

concessions from the Maronite politicians on long-standing demands for reform. It was suggested that the LNM contingent underestimated the fears of the "Christian" block about security. Faris argued that the success of the committee was dependent on the prior ability to resolve fundamental questions of identity, secularization, and the distribution of power. The committee, dubbed the "dialogue of the deaf" by one participant, ultimately failed because its members were unable to agree on a minimum platform for change.

Participants discussed a long-standing problem that the committee highlighted -- the lack of representative leadership. For example, one participant stressed that the "Christian" politicians were more representative of the status quo elite than of "Lebanese Christians." Abukhalil noted a similar problem with the designated Shi'ite representatives, who were severely out of touch with the needs and realities of their own constituency. A further obstacle to dialogue was the tremendous rivalry within the two main adversarial blocks.¹⁷ In addition, committee members were being asked to solve a crisis that to a large extent they themselves had created. Many committee members (Kamal Joumblatt, Pierre Gemayel, and Camille Chamoun, for instance) were leaders of armed groups that had chosen to settle their disagreements by violence rather than trying to resolve them peacefully. Finally, a major divisive factor, and one that mirrored the views of Lebanese society, concerned the status of the Palestinian community and Palestinian armed groups.

The Frangieh Constitutional Document promoted limited reform of the sectarian system. It came about as a result of military offensives in January 1976 that pitted Maronite militias and the army against a militia alliance of the LNM, Palestinians, and Syrian irregulars (the Palestine Liberation Army [PLA] and Sa'iqa, both loyal to Syria). Maronite leaders, terrified by this open alliance between the LNM and the PLO and concerned about the possibility of alienating Syria, decided to concede to some of the LNM's demands for reform. In return they demanded guarantees from Syria that the

¹⁷ According to a former member of the LNM: "The Movement doomed itself because it never sorted out its internal problems ... it never sorted out whether it was truly secular or not. For example, they advocated a 'balanced' army -- but if this balance was to be among sects, then they were sectarian."