during World War II. Both
nationalist elites and the French reacted to, and then sought to exploit, the mobilization of workers and women in strikes, demonstrations, and hunger marches. The preeminent goal of the MESC and rationing programs in Syria and Lebanon was to stanch incipient revolt. Catroux immediately founded the Section sociale to study and propose ways of alleviating social stress, with the goal of securing Free French rule and preserving empire. Nationalist politicians assumed leadership of protests well after they had begun, and forged alliances with women’s and labor leaders in the independence struggle, with the goal of capturing control of the state.

Furthermore, the shape of the colonial welfare state was determined more by the relative strengths of the various grassroots interests than by the design of state social engineers. Hence, highly mobilized, urban, industrial workers obtained minimum wage guarantees, family allowances, and cost-of-living increases, while nonunionized peasants, domestic servants, and women homeworkers did not. The smaller and mainly bourgeois women’s unions were unable to bring the same pressure on governments to grant women the vote. And finally, powerful mediating bodies like religious groups, landowners, and industrialists were able to maintain subsidies and privileges granted by the colonial welfare state and to block direct access to rights and state benefits by their subalterns.

Future scholarship may profitably explore further the place of Syria and Lebanon, and possibly other colonies, within the broad spectrum of welfare regime types developed in recent scholarship. This revisionist literature has undermined unilinear models of the welfare state as the unique product of industrialization and as a wholesale shift from liberal, laissez-faire public policy that assigned individuals responsibility for risk to state assumption of collective social insurance involving the expansion of the state apparatus and disbursement of vast sums of entitlement spending. A historical variety of processes is now understood to have produced diverse outcomes in differing countries: “There never was one view of how social justice was to be achieved any more than there was one route by which to achieve effective democratic governance.” In France and Germany, for example, top-down reforms and statist policies prevailed, while in Britain and the United States grassroots mobilization and nonstate initiatives informed early welfare developments. Among the latter, not only did industrialized workers and veterans mobilize for welfare protections, but women played important roles both in applying pressure on states and in designing programs. Some states relied heavily on private agencies and market regulations and incentives to address the needs of the poor, while others built overarching public administrations to deliver services directly. Working definitions of the welfare state have as a result been scaled back and become more flexible. As two early revisionists defined it, the welfare state is simply “the predictable delivery of publicly funded benefits to people without imposing
systemic degradations and restrictions upon them.” While virtually all of this recent scholarship has concerned industrialized countries, we have seen that colonies like Syria and Lebanon shared some of these characteristics in process and outcome. Syrians and Lebanese mobilized first in the 1930s, an etatist era in which the belief in the state’s unique responsibility and capability to advance social progress was nearly universal. Their programs imitated liberal models emphasizing social rights and democratic equalities. The mix of private and public agencies delivering social services that resulted from the bargaining process was not in itself atypical within the spectrum of emergent welfare regimes, although the origin of that mix in colonial practices of rule was distinctive.

Finally, among the more compelling aspects of the evolution of welfare state, apparent in the Syrian and Lebanese cases, is their malleability. We have seen how World War II stretched and reshaped the Syrian and Lebanese states, altering the direction of social policy and institutions. The American case demonstrated a similar ability to shift direction. As Theda Skocpol has argued, two distinct welfare regimes followed one upon the other, roughly divided by World War I. A maternalist welfare state emerged out of the system of veterans’ pensions established after the Civil War, only to give way to a new configuration focused on the welfare of male industrial workers in the 1930s. Similar to the American case, the phases of Syrian and Lebanese welfare policy were conditioned by the politics inherent in a variable civic order, one first transformed with the end of armed rebellion in the late 1920s, and then again during World War II, with the accelerated polarization of classes and the accession of the elite nationalist opposition to power. Wars do not simply, or always, accelerate previous trends in welfare state formation, but may instead alter their trajectory.

NOTES

4. Although Syria and Lebanon were technically mandates, a term coined by the League of Nations to distinguish their supposedly temporary and limited nature from that of colonies, the French tended to ignore the distinction. I use the term colonial here to emphasize the fact that the essential attributes of the mandatory states were shared with colonies.

5. This article is drawn from research presented more fully in my book, Colonial Citizens: Republican Rights, Paternal Privilege, and Gender in French Syria and Lebanon.

6. See, for example, Porter, War and the Rise of the State, pp. 149–93.

7. I have borrowed the concept of civic order from Isser Woloch, who used it in his analysis of the reorganization of the French state’s institutional links with society in the Napoleonic era. As Woloch defines civic order: “It is meant to encompass the values, policies and institutions at the juncture of state and civil society—the framework, in other words, for the collective public life of the French people. . . . I visualized the civic order in an almost physical sense, as embodied by buildings in the urban landscape, whose influence extended, unevenly and ever more faintly, into the countryside . . . the departmental administration; the town hall or mairie; the local schools; several new courts or tribunals; the institutions of poor relief.” See Woloch, The New Regime: Transformations of the French Civic Order, 1789–1820s, pp. 14–15.


9. Longrigg, Syria and Lebanon, p. 266.


13. MAE, Rapport . . . (Année 1933), p. 79. The argument is repeated in other 1930s reports. The French, for their own purposes here, hid behind the requirement by the League of Nations that mandatory powers respect local laws.


16. In 1935, for example, approximately 2.5 million francs in Service des oeuvres subsidies and 850,000 francs in public education department subsidies went to private schools, compared to an overall budget of 26 million francs for public education. The French and private schools also received undocumented amounts of additional French aid through other government channels and from private sources in the metropole.


18. A 1934 Lebanese law (DL 294) and a 1935 Syrian law (DL 152) revising the
1912 Ottoman corporation law required unions to include both employers and workers in each industry, subjected them to tight state supervision, and banned federations among workers of different industries. In 1937 Syrian unions threatened a general strike when the government imprisoned labor leaders for defying the law. Both state governments eventually backed down and from then on tolerated the new workers-only union movement. See Sanadiki, “Le Mouvement syndical en Syrie,” pp. 55–70; Couland, Mouvement syndical au Liban 1919–1946, pp. 221–33.


21. Ibid., 159–60.


26. Lloyd, Food and Inflation in the Middle East, 1940–45, p. 328. Data for Syria and Lebanon are not available, although a crude calculation of births against deaths of infants under one year of age in 1944, the only year numbers are available, suggests that infant mortality was still high despite regional improvements after 1942. The crude 1944 Syrian infant mortality rate, of 77 per thousand, was nearly as high as that of the Netherlands during its 1945 famine.

27. While Syria and Lebanon joined the Middle East Supply Centre in 1941, benefits from the new center were slow to accrue. Not until late 1942 was the MESC able to mount full-scale operations to assure food supplies and shipping. And while the MESC had managed in the winter of 1941–42 to import more than one hundred thousand tons of Australian wheat to the Levant, public confidence in the MESC scheme remained low, shaken by the Pearl Harbor attack and German advances on the MESC’s headquarters at Cairo between May and October 1942. Confidence grew only after the American landing in North Africa in November 1942 and the German defeat at Stalingrad in January 1943. See Lloyd, Food and Inflation, pp. 87–89; and Wilmington, The Middle East Supply Centre, p. 47.

28. MAE-Nantes, cartons 20 and 70.

29. MAE-Nantes, cartons 76, 1074, and 1107.

30. Reports and drafts of laws for nearly all of the initiatives taken, dating months before the laws were passed, suggest the Section sociale’s central and proactive role in granting workers’ rights in this period. MAE-Nantes, cartons 2921 and 2922. See also Godard, L’Oeuvre politique, économique, et sociale de la France Combattante en Syrie et au Liban, pp. 183–84.

31. Arrêté 229/FL, 21 avril 1942, portant création d’un Office du blé pour la Syrie et le Liban, printed in Bulletin officiel des actes administratifs de la délégation 8 (30 April 1942), p. 229. The Office des céréales panifiables (OCP) apparently superseded Catroux’s Wheat Office, although officials customarily continued to refer to the OCP as the Wheat Office. See Godard, L’Oeuvre politique, pp. 125–26, 130; Go-
andard, “Etude statistique de la situation économique en Syrie et au Liban,” p. 393; and E. L. Spears, “Memorandum on the First Year of the Wheat Office (O.C.P.), Syria and the Lebanon, June 20, 1943,” private papers, Middle East Library, St. Antony’s College, Oxford. I am grateful to Steven Heydemann for providing me a copy of the latter document.


33. Godard, L’Oeuvre politique, p. 133; and Catroux, Dans la bataille, p. 256–57.

34. Syrian government notice, printed in Le jour, 11 February 1943, and reprinted in Godard, L’Oeuvre politique, p. 134.


36. MAE-Nantes, carton 2922, Délégation générale decree of 30 October 1941, 18 November 1941 (arrêté 405/FL), and Lebanese government decrees of 15 December 1941 (DL 125/NI) and 27 August 1942 (DL 204/NI); Couland, Mouvement syndical, pp. 288–89; and Godard, L’Oeuvre politique, pp. 184–85.


39. Article 4 of DL 29/ET guaranteed women pay and benefits equal to those of men. The law also limited family allowances to the first wife, in cases of polygamy.

40. Le Jour, 22 May 1943. In 1942, the Free French had set up women’s committees in London to prepare social legislation to improve the status of women, children, and families as part of their effort to help France “catch up” to other welfare states. De Gaulle’s decree granting French women the vote in 1944 was taken in the same spirit.


42. DL 2031/NI of 26 January 1943, summarized in Couland, Mouvement syndical, p. 290.


44. Hanna, Al-Haraka al-‘ummaliya, pp. 479–82.

45. Khoury, Syria and the French Mandate, p. 600.


49. Couland, Mouvement syndical, pp. 294–95.

50. Ibid., p. 276; Laqueur, Communism and Nationalism in the Middle East, pp. 149, 151; al-Malla, Safhat min tarikh, pp. 155–59.

56. Direct tax revenues in Lebanon increased from 5.5 million £LS in 1944 to 17 million in 1951 (from about 1 million to 4.4 million in 1939 £LS); those in Syria increased more modestly from 16 to 27 million £LS (about 3 million to 7 million in 1939 £LS).
58. Office Arabe de presse et documentation (Syria), *Receuil des statistiques syriennes*, pp. 116–18. Syria’s defense spending jumped tenfold in one year as the French transferred control of the military, from a mere 16,679 £LS in 1944 to 16.5 million £LS in 1945. It then doubled in 1947 to 32 million £LS and reached 102.5 million £S in 1950–51, when Syrian state expenditures totaled 230.7 million £S. (Figures are not corrected for inflation.)
60. Office Arabe de presse et documentation (Syria), *Receuil des statistiques syriennes*, pp. 117–18. Prewar averages of public works spending were calculated on the basis of figures reported in annual reports to the League of Nations for public works spending by the state of Syria, 1930–38. The average was 944,000 £LS per year, or 11 percent of the state’s budget. These figures exclude additional funds spent on public works by the Common Interests administration.
65. Bruce Porter equivocates on this point by arguing both that the world wars accelerated preexisting trends toward welfare and that the intensive collectivism of total war was in fact the origin of welfare states. See his *War and the Rise of the State*, pp. 180–81 and 192–93. Eric Hobsbawm argues that World War II was particularly
defined by state ideologies promising a better society: “Social and economic reforms were introduced, not (as after the First World War) in response to mass pressure and fear of revolution, but by governments committed to them on principle.... the logic of the anti-fascist war led towards the Left.” Hobsbawm, The Age of Extremes, p. 163. Charles Tilly draws less direct and longer term linkages between increasing requirements of warfare and European states’ expanding commitments to the citizens who fulfilled them. In his view, welfare was the flip side of intensified policing and coercion. See his Coercion, Capital, and European States, AD 990–1990, pp. 67–126.

66. Lebanese and Syrian bureaucrats complained well into the 1960s that the French had so monopolized decision making in the various branches of state that their departure crippled the bureaucracy. Poorly trained lower-level cadres were encased in an overly centralized apparatus. See, for example, Iskandar, Bureaucracy in Lebanon, pp. 11–15.


68. Ashford, The Emergence of the Welfare States, p. 2.


72. See works cited above by Linda Gordon and Charles Tilly.

73. Skocpol, Protecting Soldiers and Mothers, pp. 525–31.