

tal) division should not, however, cure the role and economic power of local interests (both landed and commercial), which also divided the country geographically into haves and have-nots, irrespective of religion. For example, from independence in 1943 to the present, Lebanon has been dominated by the same group of leaders, Moslem and Christian, or their sons and protégés. The Cabinet of ministers formed in July 1975 to end the civil strife contained three feudal lords over 70 years of age and two men, including the Prime Minister, who had inherited the political mantle from their predecessors. Evidently, the National Charter's greatest weakness was its unwritten assumption that Lebanon and the surrounding universe were hanging entities.

Vulnerability

time would not stand still nor could sudden squalls fail to buffet quiet waters. Lebanon was acutely vulnerable to events and the narrow horizon of its immediate control. A case in point was the first Arab-Israeli war of 1948. Although its army did not participate, Lebanon's ruling business interests derived positive benefits from the imposition of the Arab economic boycott against Israel enhanced — indeed, reinforced — Beirut's position as the key transit port to and from the entire Eastern Mediterranean world. On the other hand, Lebanon's population increased overnight by 10 per cent as hundreds of thousands of Palestinians, driven from or fleeing their homes during the war, became unwilling exiles in its soil. No one at the time could have foreseen the consequences of this demographic development.

Barely a decade later, the weaknesses and contradictions of the National Charter were nakedly exposed during an outbreak of intercommunal fighting now referred to as the First Civil War of 1958. By comparison with the fighting in the present civil war, 1958 was a mild affair resulting in no more than a few hundred casualties; estimates of casualties in the present crisis have soared into many thousands.

Again, the reverberations of external developments in the Arab world swept across the Lebanese political scene. The overthrow of Egypt and Syria under Gamal Abdel Nasser and the liquidation of the Baathist regime in Iraq were hailed by Arab masses as progressive, anti-imperialist movements. In Lebanon, President Camille Chamoun (Minister of the Interior in the present emergency cabinet), was then attempting to contravene the constitution by running for a second

successive term in office, had come under bitter attack from Nasserist forces for his openly pro-Western leanings. The Maronites of Lebanon had never made any secret of their greater sense of affinity to Europe, and especially France, than to their fellow countrymen. Preserving Lebanon's special character in a Moslem Arab world was the Maronites' particular sense of mission; this entailed, of necessity, their continued political and economic dominance. Alleging an imminent attempt to drag Lebanon into the Arab socialist camp, Chamoun appealed to the American Sixth Fleet for support against his opponents. When the marines landed in Beirut, opposition attacks upon the President seemed fully justified.

Once the crisis had passed and daily life returned to normal, the Lebanese believed that they had "learnt a lesson" and that such civil disorder could not happen again. In the decade following 1958 this optimism seemed borne out as the economy forged ahead to unprecedented levels. However, based on few natural resources other than the shrewdness of the hard-driving Lebanese *entrepreneur*, the essentially service economy seemed guided more by Adam Smith's "invisible hand" than by any rational development plans. Even specialists conceded that the best policy for economic development was no policy at all. With one or two exceptions, the same short-sighted *laissez faire* attitude characterized the Government's approach to basic questions of social justice and welfare.

Lesson not learnt

This was, in fact, the one lesson the Lebanese had not learnt. While the civil war of 1958 was discussed in sectarian terms — Moslem against Christian —, it could not conceal the underlying movement of discontent and demands for a more balanced and equitable dispensation of the national wealth. The economy showed immense disparities between its two major sectors. Agriculture, for example, employed about 50 per cent of the labour force, while contributing only about 11 per cent to the national income; the service sector, on the other hand, employed only about 14 per cent of the labour force but contributed some 67 per cent to the national income. Added to income disparities were growing regional disparities in development between Mount Lebanon, which is predominantly Maronite, and the more backward agricultural south, inhabited largely by poorer Shia Moslems.

The 1958 civil war, therefore, had altered nothing. Redress of grievances

*During 1960s
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progress*