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ARTICLE

"Workers do not liberate themselves other than with their own hands"—The Political Experience of Workers' Committees in the Industrial District of Beirut (1970–1975)

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Abstract

From the end of the 1960s until the outbreak of the Civil War (1975), Lebanon experienced a phase of relatively sustained industrial expansion. Albeit the "boom" did not modify significantly Lebanon's tertiarized economic structure, it was anyway sufficient to create the structural conditions for the emergence of a new militant working-class able to become one of the most relevant contentious actors of its time. This new working class was made primarily of very young and recently urbanized unemployed of rural origin, brutally injected in a crude and hyper-exploitative productive cycle where formal labor unions were, for the most part, absent or scarcely effective. The input for their grassroots, transgressive organization into factory-based Workers' Committees came from the Organization for Communist Action in Lebanon (OACL), i.e. the most important force of the so-called Lebanese New Left, within the framework of a broader process of militant penetration of the "revolutionary classes" produced by the contradictions of Lebanese capitalism. This created the precondition for the Committees to affirm themselves not only as the radical avant-garde of the Lebanese labor movement but also as an integral part of a broader process of contestation of the existing status quo by the subaltern groups emerged from - or activated by - the structural and cultural changes that the country was experiencing. By retrieving the forgotten history of the Workers' Committees, the article wants to examine the forms and the trajectories whereby such a new working class became an integral part of this process. In particular, by adopting a Gramscian methodology, the article will first expose the structural changes in the Lebanese industrial sector in the examined period and their labor implications. Then, it will focus on the dynamics which superseded the Committees' birth and affirmation, reserving particular attention to the role played by the OACL. Finally, it will conclude by examining the impact of their agency on the political developments that the country was experiencing. The paper contends that the emergence and the affirmation of counter-hegemonical and transformative working-class activism on the eve of the Civil War, along with representing a direct by-product of structural stresses and constraints, was significantly debtor also of the new ideological and militant infrastructures that the emergence of an Arab New Left had contributed to

popularize and deploy. The paper wants also to intervene in the historiographical debate on the Lebanese Civil War, stressing the importance of both subaltern actors and class phenomena in its outbreak, which have generally been widely disregarded by the dominant understandings of the conflict.

Keywords: Lebanon; Labor History; Arab New Lefts; Popular Politics; Industrial History; Working-Class History

Introduction

On November 11, 1972, the southern periphery of Beirut woke up amid chaos. Around 8:00 AM, a disproportionate Internal Security Forces (ISF) unit showed up at the gates of the Gandour chocolate and sweets factory to disrupt a wildcat strike that rank-and-file workers had been staging for a week. In the clashes that followed, ISF answered workers' refusal to demobilize with shotguns, leaving two dead and several injured on the ground. The popular reaction to the event was disruptive. In the aftermath, a succession of mass demonstrations propagated quickly from Beirut suburbs to the rest of the country, storming the main Lebanese cities for days.[1] Meanwhile, a general strike was held to ask for political accountability.[2]

By virtue of its bloody end and its contentious backlash, the Gandour strike represents one of the few episodes in the long chain of labor struggles marking the Lebanese "long-1960s" to have found an established place in the historical writing on the country. There are in fact very few scholars who, when called to give an account of the turbulent pre-Civil War years, have felt immune from the obligation to include the strike among the landmark events of the decade. Still, paradoxically enough, in most of these historiographical incorporations the strike rarely appears as a history of workers. Rather, whereas not reduced to one of many—and, indeed, secondary—violent episodes in the accounts of the Lebanese crisis,[3] the strike has at best been represented as a sheer byproduct of the coeval crisis of Lebanese capitalism.[4] In both cases, the strike appears as an isolated and reactive event, misleadingly abstracted from the broader process of grassroots organization of the new class of young rank-and-file produced by the coeval Lebanese industrial expansion within the form of Workers' Committees (WCs). The political experience of WCs has remained on the margins of the limited and piecemeal body of scholarship on Lebanese labor history, whose attention has largely focused on the investigation of the formal trade union movement[5] either on more recent mobilizations and forms of organization.[6] This has contributed to canonizing a dominant mode of historiography on Lebanese rank-and-file activism of the early 1970s doubly problematic, for along with denying the rank-and-file a place "as subjects of history on their own right, even for a project that was all on their own,"[7] it has failed to give due account of two broader sociopolitical phenomena characterizing Lebanese popular politics in that delicate period, whereof the WCs represented a direct emanation.

In effect, starting from the late 1960s, Lebanon's capitalist model entered a deep structural crisis, resulting in a dramatic saturation of the labor market against rising inflation, and the rapid disaggregation of the rural world. Social tensions were further heightened by the stubborn unwillingness of the dominant classes "to surrender any of their privileges for the causes of reform,"[8] which took the form of a veritable class

struggle "from above" enacted by low wages, systematic violation of labor rights, and, above all, a systematic obstructionism against any redistributive state initiative. The result was a decade of relentless social agitation, whose ideational and organizational frames were soon provided by the wide array of progressive forces (Marxist, Socialist, Arab Nationalist), which, in the same years, were living their golden age. As a result, new transgressive social forces, solidarities, and repertoires of contention emerged, succeeding in influencing from below the articulation of the political developments in which the whole country was involved. In the case of the new rank-and-file, the leading role was played by the Organization of Communist Action in Lebanon (OACL), under whose initiative, starting from 1970, the first WCs were established as an alternative to the formal trade unions represented by the General Confederation of Workers in Lebanon (CGTL).

By retrieving the political experience of WCs, this article examines the forms and the trajectories whereby the expanding industrial working class became an integral part of the process of transgressive activation of Lebanese subaltern groups on the eve of the Civil War (1975–1990). In particular, building on Antonio Gramsci's methodological criteria for the study of subaltern groups,[9] and the investigation of unexplored primary sources in Arabic, the article will first focus on analysis of the structural changes that the expanding Lebanese industry underwent from the late 1960s, and its labor implications. It will then proceed to reconstruct the political dynamics that enabled the WCs' birth and affirmation, reserving particular attention to the role played by the OCAL and its ideological framing. Finally, it will conclude by examining the impact of WCs' agency on the articulation of the political developments the country was experiencing.

The article contends that the emergence and affirmation of a transgressive and transformative rank-and-file activism, together with representing a direct by-product of structural stresses and constraints, was significantly indebted also to the new ideological and militant infrastructures that the emergence of an Arab New Left had contributed to deploy and popularize. In so doing, the article seeks to bridge the existing body of scholarship on the political economy of postcolonial Lebanon with the new body of studies on the Arab[10] and Lebanese New Lefts[11] that has flourished in recent years where investigation of the transformative sociopolitical impact of the ideological and political ferments so carefully reconstructed remains a widely under-explored topic.

An "old" new industry, a brand new workingclass: The industrial boom of the 1970s and the social origins of a new rank-and-file generation

Historically, industry has occupied a pretty marginal position in the economic structure of independent Lebanon.[12] Inhibiting industrial development was the combination of restricted internal demand, the adoption of loose and non-protectionist customs duties, and above all, the reiteration of economic policies fully devoted to the development of the service sector. These policies resulted from the dominant position occupied in the postcolonial state by the commercial-financial bourgeoisie that arose in the Mandate period, whose capturing of political power was exploited to serve its economic interests to the full detriment of the productive sectors.[13]

In particular, reflecting the pattern typical of dependent peripheral capitalism, Lebanese industrial development mostly concentrated in branches of light industry to satisfy the internal demand for essential goods (textiles, food processing, and building materials most notably), which required a low level of specialization and technological investment. Furthermore, due to the limited dimensions of the sector, the overall number of employed never surpassed 15 percent of the active population.[14] The development was also characterized by the maintenance of a sharp dualism between a large and scarcely productive semi-artisanal craft sector, and a restricted number of big mechanized plants, holding most of the overall production, as well as the monopoly or semi-monopoly over the production of a specific good.[15] In 1969, for instance, 85 percent of the national production of dairy products was controlled by a single company, 94 percent of cotton spinning and weaving by three companies, and three factories controlled 100 percent of the national production of cement.[16] Concentration walked also along marked familial lines. In 1971, the three major families of Lebanese industrialists were estimated to control between 15 percent and 20 percent of the whole national production.[17]

This statical cadre started to rapidly change with the June War, in 1967,[18] when, following the closing of the Suez Canal, the expanding Gulf markets opened to Lebanese merchandise, inaugurating a phase of significant industrial expansion. Between 1967 to 1973, the share of industry in the national GDP rose from about 10 to 17 percent, value-added production increased by 111.4 percent, and the volume of investments rose by at least 50 percent.[19] Particularly impressive was the rise in the volume of exports destined for the Gulf, which in the same time period went from 87.4 million LBP in 1967 to 446.3 million.[20] Providing the capital for such rapid growth was the rising influx of Western money in favor of Lebanese industry, within the framework of a broader economic strategy aimed at turning the Lebanese industrial sector into a "*relais* industry" to further penetrate the Arab markets by taking advantage of the geographical proximity, the inter-Arab custom and commercial agreements, and the cheaper labor costs.[21]This further enhanced the dependent nature of the Lebanese industrial sector, keeping its development limited and crude.

The industrial boom of the late 1960s and its specific modes of articulation had, of course, important consequences on industrial labor. The first on was the rapid creation of a brand-new working class vehiculated by the rapid expansion of mechanized industries with more than one hundred workers.[22] The growth was outstanding. In the triennium 1972–1975 alone, the yearly average of new actives in industry reached a quota of 20,000 units (+18 percent per year), a number equivalent to the whole decade 1960–1970, to achieve 113,000 actives and a 20 percent share in the employment structure.[23]

The second main one was the increasing exploitativity[24] and precarization of industrial labor. In effect, despite a substantial nominal increase in investments in technological advancement, in order to compete with foreign concurrence and be assured of profits equivalent to those of the hegemonic commercial and financial sectors, the main source for the extraction of plus-value in Lebanese industry remained solidly located in the heavy pressure applied to the workforce. Such pressure was exercised first and foremost through the adoption of wage policies maintaining average salaries at the edges of the existing legal minimum. In 1974, for instance, industrial

wages and the legal minimum almost equated. In the garment sector, where reliance on subcontracting and female and daily labor was particularly high, the average wages were below the legal minimum by 15 percent, and for unspecialized daily working women by up 30 percent.[25] Second, the reliance on overtime work was structural, with average weekly working hours in Beirut's industrial suburbs swinging between 50 and 53 hours, against a legal maximum of 48 hours as of 1970.[26] This was paralleled by the adoption of a veritable "consuming and waste" employment policy whereby workers, having been exploited to the bones during the best of their youth, were expelled in mass so that employers could pick again from the thousands of young unemployed people entering the job market every year. To feed this apparently endless industrial reserve army was the inexorable disaggregation of the rural world that the country had been experiencing since the achievement of independence, in the shadow of difficult credit, lack of adequate facilities and infrastructures, and the progressive appropriation of control over the marketing of crops by an oligarchy of traders speculating on purchase prices. This disaggregation underwent a steady acceleration from the mid-1960s onward, as the developmentalist rural policies promoted by President Fuad Chihab ultimately ended up improving exploitability and fostering the rise of monopolistic agribusiness to the detriment of small landowners and landless peasants.[27] As a consequence, thousands of rural migrants reached the suburbs of the capital every year in search of better opportunities. There, the saturation of the labor market left them little recourse beyond swelling the army of informal jacks-of-all-trades, and seasonal workers in the tourist industry. Still, knocking at the factory gates, if successful, remained one of the most profitable options for a young unemployed person to contribute to household needs, afford education, or to enjoy from the margins part of the leisure of the "cosmopolitan metropole of the Arabs".

Enabling their hyper-exploitation were the numerous loopholes in the Lebanese labor legislation. According to Article 50 of the Lebanese Labor Law, it was a right of the employer to arbitrarily dismiss employees under the payment of a sole termination indemnity. This obligation was often skipped by hiring de facto permanent workers on a daily basis, as the law excluded from payment of termination indemnities those workers employed for less than a continuous documentable year.[28] This expedient allowed employers to avoid paying for rest days and leave, or to speculate downward on social security fees. Furthermore, the Labor Law exempted employers from paying workers under twenty years of age the legal minimum.

The ubiquity of these policies clearly resonated in the demographic profile of the industrial population. In 1970, 35 percent of industrial workers were under twenty (4 percent were under fifteen), and the section of under-twenty-fives overcame the twenty-five–thirty-four slot. Furthermore, about 80 percent of them were of rural origin, and 95 percent had had at least one professional movement in the past five years.[29]

Extract, discipline, and punish: Labor conditions in Lebanese "big" industry

Along with low wages, permanent job insecurity, and structural exploitation, the new working class also had to cope with poor working conditions, routinized abuse, and

the systematic violation of labor rights. The most important terrain of violation was that of social security.

The Lebanese Social Security Law was approved in 1963 per an initiative of President Fouad Chihab, as the main backbone of his project of modernization of the state. Since its very discussion, the law had met with strenuous opposition from entrepreneurial circles, who were hardly disposed to give away part of their profits, or to tolerate what represented, in their eyes, an unacceptable interference of the state in the arena of the free market. This opposition translated into a series of oppositional initiatives meant to delay the executive enforcement of the law, and renegotiating the established indemnities and coverage criteria according to their desiderata. This put waged workers at the center of a class war between state and entrepreneurs, where they paid the highest price. In 1970, for instance, after a year of lobbying and threats, entrepreneurs answered the implementation of the first part of the Law's provisions with the mass dismissal of workers employed for more than two years, which was the established threshold for employers to start paying social security fees.[30] A similar scenario resurfaced the following year, when implementation of the second part of the law's provisions was countered with an open-ended boycott of the payment of social security indemnities.[31] If, by 1972, this last boycott was lifted, another was implemented against payment of the cost-of-living allowances Parliament had approved in 1971.[32]

Industrialists' unscrupulous "no cost at any cost" policy was also reflected in the poorness of labor conditions. Especially for what concerned rank-and-file workers, adequate protective equipment (clothing, masks, gloves, etc.) was rarely provided.[33] The same can be said for the general conditions of working environments, often lacking adequate air conditioning and ventilation, sanitary units, and drinkable water.[34] Discipline was exerted through an oppressive-repressive dispositive of surveillance and punishment pivoting around the police use of *wukalā'* (sing.: *wakīl*), i.e., the supervisors charged with coordinating the functioning of a productive unit. Veritable omnipresent eyes and ears of the management, in fact, *wukalā'* were used to pressure workers, foster reporting, and aliment suspicion and mistrust. Their main disciplinary weapon was the application of arbitrary wage curtails, applied for the most insignificant reasons such as a few minutes delay at the entrance, real or alleged "low" daily productivity, or a moment of rest outside of the (indeed, minimal) allowed breaks. Their application was so routinized that at the end of the month curtails could cost a worker up to two or three full working days.[35] Finally, insubordination, including political, was generally punished via arbitrary dismissal.

It should be noted that both hiring and firing practices were pretty basic, brutal, and unformalized. As for hiring, the selection occurred at the factory gates where, on an established day of the week, a crowd of young unemployed people would gather before the opening hour in search of jobs. Here, a responsible member of the administration would choose the required number of new workers, and send them straight to the assigned productive line for a probationary period. The selection criteria were generally limited to conformity with the age and gender requirements to perform the task needed. As for firing, in case of disciplinary terminations a verbal notice was sufficient by law. For nondisciplinary terminations, the law established that formal notice had to be given at least one month in advance. However, following the

informality of contracts and the difficulty for employees to testify on abuses, this obligation could be easily skipped, and it was not uncommon to see the interruption communicated on the very day of payment.

Such poorness of labor conditions was also related to the lack of strong industrial unions. In the agri-food sector, for instance, which employed about 23 percent of the waged industrial workforce, no sectoral unions had ever been licensed. Lacking a sectoral union were also workers in the furniture, glass, and metal sectors, which together accounted for another 20 percent of overall workers.[36] Furthermore, even if a union was present, this was not an automatic guarantee of better labor conditions. A case in point is the workers in the textile sector. Representing another 20 percent of the overall waged workers in the industrial sector, textile workers were endowed with a national union of right-wing orientation, plus a smaller regional one of Communist allegiance. In 1969, after lengthy bargaining, the unions succeeded in obtaining a national collective labor agreement. However, because of the scarce combativeness and presence in the factories of the main union, abusive practices remained unvaried. The vulnerability of the new working class was further enhanced by the marginal weight that the industrial unions occupied within the CGTL,[37] as well as by the internal contradictions of the CGTL itself.

Since the very enforcement of the Lebanese Labor Law in 1946, Lebanese trade unions underwent a constant recrafting from above aimed at disempowering their transgressive power, and possibly turning them into sites of hegemonic incorporation by the ruling elites.[38] The main mean of this recrafting was the political use of union licensing according to a two-fold strategy addressed to contain the political weight of leftist unions while fostering workers' adhesion to corporatist or—at best—reformist, anticommunist ones. This produced over time a formal trade union landscape severely tilted in favor of the crafts and tertiary sector and, above all, of scarcely representative corporatist federations tied to prominent political leaders.

Against this backdrop, starting from the early 1960s, a new generation of reformist union leaders emerged from the existing licensed federations, managing to earn the workers' consensus.[39] Their political rise was backed by both the Chihabist apparatus and the United States, which, within the framework of the Cold War, saw in these new unionists a much more effective alternative to the old corporatist guard to contain the influence of the expanding leftist unions.[40] The latter, in turn, in the same period entered a phase of sustained mobilization and organizing, which, thanks to a favorable political conjuncture, in 1966 ultimately brought about their legal licensing.[41] This paved the way for a long process of unification culminating in 1970, with the convergence of all the licensed union federations within the pre-existing CGTL,[42] which became the largest official representative body of Lebanese workers.[43]

The unification had the great merit of coalescing Lebanese workers and employees around a common program of demands, envisaging among its major claims the abolition of Article 50 of the Labor Law and the defense of social security rights. However, the internal predominance of conservative-corporatist and reformist unions[44] created a vicious circle whereby the CGTL's political effectiveness remained circumscribed to the periodic receipt of—indeed meagre—wage increases, leaving all questions related to labor rights on the margins. Such predominance was guaranteed by the adoption of a "one union, one vote" internal representative rationale,

engineered during the process of unification according to the same anti-leftist containment strategies which had informed the union policies of the previous thirty years. This prepared the terrain for the united CGTL to quickly lose legitimacy in the eyes of the most vulnerable waged labor constituencies, including the new working class, who would ultimately search elsewhere for a solution to improve their labor conditions.

"To pivot around the working-class": The OCAL and the organization of Workers' Committees

While the stances of the rank-and-file struggled to find satisfaction and adequate representation in the formal trade union arena, the question of their labor conditions and, above all, their organizing earned increasing centrality in the militant agenda of the Lebanese Marxist Left.

Resonating with the revolutionary momentum of the Global 1960s, starting from the end of the 1950s, the Arab region witnessed a significant growth of radical leftist groups. Among them, a prominent position was occupied by the so-called New Arab Lefts (NALs), a new generation of radical activists and organizations that emerged and split from the existing Socialist, Communist, and Arab Nationalist parties throughout the 1960s, searching for new organizational and ideational paradigms to push forward the struggle for radical emancipation of their societies.[45] Their rise developed as a reaction to the bureaucratic-autocratic shift of the Arab socialist regimes in power (Baathist Syria and Iraq, Nasserist Egypt, among the most important) and, above all, the latter's failure to fulfill the promises of social justice, Arab unity, and anti-imperialist commitment legitimizing the respective authoritarian pacts. In the process of detachment and radicalization, the last drop in the cup was notoriously the Arab defeat in the June War (1967) or *Naksah* (the "catastrophe"), which, in the eyes of these young militants, offered the ultimate evidence of the necessity of a radical change in pace. Amid the subsequent intense soul-searching, the horizon of their revolutionary imaginary shifted quickly from Cairo and Damascus to Havana and Hanoi, with Third-Worldism, Maoism, Eurocommunism, and above all, Marxism-Leninism cleared of the Soviet *doxa* providing the new ideological framing for action.[46]

As for Lebanon, the two most important New Left organizations were the collective of intellectuals Socialist Lebanon and the Organization of Lebanese Socialists—the Lebanese Marxist-Leninist splinter of the Movement of Arab Nationalists.[47] In 1970, the two organizations merged together into the Organization for Communist Action in Lebanon (OACL).[48] The programmatic bases of the merger stemmed from a radical critique of the international situation and the political meaning of the *Naksah*, which, according to the organization, required Arab revolutionaries to redefine their political agendas so as to conciliate "the elimination of imperialist domination with the consolidation of the construction of socialism, and the construction of the foundations of socialism with the construction of socialist relations of production,"[49] like in Vietnam and Latin America. This implied first and foremost the creation of a new historical bloc stemming from—and organic to—the "revolutionary classes" (i.e., students, peasants, and the working class), to be turned into the new

leading force of the struggle for class and national liberation. For this goal be achieved, a radical shift in the dominant modes of organization and mobilization was necessary in favor of direct action and militant solidarity, as it was only from the practical unity of the "revolutionary classes" that, according to the OACL, the dominant social relations could be radically transformed.[50] This programmatic urgency was framed in a direct critique of the "old" Lefts and their labor agenda, including the Lebanese Communist Party (LCP), accused by the OACL of "right-wing opportunism" for having preferred institutional politics to grassroots militancy, turning itself "into the party of the interests of petty bourgeois and intellectual elements connected with the government, and of inherited groups of laborers and petty employees."[51] The OACL also accused the LCP of a reductionist understanding of the crisis of Lebanese capitalism as one of "economic stagnation and improper political structure" rather than originating from "the involvement of ruling elements in the country with imperialism."[52]

Within this framework, immediately upon the merger, Labor Cells (LCs) specifically devoted to the organization of rank-and-file workers were created within the OCAL. The organizational model they sought for was influenced by the working-class and "workerist" experiences germinating in the same period in Europe, most notably in Italy, knowledge of which was conveyed to Lebanon via the intense circulation of European New Left periodicals, such as Jean Paul Sartre's *Les Temps Modernes*.[53] There, against the backdrop of a sustained industrial expansion, from the end of the 1960s a new generation of young rank-and-file of rural origin began to rise and self-organize into autonomous, grassroots committees (the so-called *Comitati Unitari di Base*), pitting direct action against the ineffectiveness of formal trade unions to improve their labor conditions.[54] Their mobilizations soon swept in the militant solidarity of the workerist vanguards stemming from the 1968 student movement, laying the foundations for a new radical sociopolitical bloc meant to become one of the most transformative of the next decade.[55] This resonated with OACL's ultimate ambition of organizing "the dedicated, fighting communists through an ideological and practical alliance that would bring the working masses, the farmers, and all the struggling masses together on a daily basis to learn from them and permit them to learn from each other." In so doing, the organization set itself "on the road toward a fuller participation in the progress of the democratic national movement and toward establishing the working-class in a firm position within that movement,"[56] conceived as an integral part of the revolutionary movements fighting against class and imperialist oppression worldwide.

This double tension was ultimately condensed in the programmatic slogan "to pivot around the working-class," under whose auspices the first steps toward creation of the Workers' Committees were taken.

A specter haunting the factories: Diffusion, action, and internal organization of the Workers' Committees

In the passage from theory to practice, the OCAL found itself in front of two major challenges. The first one was to actually reach the working class and its stances, since the OCAL body of militants was largely comprised of students, intellectuals, and

petite bourgeoises. This was paired by the practical impossibility of using the factories as spaces for organization and politicization, due to capillary control by the *wukalā'* alongside workers' job vulnerability.

Acknowledging these difficulties, the organization's first step was to launch a "militant enquiry"[57] among the rank-and-file in order to learn directly from their mouths about their labor and living conditions.[58] The enquiry was part of a broader, totalizing process of "penetration" of the working class engaged by OACL militants whereby, after having created small contact groups, the latter began to hang out in working-class neighborhoods and attend workers' leisure spaces, so as to establish a first interaction and build mutual trust.[59] The core of this early activity was Beirut's industrial suburbs, where about 85 percent of the national industrial capacity was located, and most of the rank-and-file resided. The face-to-face approach was soon coupled with the capillary distribution of loose leaflets and then a bulletin, *Niḍāl al-ʿUmmāl* (Workers' Struggle), meant to raise awareness among workers about their rights, acknowledge the importance of unity and organization, and emphasize the strategic centrality of direct action. Its aim was to circumvent the political inaccessibility of the factories and connect and organize workers on a large scale. From the very first, instructions on why and how to form committees were spread. Once committees began to be formed, *Niḍāl al-ʿUmmāl* was used to circulate calls for action, share reports about labor conditions or the progress of the mobilizations from one factory to another, and host declarations, analysis, and updates from the rest of the mobilized social forces. This made the bulletin a veritable "paper comrade," acting as an indispensable megaphone and avatar for the WCs whenever the intermediation of the living body and word was inhibited.

The work of penetration of the working class walked in parallel with the equally intense work of organizing among students and peasants,[60] which, in the same period, entered a phase of intense mobilization. On the plain of Akkar, starting from 1969, landless sharecroppers arose against absentee landlords, arbitrary evictions, and the rise of monopolistic agribusiness. In a similar vein in the South, tobacco growers activated against the *Régie* to ask for better purchase prices, the granting of new licenses, and the right to unionization as well as to social security.[61] Alongside, in schools and universities an increasingly radical student movement emerged to challenge Lebanese "merchant society" and its social costs, as well as Lebanese foreign policy and the positionality of Lebanon vis-à-vis the Palestinian question, which, in that period, represented the mother of all struggles and a prominent polarizing force within the Lebanese political spectrum.[62]

Against any initial OCAL expectation, the diffusion of the Wcs was particularly rapid. By 1971, active committees were present in all of the biggest industrial plants of the southern suburbs of Beirut. By the end of the next year, they had an established presence also in eastern ones. Furthermore, a presence in the factories of the South and the Beqa'a[63] as well as among a number of nonindustrial workers' constituencies was established.[64]

The basic unit for the creation of a WC was the factory section. Above the sections stood the general committee of the factory, whose representatives (usually two per cluster) participated in the interfactory gatherings. The latter, in turn, were coordinated by OCAL LCs, which acted as a juncture between the WCs and the rest of

the organization—most notably the Central Committee and the Political Bureau—and between the WCs themselves. LCs were divided on a sectoral base (food, wood and furniture, mechanical, textiles, etc.).[65] At any level, meetings were usually held on a weekly base, with committee and LC delegates acting as a bi-directional transmission belt among the various layers. The LCs represented the political locus where the strategic priorities to foster were discussed and adopted. It was also the LCs that acted as bridgehead for the organization of new committees, as well as the forefront for workers' integration within the OCAL. Meetings were rigorously held outside of the factories, usually in militants' private houses or alternatively in public spaces such as Beirut's Horsh. It should also be noted that, as a result of the police climate reigning in the factories, the WCs were veritable specters within the plants to the point that, with the exception of the delegates themselves, committee members did not know the identity of any members other than those in their own cluster. Furthermore, political activities and talks during working hours were strictly avoided. The moment of "unveiling" was represented by on-site mobilizations, and most notably by strikes, where the wall of anonymity surrounding committee members was broken.

The organization of a strike was articulated *grosso modo* as follows. After its necessity was agreed in the LC and WCs meetings, "preparation of the terrain" was fostered through the double channel of *Niḍāl al-ʿUmmāl* and militants' personal networks. Once ascertained that the general mood was favorable enough, a date for action was established with prior approval of the OCAL's Politburo. Upon the chosen day, the task of committees' and LC militants was first to act as a detonator for the mobilization, by declaring *tout court* the state of mobilization in front of the factory gates before the beginning of the work shift. If the call for action was successful, committee and LC members proceeded to present a list of claims, organize the bargaining, issue statements, prepare flags and banners, and do whatever else was needed to carry out the mobilization.

During the first year of activity, most of the efforts of the WCs and the LCs were devoted to the construction and consolidation of a militant and conscious working-class base. The fruits of this politicization started to be capitalized from the second half of 1971, when committee-driven wildcat strikes and mobilizations began to shake the industrial world on a regular base. During the spring of 1971, for instance, two strikes were staged at the Jaber-Pioneer (300 workers) and Unifood plants (food processing) to obtain the right to a paid rest day on the Mawlid and higher wages and better working conditions, respectively.[66] Throughout the summer, further mobilizations were held at Seven Up (beverages), Sleep Comfort (furniture, 1,000 workers), and Sinbois (wood) to demand better wages and working conditions, protest arbitrary dismissals and violations of the labor law, and demand union freedoms.[67] Strikes were also paralleled by the first attempts to earn formal recognition as legitimate workers' representatives in the factories. A suitable occasion was offered in the autumn by the elections for renewal of several industrial unions' supervisory boards, with whom the committees decided to compete.[68] It should also be noted that, despite the process of renovation that the LCP engaged in after the second congress of 1968,[69] in this phase the party and the OACL were still at odds. This competition was, for instance, made evident during the elections of the union board of Décor w

Listro, held in 1971, affiliated to FENASOL, whose delegates ostracized the participation of committee candidates by any means.[70]

Despite the growing diffusion and capacity of mobilization, the results achieved by the WCs in this first phase remained pretty meager. Concerning the strikes, no major gains were achieved except for the reintegration of some of the workers dismissed for their political activism. Dismissals—whether threatened or executed—as well as the circumstantial use of the police force and electoral frauds were also used to prevent WCs from competing and being elected on unions' boards.[71] Nevertheless, the effects of this obstructionism and repression ultimately fell short of the mass discouragement that employers hoped to achieve. Rather, by progressively unveiling the organic relation and convergence of interests between the state, employers, and the CGTL in maintaining the status quo, they acted as an accelerator for workers' radicalization and detachment from the formal trade union structures.

The Gandour strike and the end of the "age of innocence"

In the process of rank-and-file radicalization a fundamental breaking point was the Gandour strike in November 1972.

By the time of the strike, the Gandour factories represented a perfect archetype of Lebanese big industry. Established at the end of the nineteenth century as a small family-run sweets factory, after the industrial boom of the 1960s it had become a veritable national giant of confectionery, with the Gandour family entrenched as the second most important industrial dynasty of the country. Such an expansion was epitomized in the 1970 inauguration of a second plant with about 1,250 workers in Choueifat, eclipsing the historical plant of Chiah (350 workers), in the southern suburbs of Beirut. This made the Gandour factories the largest industrial group not endowed with formal union representation, since neither a sectoral union for the food processing sector, nor even a "yellow" union, had ever been licensed. The Gandour group was also very representative of the close ties between entrepreneurial and political class characterizing the Lebanese power structure, sealed by the appointment of Rafik Gandour to the presidency of the Makassed Society—the Sunna charity giant founded at the end of the nineteenth century by the family of the powerful Sunni leader and prime minister in office Sai'b Salam—in both 1966 and 1970.[72]

The first Gandour WC was established in early 1970 and represented one of the very first committees established by the OACL.[73] Since its very creation, it periodically spread on the pages of *Niḍāl al-ʿUmmāl*, and the OACL's weekly *al-Ḥurriyyah* punctual reports testifying to systematic violation of workers' basic rights perpetrated by the factory's management.[74] These included, among the most important, the structural reliance on unpaid overtime work, the nonapplication of the social security provisions established by law, and a particularly suffocating mechanism of control and sanctioning carried out by *wukalāʾ*.

The decision to declare an open-ended strike matured after months of escalating tensions, ultimately sparked by the reiterated refusal of the Gandour brothers to allow workers a 5 percent salary rise approved by Parliament in June 1972. Discontent had already undergone a steady shift from the end of August when, in the background of a

stringent routine of wage curtails and labor shifts, a worker at the Chiah plant literally died of fatigue under the pitiless eyes of a *wakīl* who, thinking that he was sleeping, applied a sanction to his corpse.[75] This provoked an escalation of resentment multiplying the existing discontent over irregularities in the application of wages and social security provisions, structural and unpaid overtime work, and the abusive practices of *wukalā'*. The open-ended strike was launched on the early morning of November 3 at the Chiah plant, to extend the following day also to the Choueifat one, and immediately gained the workers' full adhesion. The core of the mobilization was centered at the gates of the Chiah plant, where a garrison was soon set up to coordinate the strike, organize pressure activists, and welcome the solidarity of students and social activists. Meanwhile, a group of delegates was charged with carrying out bargaining with the management and the political authorities.[76] The first talks started a couple of days later when, after initial reluctance, the workers' delegation was received at both the Ministry of Labor and the Ministry of Social Affairs, and succeeded in establishing a bargaining table. In the meantime, as the CGTL had limited its early intervention to persuading workers to demobilize, a further rally was organized from the factory to the central offices of FENASOL, searching for support.[77]

The intrinsic hecticness of the situation notwithstanding, the first week of strike unfolded in a climate of relative calm. The general atmosphere drastically changed on November 10 when, after a second meeting between workers' delegates and the Ministry of Social Affairs, the Gandour management made clear that it would not satisfy any of the workers' demands. Against this unilateral closure of bargaining, workers decided to remain firm on their position and continue the strike until all the requests were met. The counter-answer workers received, however, went far beyond any expectation. On the morning of November 11, a disproportionate ISF unit was sent to the factory to disrupt the strike by force. As clashes erupted, the ISF shot at eye level, killing committee member Yousuf Ali al-Attar and the young Fatmeh al-Khawejah.[78] The wave of indignation and resentment that followed was disruptive. Soon after the murder, a *manif-sauvage* exploded in the streets of the southern *banlieue*. Meanwhile, as leftist and progressive forces called for a day of national mobilization, pictures of the massacre leapt from one newspaper to another. "The bullets shot against Gandour workers are indeed bullets shot against the whole working-class," wrote the OCAL. The organization was echoed by the daily PSP, which, in the same tones, described the massacre as the umpteenth demonstration of how "capitalist enterprises in a reactionary State exploit the State institutions and the public force at the service of capital."[79] In this turmoil, as accountability for the repression started to be demanded by public opinion and by parliamentary opposition, a national demonstration was called for November 13.[80] This exercised enough pressure on the CGTL to finally call for a general strike.[81] Adhesion to the strike and the mobilizations was massive. In Beirut, about fifty thousand people marched toward Parliament, where the slogans shouted the previous day by workers turned into powerful speeches hitting without exception Lebanese economic policies, colluding political leaders, and the abuse of force. Mass mobilizations occurred also in the other Lebanese major cities, where likewise thousands of citizens took to the streets.[82] Wildcat strikes and demonstrations continued on a national scale over the next days.

Against this outstanding popular pressure, soon after the declaration of a general strike, an official tripartite commission comprising the CGTL, the Ministry of Social Affairs, and the Gandours was formed, with the task of studying and give satisfaction to workers' demands. In the meantime, the Gandour brothers suspended the lockout declared during the mobilizations, and reintegrated the dismissed workers. Any enthusiasm, however, was short-lived. As production resumed, a succession of disciplinary reprisals against workers, and above all those who had shown greater activism, was inaugurated. At the same time, as a result of Gandour's firm obstructionism, bargaining in the tripartite commission got stuck around minor gains. Furthermore, despite the numerous voices demanding accountability for the massacre, Prime Minister Saʾib Salam refused to authorize even an internal investigation among the ISF, honoring in this way his long friendship with the Gandour brothers.[83]

The breaking point was reached in mid-December when, after yet another arbitrary dismissal, a committees' delegation was received by the Ministry of Social Affairs. Gandour's counter-answer, this time, was possibly more drastic than the December one. Appealing to the "sacrosanct principle of contractual freedom," a six-month lockout was declared for both plants, accompanied by the dismissal *en bloc* of all workers.[84] This inaugurated another wave of massive mobilizations on a national scale, which succeeded only in obtaining the reintegration of the dismissed workers.[85] Nevertheless, the political management of the strike and its aftermath by both the CGTL and the state produced an irremediable fracture between rank-and-file and the ruling and trade union elites, powering a steady acceleration of their radicalization and convergence toward the WCs. This change in political posture finds evidence first in the increase in scale and strength of the mobilizations carried out by the WCs. Between 1972 and 1973, for instance, three open-ended strikes were organized with success at the Kesarjan (aluminum, 500 workers) and Pioneer-Jaber and Light Metal Manufacturer (250 workers, light metallurgy) plants respectively, inaugurating a long chain of victories for all the factory-based mobilizations to come.[86] In the same period, committee members finally managed to be elected to the directive boards of the shoemaking and mechanic workers' unions. Meanwhile, the pills of "Marxism for dummies" silently hidden in the first numbers of *Niḍāl al-ʿUmmāl* gave way to an openly militant lexicon, more articulated analysis of the Lebanese and regional situation, and a collective agenda touching working-class life in many of its aspects. Among them, the abolition of Article 50 and the housing question came soon to occupy a prominent position. Finally, updates and declarations from students and, above all, peasants became an established presence, in the attempt to build and consolidate mutual solidarities and a shared agenda of claims.

Tu quoue: The Mkalles days and affirmation of integral autonomy

As well as marking the end of the age of innocence for young rank-and-file workers, the Gandour massacre inaugurated a sharp repressive shift in the state management of labor dissent. In the month of January 1973, an umpteenth demonstration of tobacco growers in Kfar Rumman, Nabatiyyeh, was disrupted again in blood by the ISF, leaving two further victims on the ground.[87] Almost simultaneously, after two months of fruitless bargaining with the government, a mobilization by public

school teachers was drastically disrupted with the dismissal *en bloc* of 324 educators accused of "troublemaking."[88] Students' protests were also systematically repressed by force.

The state's recourse to the iron fist followed the blatant failure of the so-called Sa'ib Salam "youth government" (1970–1972) to carry out a number of socio-economic reforms intended to mitigate the impact on the population of the sharp rise of inflation and thereby prevent a "revolution from below."[89] The program floundered under the heavy lobbying of politically connected commercial monopoles who, thanks to the victory of the anti-Chehabist coalition in the parliamentary elections of 1968, were able to escalate the class war from above inaugurated in the previous years. Paradigmatic of this escalation was the shipwrecking, in 1971, of the reform project undertaken by Minister of Health Emile Bitar to reduce the inflated price of essential medicines through their import via the National Social Security Fund. The project engendered a fierce counter-reaction by the organizations of pharmacists and medical importers who ultimately managed to score a victory by withdrawing from the market vital drugs such as insulin. In a similar vein, following uncontrolled real estate speculation and the lobbying of real estate cartels, the social housing projects launched by Fuad Chihab remained a dead letter. The speculative practices of food importers were also behind the sharp increase in prices of basic foodstuffs, which more than doubled between 1967 and 1975.[90] This display, in the eyes of waged workers, of the brutality of the organic relation between economic and political power, played a pivotal role in their radicalization. In the countryside, mobilized peasants were also rapidly organizing. In the month of April 1973, under the auspices of leftist forces, the Unified Union of Tobacco Growers was established. A month earlier, the first National Congress of the Agricultural Workers was held. Finally, in May, the agricultural workers of the Beqaʿa Valley convened their first congress.[91]

The CGTL, from its side, was well aware of grassroots impatience. A first tangible taste of this change in mood was offered in the aftermath of the Kfar Rumman massacre, when, contrary to the post-Gandour demonstrations, popular protests escalated in a wave of clashes all over the country involving peasants, students, workers, and especially in the South, unpoliticized common people.[92] This degree of pressure ultimately compelled the CGTL to take action.

In the attempt to appease grassroots unrest, on August 28, 1973, the general strike that workers had been demanding for years was finally held.[93] The list of demands included a comprehensive package of anti-inflation initiatives, including effective actions against commercial monopolies, the regulation of consumer prices, and the regular payment of subsidies. The strike also reiterated the demands that had so far remained unaddressed, starting from the abolition of Article 50. This was paired with the threat of an open-ended general strike starting in September if all the demands advanced were not met. Even though the CGTL managed to achieve only minimal salary rises, however, the open-ended strike was never finalized. Rather, in the misguided attempt to kill two birds with one stone, the CGTL entered a vicious circle of calls and last-minute postponements of the open-ended strike on a monthly base. These threats succeeded to extort from the state some salary rises, as well as the formal engagement to address the rest of the demands.[94] However, the CGTL's

hesitant attitude did nothing but exasperate the most radical fringes of the labor movement, who ultimately broke from the dictates of the General Confederation. The first and most radical breach came precisely from the WCs, at the beginning of 1974.

Having become by that time a contentious force that could hardly be ignored, the committees had begun to show growing distress against the CGTL's hesitancies since September 1973, as it became clear that the threat of open-ended strike was meant to remain unmaterialized.[95] Their early answer was to try to exercise pressure from below on the General Confederation and the formal unions in favor of the strike by mobilizing their base on the eve of any announced date, as well as by escalating their collective campaign against arbitrary dismissals.[96] The breaking point arrived on February 6, 1974 as, after the umpteenth CGTL last-minute postponement of the announced general strike,[97] the WCs ultimately decided that the time of following the official "right-wing unions" was over.[98] Participation in the WCs' strike was impressive. After days of hectic meetings and preparations, at sunset on February 6, ten thousand workers in Beirut's eastern suburbs were already paralyzing the industrial district of Mkalles. Here, a first rally in a long chain meant to last for four days began to stretch throughout the eastern suburbs, as all the major traffic hubs were blocked with barricades and burning tires. The slogans shouted out by the crowd left no room to misunderstand that this time the General Confederation itself was the great target of their anger.[99] Meanwhile, in the city center, a big rally brought workers' grievances straight to Parliament and the doors of the CGTL. Strikes and mass demonstrations took place also in the main peripheral cities from north to south. In Tripoli, the regional office of the CGTL was raided. In the South, the general strike order was maintained by the Federation of the South, garnering a total adhesion.[100] This anticipated the definitive dislocation from the official CGTL agenda that leftist federations would undergo in the weeks to come.

The "Mkalles days," through the radical and public re-appropriation of working-class spaces by the working-class itself, marked the great act of affirmation of rank-and-file workers' integral autonomy. At the same time, they offered the tangible expression of two further phenomena that the Gandour strike and its aftermath had contributed to produce, and which played a major role in the making of the socio-political bloc that ultimately coalesced in the Lebanese National Movement.[101] The first was the consolidation of the organic relation between students, workers, and peasants that the OACL had tried to foster since the very beginning of its activity, and that ultimately was cemented in practice thanks to the militant solidarity engendered by common repression and living conditions. The second was the gradual rapprochement between "old" and "new" Left,[102] which, in the labor arena, was reified in the increasing proximity between leftist federations and grassroots organizations. The rapprochement was facilitated by the definitive dislocation of leftist federations from the CGTL from March 1974 onward, sealed by the organization of a march against inflation to which the WCs also adhered and, more importantly, by the unilateral organization of a general strike on April 2.[103] This acted as fundamental pressure weapon for the labor movement to finally achieve the first important collective gains concerning rights. In 1974, peasants were integrated into the NSSF. In the spring of 1975, Article 50 was partially amended.[104]

Conclusions

By retrieving the political experience of WCs this paper has attempted to show how, contrary to the dominant historical narratives, the mobilization of the class of young rank-and-file that emerged on the eve of the Civil War represented neither episodic and pre-political disturbances in the accounts of the Lebanese crisis, nor a sheer counter-reaction to increasingly impactful socio-economic stresses. Rather, it was the result of the progressive adhesion of rank-and-file workers to a project of self-representation and defense that was at any degree political. In the making of this mobilization, structural determinants were as functionally important as the political and ideological ones, with the OACL playing a leading role in the organizational process. From this last point of view, the history of the WCs is also a global one, rooted in the transformative worldwide circulation of ideas, experiences, militants, and texts defining the "Global 1960s."

The political experience of WCs as a mass industrial force brutally came to an end with the outbreak of the Lebanese Civil War in April 1975, which, together with substantially transforming the human and industrial geography of the country, also shifted the political priorities of progressive forces and militants toward the armed struggle. The latter also included former rank-and-file who, through the entry point of the committees, ultimately ended up endorsing the project of revolution. The majority, however, followed the destiny of displacement, which hit the inhabitants of industrial neighborhoods. This, however, is another story.

Notes

1. *An-Nidā'*, 14/11/1972; *L'Orient-Le Jour*, 13-14/11/1972.
2. Fawwaz Traboulsi, *A History of Modern Lebanon* (London, 2012), 174.
3. David C. Gordon, *Lebanon: The Fragmented Nation* (London, 2015), 100; Farid El-Khazen, *The Breakdown of the State in Lebanon, 1967-1976* (Cambridge, MA, 2000).
4. Claude Dubar, "Structure Confessionnelle et Classes Sociales Au Liban," *Revue Française de Sociologie* 15, no. 3 (July 1974): 307, https://doi.org/10.2307/3320159; Theodor Hanf, *Co-Existence in Wartime Lebanon: Decline of a State and Rise of a Nation* (London, 1993), 109.
5. Jacques Couland, *Le mouvement syndical au Liban, 1919-1946: son évolution pendant le mandat français de l'occupation à l'évacuation et au Code du travail* (Paris, 1970); Ilyās al-Buwārī, *Tārīḫ al-Ḥarakah al-ʿUmmāliyyah wa an-Niqābiyyah fī Lubnān*, voll. I-II-III (Beirut, 1986); Sami E. Baroudi, "Economic Conflict in Postwar Lebanon: State-Labor Relations between 1992 and 1997," *The Middle East Journal* 52, no. 4 (October 1998): 531; Ghassan Slaiby, *Fī al-Ittiḥād Kuwwah? Baḥaṯ fī Muškilāt al-Ittiḥād al-ʿUmmālī al-ʿĀm fī Lubnān* (Beirut, 1999); Lea Bou Khater, *The Labour Movement in Lebanon: Power on Hold* (Manchester, 2022).
6. Léa Bou Khater, "Public sector mobilisation despite a dormant workers' movement," *Confluences Méditerranée* 92, no. 1 (2015): 125, https://doi.org/10.3917/come.092.0125; Michele Scala, "Clientélisme et contestation : l'exemple de la mobilisation des travailleurs de Spinneys au Liban," *Confluences Mediterranee* 92, no. 1 (March 26, 2015): 113–23; Louis Mandarino, "De la pérennisation d'un statut précaire à la lutte pour la titularisation : un regard rétrospectif sur la mobilisation des journaliers de l'Électricité du Liban (EDL).," *Civil Society Knowledge Centre* 1, no. 1 (June 2016), https://doi.org/10.28943/CSKC.001.40003.
7. Ranajit Guha, *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India* (Oxford, 1983), 3.
8. Kamal S. Salibi, *Cross Roads to Civil War: Lebanon, 1958-1976* (London, 1976), 75.
9. Gramsci emphasizes six major elements to be investigated, according to a combinatory, dynamic, and historicized approach: a) the objective formation of subaltern groups from the developments and changes affecting economic production, their quantitative diffusion, and their origin from pre-existing social groups;

b) their eventual active or passive adhesion to the dominant political formations, the attempts to influence the latter's policies so as to impose their own claims, and the consequences of these attempts; c) the eventual birth of new parties from the dominant groups to keep control over the subalterns; d) the eventual formations proper to the subaltern groups fostering restricted and partial demands; e) the eventual birth of new formations affirming the autonomy of the subaltern groups, but within the existing frameworks; and f) the eventual birth of new formations affirming the integral autonomy of the subaltern groups. See: Antonio Gramsci, *Quaderni dal Carcere,* vol. III (Torino, 1977), 2277–94.

10. Cf., *inter alia*: Ilham Khuri-Makdisi, *The Eastern Mediterranean and the Making of Global Radicalism, 1860-1914* (Berkley, CA, 2013); Abdel Razzaq Takriti, *Monsoon Revolution* (Oxford, 2016); Sune Haugbolle, "The New Arab Left and 1967," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 44, no. 4 (October 2, 2017): 497–512, https://doi.org/10.1080/13530194.2017.1360008; Laure Guirguis, *Arab Lefts: Histories and Legacies, 1950s-1970s* (Edinburgh, 2020).

11. Laure Guirguis, "La référence au Vietnam et l'émergence des gauches radicales au Liban, 1962-1976," *Monde(s)* 14, no. 2 (November 21, 2018): 223–42; Fadi A. Bardawil, *Revolution and Disenchantment: Arab Marxism and the Binds of Emancipation* (Durham, NC, 2020).

12. Toufic K. Gaspard, *A Political Economy of Lebanon, 1948-2002: The Limits of Laissez-Faire* (Leiden, 2004).

13. Carolyn Gates, *Merchant Republic of Lebanon: Rise of an Open Economy*, (London, 1998).

14. Cf.: Gates, *Merchant Republic of Lebanon*; Claude Dubar and Salim Nasr, *Les Classes sociales au Liban* (Paris, 1976).

15. In 1971, 90 percent of Lebanese industrial units comprised nearly 10,700 small-scale enterprises of less than twenty-five workers, employing about 40 percent of the waged workforce. Conversely, three hundred firms with twenty-five or more wage-earners represented only 10 percent of industrial units but accounted for two-thirds of total production. See Salim Nasr and Marléne Nasr, *Les Travailleurs de la Grand Industrie dans la Banlieue Est de Beyrouth* (Beirut, 1976), 10.

16. Dubar and Nasr, *Les Classes sociales au Liban,* Tab. II.9.

17. Dubar and Nasr, *Les Classes sociales au Liban*, 83–84.

18. The June or Six-Days War, exploded on June 5, 1967, and resulted in the occupation by Israel of the whole of historical Palestine, the Syrian Golan, and the Egyptian Sinai Peninsula. As a consequence, the activities of the Suez Canal were suspended, triggering a reconfiguration of the supply chains serving the Gulf markets.

19. Nasr and Nasr, *Les Travailleurs de la Grand Industrie,* 19 and Annex 5, Tab. 3.

20. Salim Nasr, "Backdrop to Civil War: The Crisis of Lebanese Capitalism," *MERIP Reports*, no. 73 (1978): 14 and Tab. 7, https://doi.org/10.2307/3012262.

21. Catherine Paix, "La Portée Spatiale des Activités Tertiairs de Commandement Économique au Liban," *Revue Tiers Monde* 16, no. 61 (1975): 166–71. Before the industrial boom of the late 1960s, Western capital already made up about 35 percent of overall industrial investments. More importantly, by the same period, Western capital had earned control of the leading banking and financial sectors. See *Nasr, Backdrop to Civil War*, 3–7 and 10.

22. Nasr and Nasr, *Les Travailleurs de la Grand Industrie,* Tab. 38

23. Nasr, *Backdrop to Civil War.*

24. In 1964, the value added/variable capital ratio accounted for 171 percent. Ten years later it had increased to 204 percent. Nasr, *Backdrop to Civil War*, 10.

25. Nasr, *Backdrop to Civil War*, 11. Nasr, *Backdrop to Civil War*, 11.

26. Republic of Lebanon, *L'enquête par sondage sur la population active au Liban*, vol. II. (Beirut, 1972): Tab.14-04a/b. Henceforth indicated as PALII.

27. Nasr, *Backdrop to Civil War*, 6–10.

28. According to the PAL survey, in 1970 the waged industrial workforce classified as "daily" accounted for 60% of the total, i.e., a proportion almost equivalent to the overall unskilled workforce. PALII, Tab. 14.10.

29. Nasr and Nasr, *Les Travailleurs de la Grand Industrie, 153.*

30. Traboulsi, *A History of Modern Lebanon*, 166–67.

31. *Le Jour*, 27/01, 17/02, and 19/03/1971.

32. *L'Orient-Le Jour,* 24/06/1971.

33. Cf.: Chamcham, Fadia, and May Metn. *La Condition de l'ouvrier textile au Liban: étude socio-économique* (Beirut, 1972).

34. Dubar and Nasr, *Les Classes sociales au Liban,* 227.
35. Cf.: *Niḍāl al-ʿUmmāl*, no. 3, 12/06/1971; no. 7, 08/08/1971; no. 8, 15/10/1971, and no. 13/08/1972.
36. Nasr and Nasr, *Les Travailleurs de la Grand Industrie, Tab. 38; Bertrand, Jean-Paul. 1978. État et Perspectives de l'Industrie au Liban* (Beirut 1978), App. 11, Tab. 4.2.
37. In 1972, the licensed industrial unions were 33 out of about 140. Among them, thirteen were affiliated to the corporatist-conservative block, ten to the reformist one, seven to the leftist block, and three had no federal affiliation; *Bertrand, Jean-Paul. 1978. État et Perspectives de l'Industrie au Liban,* App. 11, Tab. 4.2.
38. Rossana Tufaro, "A Historical Mapping of Lebanese Organized Labor: Tracing Trends, Actors, and Dynamics" (Civil Society Knowledge Center, 2021) doi: 10.28943/CSKC.001.90002; Khater, *The Labour Movement in Lebanon*.
39. The most important representatives of this new generation were Georges Saqr (Federation of Petroleum Workers), Antoine Bechara (Federation of the Autonomous Offices and Public and Private Enterprises), and John Tweini (Federation of the Autonomous Offices and Public Enterprises). The three federations earned licensing between 1964 and 1967, and came to represent the reformist bloc of the united CGTL.
40. Irene Gendzier, *Notes from the Minefield: United States Intervention in Lebanon and the Middle East, 1945-58* (New York, 1996), 116–28; Khater, *The Labour Movement in Lebanon*.
41. The two federations were the National Federation of Workers and Employees in Lebanon (FENASOL), organic to the Lebanese Communist Party (LCP), and the Federation of the South, organic to the Movement of Arab Nationalists (MAN) and the Popular Nasserist Organization (PNO), and came to represent the leftist block of the united CGTL.
42. The CGTL was first been established in 1958 as a confederation between the United Unions, the Federation of the North, and the League of Workers.
43. al-Buwārī, *Tārīḫ al-Ḥarakah al-ʿUmmāliyyah wa an-Niqābiyyah*, 351–68.
44. The corporatist-conservative block grouped the Federation of the United Unions, the League of Unions, the Federation of Independent Unions, and the Federation of the North. The federations had earned licensing throughout the 1950s and were led by the United Unions' leader Gabriel Khouri, who would also be elected as president of the CGTL.
45. Tareq Y. Ismael, *The Arab Left* (Syracuse, NY, 1976); Walid Kazziha, *Revolutionary Transformation in the Arab World: Habash and His Comrades from Nationalism to Marxism* (London, 1975).
46. Haugbolle, *The New Arab Left and 1967*; Guirguis, *La référence au Vietnam*.
47. Another New Left organization was the Union of Communists, born from a splinter of the LCP in 1968. The organization dissolved in 1970 and some elements adhered to the OACL.
48. Fadi A. Bardawil, "Dreams of a Dual Birth: Socialist Lebanon's World and Ours," *Boundary 2* 43, no. 3 (August 1, 2016): 313–35, https://doi.org/10.1215/01903659-3572854.
49. *al-Ḥurriyah*, no. 579, 05/07/1971. For an English translation of the declaration, see Ismael (1976), Appendix E.
50. Ismael (1976), Appendix E.
51. Ismael, *The Arab Left*, 192.
52. Ismael, *The Arab Left*, 191.
53. Reflecting the centrality attributed to the working-class question, and the inspirational role of the Italian experience, on February 1970, the organization published on *al-Ḥurriyah* the Arabic translation of the notorious "Rapporto sulla FIAT" by the Manifesto Group on the grassroots mobilizations at FIAT's Mirafiori plant during the autumn of 1969 (no. 501, 09/02/1970), and the one at the Candy plant in Brugherio, near Milan (no. 502, 16/02/1970). Both reports were translated from the respective French versions published by *Les Temps Modernes*.
54. Nanni Balestrini and Primo Moroni, *L'orda d'oro: 1968-1977: la grande ondata rivoluzionaria e creativa, politica ed esistenziale* (Milano, 1997), 477–570.
55. Steve Wright, *Storming Heaven: Class Composition and Struggle in Italian Autonomist Marxism* (London, 2002).
56. Ismael, *The Arab Left, 193.*
57. The instrument of the militant enquiry was also borrowed from the Italian New Lefts. See Guirguis, *Arab Lefts*.
58. Where not otherwise indicated, all the information concerning committees' internal organization reported in this and the following paragraph have been drawn from a series of interviews conducted by

the author in Beirut with A. D., former OCAL responsible for the Committees of Beirut southern suburbs, between October 2015 and June 2017.

59. Dalāl al-Bizrī, *Sanawāt as-Saʿadah aṭ-Ṭawriyyah* (Beirut, 2015), 159–65.
60. al-Bizrī, *Sanawāt as-Saʿadah aṭ-Ṭawriyyah*, 69–80 and 167–76.
61. Tabitha Petran, *The Struggle over Lebanon* (New York, 1987), 133–38; Traboulsi, *A History of Modern Lebanon*, 164–66.
62. Samih Farsoun, "Student Protests and the Coming Crisis in Lebanon," *MERIP Reports*, no. 19 (August 1973): 3, https://doi.org/10.2307/3011841; Halim Isber Barakat, *Lebanon in Strife: Student Preludes to the Civil War* (Austin, TX, 1977).
63. *Al-Ḥurriyah*, no. 545. 14/12/1970 and no. 569, 31/05/1975.
64. Cf. *Al-Ḥurriyah*, no. 530, 31/08/1970, and no. 531, 07/09/1970.
65. *Niḍāl al-ʿUmmāl*, no. 4, 25/06/1970 and A. D., multiple interviews.
66. *Niḍāl al-ʿUmmāl*, no. 1, 21/05/1971.
67. *Niḍāl al-ʿUmmāl*, no. 5, 13/07/1971, and no. 7, 08/08/1971.
68. *Niḍāl al-ʿUmmāl*, no. 9, 1971.
69. Ahmad Deyrakī, *An-Niqābah wa as-Siyāsah. Taǧrabat al-Ḥizb aš-Šuyūʿī al-Lubnānī, 1924-1975* (Beirut, 2021): 285–99.
70. Deyrakī, *An-Niqābah wa as-Siyāsah. Taǧrabat al-Ḥizb aš-Šuyūʿī al-Lubnānī, 1924-1975* (Beirut, 2021): 285–99.
71. Deyrakī, *An-Niqābah wa as-Siyāsah. Taǧrabat al-Ḥizb aš-Šuyūʿī al-Lubnānī, 1924-1975* (Beirut, 2021): 285–99.
72. Michael Johnson, *Class & Client in Beirut: The Sunni Muslim Community and the Lebanese State, 1840-1985* (London, 1986), 343–45.
73. *Al-Ḥurriyah*, no. 506, 13/03/1970.
74. Cf.: *al-Ḥurriyyah*, no. 525, 27/07/1970, and no. 529, 24/08/1970.
75. *Niḍāl al-ʿUmmāl*, no. 13, August 1972.
76. Together with a 5 percent salary rise, the demands of Gandour's strikers included: 1) inhibition of arbitrary dismissals; 2) authorization to join the chocolate workers union; 3) interdiction of curtails on overtime working-hours; 4) the regular payment of sickness leave; 5) the regular payment of working days in case of labor accidents; 6) re-establishment of an eight-hour working day at the Choueifat plant; 7) payment of transportation fees to the Choueifat plant; 8) prohibition of workers' inspections at the factory doors in the respect of their personal dignity; 9) installation of a canteen and a plant for drinkable water in the Chiah plant; 10) regular payment of annual leave and holidays; 11) regular payment for strike days; and 12) inhibition of dismissal of striking workers. See: *Niḍāl al-ʿUmmāl*, no. 17, November 1972.
77. René Chamussy, "Remous et Affrontements dans l'Hiver Libanais," *Travaux et Jours* 46 (Jan.–Mar. 1973): 73–94, 73–75.
78. The figure of Fatmeh al-Khawejah and her positionality vis-à-vis the strike is at the center of a still unsolved controversy. According to the family and several press sources, the young girl was an accidental passerby who had neither a direct involvement in the strike, nor with the political activities of leftist groups. This conflicts with the LCP version, which, from the very first moment, claimed her as a young militant of theirs. The controversy is reported in the docu-film *A Feeling Greater Than Love* by Mary Jirmanus Saba (Lebanon, 2017), 100.
79. *Al-Ḥurriyah*, no. 596, 20/11/1972, and *al-Anbāʾ*, 12/11/1972.
80. *L'Orient-Le Jour*, November 13, 1972.
81. *L'Orient-Le Jour*, November 12, 1972.
82. *An-Nidāʾ*, November 14, 1972.
83. Chamussy, *Remous et Affrontements*, 76–79.
84. *L'Orient-Le Jour*, 15/12/1972.
85. *An-Nidāʾ*, 16, 20, 21 and 22/12/1972.
86. *Niḍāl al-ʿUmmāl*, no. 10, March 1972, no. 13, August 1972, no. 14, October 1972, and no. 22, October 1973; *as-Safīr*, 24/08/1974 and 30/08/1975.
87. *L'Orient-Le Jour*, 25/01/1973. The victims were the planters Naim Darwish and Hassan Hayek.
88. *L'Orient-Le Jour*, 27/01/1973.
89. Traboulsi, *A History of Modern Lebanon*, 172–74.

90. Petran, *The Struggle over Lebanon*, 110–11; Dubar and Nasr, *Les Classes sociales au Liban*, 327–28; Traboulsi, *A History of Modern Lebanon*, 166.
91. Petran, *The Struggle over Lebanon*, 133–38; Traboulsi, *A History of Modern Lebanon*, 164–66.
92. *L'Orient-Le Jour*, 26, 27, and 28/01/1973.
93. *L'Orient-Le Jour*, 28/08/1973.
94. *Niḍāl al-ʿUmmāl*, no. 21, September 1973.
95. *Niḍāl al-ʿUmmāl*, no. 21, September 1973.
96. *Niḍāl al-ʿUmmāl*, no. 22, December 4, 1973, and no. 24, January 25, 1974.
97. *L'Orient-Le Jour*, 31/01/1974.
98. *L'Orient-Le Jour,* 2, 3, and 5/02/1974.
99. *L'Orient-Le Jour*, 07/02/1974; and interview with M. Z., former member of Beirut's eastern suburbs WCs, Beirut, November 2015.
100. *L'Orient-Le Jour*, February 6 and 7, 1974.
101. Rossana Tufaro, "Also a class (hi)story: working-class struggles and political socialization on the eve of Lebanese Civil War," *Confluences Mediterranee* 112, no. 1 (April 27, 2020): 21–35.
102. Aziz Al-Azmeh, "The Progressive Forces," ed. Roger Owen, *Essays on the Crisis in Lebanon* (London 1976), 5c–72; Jacques Couland, "Movimento sindacale e movimento nazionale e progressista in Libano," *Quaderni Feltrinelli* 15 (1981): 71–94.
103. *L'Orient-Le Jour*, 28/03/1974 and 02/04/1974; and *Niḍāl al-ʿUmmāl*, no. 26, 01/04/1974, and no. 27, 01/05/1974.
104. al-Buwārī, *Tārīḫ al-Ḥarakah al-ʿUmmāliyyah wa an-Niqābiyyah,* 305.

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