

*Domestic Politics* (originally *Politique intérieure*; Internal Politics)  
by : Michel Chiha  
Beirut: Éditions du Trident, 1964

### Preface

This volume, *Domestic Politics*, is the fourth of Michel Chiha's published works, following *Essays*, *Plainsong* and *Palestine*.

The texts contained in this volume were chosen from among the hundreds Chiha devoted to Lebanese politics. It was an extremely difficult choice because it meant leaving aside many articles worthy of being resubmitted to the attention of the public, who would certainly find them of interest. It is necessary, however, to keep in mind the usual scope of a work of this kind; his selection of an unprecedented number of definitions; and the insights and conclusions that no Lebanese person concerned with the fate of his or her country should ignore.

As it is impossible to reproduce everything he wrote, the Michel Chiha Foundation has endeavoured to present here the most important elements of a system of thought that has not, and will not, become outdated. This is because it is derived from the most clear, unbiased, basic realities of Lebanon—its unchanging features and ancient potential borne of its geographical and human environment.

For thirty-five years, this late, great thinker unceasingly gave himself to the service of Lebanon and Lebanese realities, never asking anything in return. His only goal was to offer future generations the benefit of his thoughts and experiences, unique in our contemporary history.

Still a young man, Michel Chiha, the poet-banker, fought for the restoration of the Lebanese state within its natural borders—considering September 1<sup>st</sup> even more memorable than November 22<sup>nd</sup>. He then dedicated himself to a series of study-filled meetings in order to draft our constitution—a work still praised today for its suitability to our needs and characteristics. A

constituent in 1926, our ardent patriot was elected the previous year to the position of deputy in Beirut. There was no manual to inspire him as he sat down to endow the nascent Lebanese Republic with an organic law that would suit a nation of associated confessional minorities minorities, to preserve and reinforce their desire to live communally. He was fully aware of these factors because he understood that the Lebanese situation was exceptional and, in many ways, extremely complex.

This same clearheadedness expressed itself in the years before independence, and continued after it was won. From the beginning, Michel Chiha's political thought rose to heights from which it could distinguish, with almost miraculous ease, an idea worth preserving from an accidental one, a worthy tradition from a bad habit, and true progress from a clumsy imitation.

The reader will notice that neither the benefits nor the obligations of independence surprised Michel Chiha, who waited and longed for them with diligent thought, never losing sight of the conditions that would ensure its protection and allow it to blossom fully. For Michel Chiha, independence in a mountainous and maritime country like Lebanon would not and could not be a moment of rupture or motivated by only by self-interest, but above all else independence should be a way to be much more open to the rest of the universe.

The Lebanon in which we live today is the result of a doctrinal and governmental definition developed by Michel Chiha. In him, an enormous and shrewd intellect and an unwavering commitment to spiritual values were complemented by uncompromising and selfless morals—a rare quality indeed. He only ever wanted one thing: to brighten the road for his compatriots and see them progress down it, in peace, tolerance, discipline and freedom, towards a promising future.

First, let us define ourselves. What is Lebanon? What does it represent to Arab countries and to the world in general? What is its calling and its *raison d'être*? Michel Chiha turned these questions over and over again in his mind. Thanks to an acute sense of what Lebanon needed and a critical mind that could go straight to the root of the problem, he provided brilliant, clear answers to these questions. At this point in time, when many of us can no longer tell the

difference between what separates us and what unites us, what we should maintain and what we should allow to pass us by, it is surprising that these early and remarkably well-defined truths have often been lost or misunderstood in the heated disputes between different sides.

To know Lebanon well and to create a definition for it which is neither artificial nor tendentious, we should consult the writings of Michel Chiha: '[Lebanon is] a country of associated confessional minorities that avoids hasty decision making and *coups d'état*, understanding that each time it endorses an upheaval, it compromises the good work done by time. It considers itself independent and intangible, as belonging equally to all of its children, proclaiming its right to life and believing in its *raison d'être* more than ever'.

In times of crisis or fluctuation, it is essential to revisit positions based on doctrine, otherwise every debate will challenge the principles upon which the unity of Lebanon's different communities and their desire to live together are based. The Michel Chiha Foundation has published this volume, which contains a series of articles organized chronologically under the general title *Domestic Politics*. The goal of this collection is to enable the reader to better know and understand Lebanon, its purpose and the conditions of its existence. In it, you will find explanations of the general and official principles underpinning Lebanese national politics. In addition, the author analyses the condition of the Lebanese state, indicating ways in which it can be reformed.

Because he frequently returned to subjects he deemed of vital importance in his editorials in *Le Jour*, year after year, Michel Chiha reiterated truths upon which Lebanon's well-being depended and still depends. Far from harming the collection, this repetition rather shows the development of the author's thought and his persistent efforts to underline conclusions that have been decisively confirmed by facts.

May the reading of this collection help our fellow citizens discover who they are, so that they may better love each other and their common homeland.

### **An Introductory Note**

Later, when I have departed and entered the kingdom of heaven, if I have completed my task well, and if something remains of all my daily writings, some keen 'schoolboy' or hardworking historian will discover it.

And some future publication will reveal these forgotten words like a secret.

The ideas, hopes, passions and dreams that occupy me, the flood that inundates my thoughts according to the phases of the moon, the vigour which rises in my soul, everything that I record in the fires of 'cogitation', and that I bear as a testimony—this whole explosion will one day be nothing more than the flimsy fabric of memories.

But my hope and expectation is that the few who have the opportunity to escape the night and 'land in far away eras' will testify to an unwavering faith.

Faith is like a seed which encourages me to work in both the present and the hereafter, if God wills it.

The task now, however, is to construct a land on earth where people, minds and love can grow.

Michel Chiha

## Introduction to Lebanese Politics

*The title of this article is well-deserved, as the reader will find here a true introduction to a system of politics for Lebanon. As you will notice, it develops a definition of Lebanon and its distinctive characteristics while at the same time, and with shrewd realism, suggesting practical ways to create a permanently balanced state in the heart of a national community. The basic realities that Michel Chiha highlights from 1937 onwards are later recalled and underlined repeatedly, with the aim of confronting the Lebanese with their identity so that they might better understand themselves and feel more a part of their homeland.*

Will the Lebanese youth of today allow me to address their judgement and their fine (if at times undisciplined) intelligence in order to try (quickly and briefly) to clarify—at least partly—a situation which justifies many current concerns, and poses a threat for the future?

Lebanon is clearly a very small country, but its uniqueness is indisputable. It is a very old country that today we claim is very young. Its geographical location on the Mediterranean is one of the most prominent and exposed of any country<sup>1</sup>, located between the most important land and sea routes on the globe. Arguably, from a certain angle, it has contributed more than any other country to facilitating connections between different cultures from the four corners of the globe<sup>2</sup>.

Races, beliefs, rituals, languages, ways of thinking and customs all confront each other in Lebanon. It is a country that is at once a ‘refuge’ and a place from which many people have emigrated, a country of mountains and plains, varied climates and different cultures. In Lebanon you’ll find all the different forms of the human race, and human endeavour.

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<sup>1</sup> Lebanon covers an area of 10,452 km<sup>2</sup> on the Eastern shore of the Mediterranean. Syria is to the North and East, whereas Palestine and Israel are to the South. The country is mountainous with Mount-Lebanon constituting its spine. This mountain belongs to a chain which extends along the Mediterranean from Mount Taurus (Turkey) to the sands of Sinai.

<sup>2</sup> Lebanon was conceived by Mr Chiha to be the natural bridge between the Arab world and the West.

All things being equal, you'll find as many schools in Lebanon as in more advanced countries. You'll find all levels of teaching and of science, as well as all levels of ignorance. Alongside extremely enlightened men, you'll find others (even in the cities) who are a century, or even thousands of years, behind. You'll find the full gamut of people, from the Crazy Man of Carrel to primitive man, dating back through the ages.

Briefly, Lebanon contains the most pronounced contrasts, the most varied mentalities, the most disparate customs, and the least uniform faces. It is a microcosm of humanity<sup>3</sup>.

For lack of a better option, we use confessional labels to compartmentalize this mass of people into main groups, each with their own divisions and subdivisions. Thus we are able to include a certain number of spiritual 'families'<sup>4</sup> that tend to 'morally' and 'intellectually' sustain themselves in very different ways, and who also 'assimilate' the sustenance they receive differently.

Except when it comes to personal status laws<sup>5</sup>, which creates more sovereign jurisdictions in certain domains, all these people are subject to the same laws. They live under the same sun and form a national homeland which, such as it is, would not be possible unless the majority of them deemed it a necessity.

And it is indeed a necessity. An appealing one at that: nature has bestowed upon the Lebanese people one of the most 'balanced' and beautiful 'habitats' in the world. Here disorder resides not in things, but in people.

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<sup>3</sup> The Lebanese political and social canvas is composed of 18 religious communities (Christian, Muslim and Jewish). The Constitution proclaimed on May 23, 1926, and promulgated by the French High Commissioner, transformed Lebanon into a Republic. M. Chiha was the secretary of the committee that drafted the Constitution. The Constitution guaranteed (in articles 9 and 10) religious freedom and the respect for the personal status regulations of the various religious communities. It also established political confessionalism (article 95) which divided the different state functions along confessional lines. The Lebanese State remained, then, as in the past, confessional and community-based in both sociological and political spheres.

<sup>4</sup> By 'spiritual families' M. Chiha means religious communities.

<sup>5</sup> All Lebanese citizens are subject to the same laws governed by state tribunals except for matters of personal status. These are governed by the Islamic "*Sharia*" for Muslims. For Christians, canon law applies except for matters of inheritance, which are of the competence of civil tribunals.

My dream of course is to see all Lebanese people suddenly agree. This is not, nor ever will be, anything more than a dream. No one can perform a miracle and unify all these people in one day. It would be costly and foolish to believe that hasty, large-scale concessions would bring about a joining together of all, including the most rebellious, minds. People have thought it before. People say it today.

While the Lebanese govern themselves in a way that mitigates their paradoxical situation, they must 'hang on' for long enough to achieve a state of 'permanent' balance.

*The way to achieve this* is to understand that when facing a similar problem, the 'time' factor is instinctual. As the leader (whatever and wherever you lead) you must find time and save time by acting more like a wise man or a well-informed diplomat than a firebrand. Without violence, time makes and enshrines habits<sup>6</sup>. In order to get used to things you must, by definition, deny yourself changes and excesses as much as possible. Rather than arouse lusts and desires, you must temper them. Rather than overturn the chessboard, you must move the pawns slowly and use the rook rather than the knight and the bishop.

*The way to achieve this* is to realize that one can not bring together and unify so many diverse elements except by letting them *act together in a political sense*, letting them *make their laws together* within an Assembly, and controlling the way in which these laws are enforced. One is also held back, in a country like Lebanon, by the lessons of the past; and much less by excessive democratic tastes than *by the very laws of balance*. *The important* and essential thing is that Lebanon live. Perhaps we have not always had Assemblies that are entirely admirable. But what Lebanese government has?

If the Executive branch, which is well-equipped compared to the Assembly, only uses its power to ruin it, if its ulterior motive is to bring it into disrepute by slowly wearing down a

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<sup>6</sup> Kamal Salibi maintained in his "*A House of Many Mansions – The History of Lebanon Reconsidered*" (University of California Press, Ltd. London, England – 1988 – page 180) that "as a young man, Chiha had carried out some free study in Britain, where he developed a great admiration for the resilience of the unwritten British constitution whose forcefulness struck him as deriving entirely from tradition. Such a constitution, Chiha thought, would be ideally suited for Lebanon, because it could accommodate differences without recourse to artificial legal rulings which could please one group, but anger another possibly to the point of violence."

*necessary institution*, rather than to help it improve in every way possible, then it is the Executive branch which must first be changed.

We will become less members of a confession (in the narrow sense this word has in the Near Eastern context), and more citizens of this country, in that we will take a *direct* interest in the life of the state. Further, we will gain from this progress *on the confessional front itself* where group action, with the public good in mind, will thus come up against much fewer difficulties than it does today.

We must not solve confessional and social anarchy in Lebanon by deliberately ignoring the *political* order. When the confessional idea wins, *it is the Nation that loses*.

But on the other hand, everything that *the Nation wins* can only help to temper the confessional disorder that we are sadly witnessing today.

2 July 1936

### **And Now Forward**

*Written in 1936 on the day after the signing of the Franco-Lebanese Alliance—a treaty not ratified by France—this article reflects Michel Chiha's firm beliefs on the subject of independence and the role that Lebanon was asked to play among nations. Similarly, the texts that follow each make clear, in their own way, elements of the author's thought, as well as his ongoing concerns as a patriot and citizen.*

For Lebanon, this independence<sup>7</sup> would have been like all important events in life. One day during your adolescence you happen to realize you're a man. You struggle and fight and suffer and love. And then later, you realize that you have failed, succeeded or grown old.

<sup>7</sup> Syria and Lebanon were under French mandate since 1922 (Article 22 of the Pact of the League of Nations). They both sought a treaty with France that would pave the way to independence. This became the "leitmotiv" of the negotiations with the French High Commissioner. On September 1936, a Syro-French treaty was signed in Paris. On November 13 of the same year a similar treaty was signed with Lebanon. The treaty contained 9 articles and was accompanied by a military convention, five protocols and exchanges of letters. The Lebanese Parliament unanimously approved the treaty on November 24, 1936.



In the case of our country, the independence treaty will have revealed things even more surprising, fundamental and irrefutable than the document itself.

First of all, independence: yes. We felt it, and now we finally have it. The Franco-Lebanese Treaty is not, at least on paper, the immediate reason for this. But nonetheless it enshrines independence as a right, simply by considering it a *fait accompli*.

The alliance between France and Lebanon is one of ‘*two independent and sovereign states, a consecration of their friendship and the ties which link them in the defence of peace and protection of their common interests*’<sup>8</sup>.

The advance to independence means many other advances as well: the treaty acknowledges ‘*progress achieved in the course of strengthening Lebanon as an independent nation*’. This is what we call emancipation: political, civic, social and technical emancipation.

Lebanon has been admitted to the SDN<sup>9</sup>. Its national sovereignty will thus be formally recognized by the world community. It will henceforth have both a voice and a choice within this community. It will contribute indirectly, but confidently, to decisions of the utmost importance. As well as its national sovereignty, its international personality can now be asserted with a new sense of security.

Independence, sovereignty, emancipation, national and international personality: we will have all of these at our disposal from now on. We have failed to achieve too often in the past to deny ourselves the intoxicating joy of achievement and accomplishment today.

One stage in the life of Lebanon is over. Now another begins. But we really must understand how to give this rhetorical classification meaning, and implement it. *Independence, sovereignty, emancipation—because these words are happening right now for us*, we must know how to bravely relegate the realities they reclaim to positions of secondary importance. We needn’t dream less now about our new tasks just to preserve the gains of our completed ones.

Let us preserve the past – but let us also start building the future.

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<sup>8</sup> (Article one of the Treaty).

<sup>9</sup> (Article seven of the Treaty). Lebanon was one of the 49 founders of the United Nations (April 26, 1945).

16 November 1936

**Conversations with Patrice***And we were so pensive about the homeland.*

- Victor Hugo

Imagine a low window, overlooking a garden of thirty square feet, covered with a jagged shadow made by a flowering oleander tree; then you notice a small silent street; then a wall; and this wall is covered with purple wisteria which dominate the other laurel trees.

Through this Athenian landscape, Patrice and I look at the face of the Homeland.

‘We lack Ideals!’ says Patrice.

‘I agree,’ I reply, ‘and this is the root of our problems.’

‘Look at living nature,’ he answers, ‘Plants and trees come back to life every spring, testifying to their vitality; this laurel tree’s divine growth is enough to ennoble the landscape. You can sense the triumphant rising of sap under the bark of a tree—but men? The men of my city, do they worry about the path of the stars? Do they tune in to the beat of their hearts?’

And me: ‘We have done away with dreaming.’

‘Not quite,’ Patrice said, ‘but we only dream of little things. We invoke the spirit of the Phoenicians, but what do we still have of their virtues? They brought indigo to Rome! They travelled unafraid on the raging seas, carrying ideas like a torch. What have we done?’

‘Look around you at the sedentary merchant people that we are. We buy to resell. What do we create? Art and science elude us; that is our weakness. We lack ideals, I tell you—hence our weakness and impotence.

‘I read a page in Ruskin I’ll never forget<sup>10</sup>. The basic idea is this:

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<sup>10</sup> English sociologist and art critic (1819-1900).

‘Five men form the basis of the city: the priest, the judge, the doctor, the soldier, and the merchant.

‘The priest would die rather than come into conflict with his faith; the judge rather than desecrate his conscience; the doctor rather than shun an illness that he could alleviate or cure; the soldier rather than betray his country. And the merchant? Is there any circumstance in which you could imagine the merchant braving death?’

‘Ruskin says that he who does not know when to lay himself open to death, does not know how to live.

‘This means we cannot achieve great things if we do not have the eternal law of sacrifice right before our eyes.

‘We are a merchant people,’ concludes Patrice. ‘This is why the bones of our forefathers are warmer than our own lives.’

### **I am Searching for a Good Man**

‘Citizens who lose interest in public matters should forfeit their right to being established in the country’. This should be one of our first laws.

‘You’re talking nonsense,’ Patrice said, ‘or joking perhaps. Are we still in the age of Lycurgus and the Twelve Tables? Leave this talk to the nomads and mercenaries, but for God’s sake don’t mention it to the important people in your town. They’ll think you’re hallucinating.’

Once, in the peacefulness of the morning, we were discussing Municipality matters.

‘Everything is calm at this hour,’ Patrice observed, ‘and nature fortifies man. It seems to say to him: regain an awareness of your being; go and do your daily tasks; enjoy self-sacrifice, exertion, and work. But these are lessons which city people do not heed. These great joys are the privilege of the peasant.’

‘You’re dreaming of the golden age,’ I said to Patrice. ‘Have you just finished reading the *Eclogues* or the *Pastorals*?’<sup>11</sup>

‘No! I am aware of the perils of fantasising. I’m simply fighting against selfishness. Consider how much this country would improve if each one of its sons understood that he owed something to the community.

‘But all you see is indifference. The silent city will soon be noisy, bustling and almost insane. One hundred thousand ‘reasonable people’, one hundred thousand ‘thinking reeds’ will hurry towards it in search of financial gain, greedy, money-grabbing and servile, forgetting God, the homeland and duty, who would rather let the city perish than let it cost them a minute of their time or a cent of their money.’

### ***Our Raison d’Être***

#### **I**

We do not make Lebanon an inhuman place. Everything here welcomes people and grants them sanctuary: two hundred kilometres of cool, green shores and, deeper, lofty mountains, even more secure for those who wish to defend them.

But these sacred places are not for sale. To be today what the West was one hundred years ago is enough for us. No temptation or seduction should lead us to compromise our heritage. Let civilization get ahead of us! We will play our part in it.

In our small, worldly domain which, despite us, was closely tied to the geographical centre of the ancient world, circumstances have taken us a world away from racism. For having been a refuge a thousand times, we have gathered a disparate crowd. This is not to say that our land will die from the consequences of its kindness. However, we must no longer grant access to just anyone. *As it is we have no choice but to live together or die.*

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<sup>11</sup> A collection of 10 poems by the Latin poet Virgil (70-19 B.C.).

At its peak, a country like this—whose windows open onto one of the public places of the land, where confusion reigns, where each arriving foreigner brings the conflicts and peculiarities of his own country—needs, more than anything else, austere traditionalism, steadfastness and faith. *If it loses sight of its spiritual and moral raison d'être, it loses itself.*

## II

We also have custody of your shores: you, the Mediterranean, who is becoming a lake in your old age while everything else gets younger. Now that distances are only an illusion, should we forget Greece and Rome, Carthage, and the islands, and everything that made our countryside, this Provence of the East—(Provence, with her sunny climate, vineyards, olive, orange, and mulberry trees)—more bitter and more beautiful? They say there is a Mediterranean soul and sensibility, and we are no strangers to its fire and fervour.

A collective consciousness is more likely to arise from the calm of this sea than from a Europe where people hate each other. Northern Europe, wonder of pride, today full of disdain for both intelligence and love, how gentle the Mediterranean is! Mediterranean, mother of the arts, humanism and faith, the important Europeans are in danger of dying, this we know. The sound of the boots of roughneck soldiers drowns out even the vast harmonies of Wagner, and Dürer's *Melancholy* turns its concern towards the frenzy of the Germans.

Quarrels between races did not save Greek statues from the abuse of the Barbarians. What will happen to the world if Mediterranean people no longer wish to love one another?

## III

With noble sentiments and a keen intelligence, a thousand people can be worth one hundred thousand; but nobility of the soul and superiority of the mind are no match for sheer numbers. Creating spiritual and material wealth alone is not enough; you must also protect it. In the fruit season, the badly guarded orchard calls out to the prowler. Only the desert fears no pillage.

A small country of any worth is destined to no longer enjoy a feeling of security (for Laws have become imaginary outside of God), but this is no reason for such a country to deliberately abandon its own appearance and character. In this time of international plunder, a small country that continues to exist implies a strong personality.

You enter into alliances, Patrice says, against a declared or possible enemy.

As much as you can, you ally yourself with your friends. When there are two allies—one powerful and the other not at all powerful—the second can only rely on the generosity of the first. If there is no act of faith at the origin of such an alliance, then it may be a simple case of ‘only equals should associate,’ as the moral of the fable would have it.

Acts of faith are our natural state, Patrice says. Our entire existence is an act of faith. Despite the small area of our territory, in the past and present, we have laid claim to invaluable spiritual riches. And our landscapes are splendid. We have protected them and loved them, and we will protect them with the support of a watchful France (for love of the Mediterranean, if nothing else).

Lebanon is a small country; but to say nothing of its history, its geography is vaster than Homer’s.

23 May 1938

### **The First of September 1936**

Lebanese people over twenty-five years old remember the first of September 1920<sup>12</sup>. With different levels of precision perhaps, but with equal emotion, they will soon be able to

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<sup>12</sup> On September 1, 1920, general Gouraud, the French High Commissioner, proclaimed from Beirut the creation of the State of the Greater Lebanon. The dismemberment of the Ottoman Empire, and the Sykes-Picot Agreement of 1916, had delineated the zones of influence of France and Great Britain in the Near East. The San-Remo agreement of 1920 attributed to France a mandate on Syria and Lebanon that was officially recognised by the League of Nations in 1922. Gouraud found in these two countries the rudiments of a state that were the foundations of the Lebanese and Syrian states of today.

Several resolutions adopted between August 27 and September 1, 1920, form the state of Greater Lebanon by adjoining to Mount-Lebanon, the Vilayat of Beirut (that included Tripoli, Sidon and Tyre) and the Bekaa (that included Baalbeck, Hasbaya, and Rachaya).

recall the day sixteen years ago when General Gouraud, the French High Commissioner of the territories of the Levant, solemnly proclaimed the recognition of the Lebanese homeland. Those present on September 1<sup>st</sup> 1920 will never let another September 1<sup>st</sup> pass unnoticed.

What does our national celebration mean to others and to our youth?

Is it a 'national celebration' like any other, which as everyone knows all countries have? A day of parades, music and Chinese lanterns, like all other days of official celebration?

Most know that for Lebanon, every year September 1<sup>st</sup> means a day of glory and peace, a day of victory.

But do they know how many centuries of difficult and persistent struggle were devoted to this victory? Do they know what it ended—the long decline and slow agony of an enslaved Lebanese state?

If they do not know, can we reproach them?

What have we done in Lebanon to further national and civic education? What propaganda have we disseminated? What moral and intellectual preparation was provided for this national celebration, which should be the most natural and most legitimate gathering of all Lebanese people around their flag and their hopes?

It seems to me that there is grave official incompetence, which is exactly what we are trying to overcome in all ways possible.

Thus, for the first time since 1920, this September 1<sup>st</sup> is witnessing a clearer and more certain dawn of independence. Its radiance should reflect the fervour with which we support it.

### **The Meaning of a Vote**

*Lebanon's independence in November 1943 led Michel Chiha to write more and more. Little by little, his columns in Le Jour became bi-weekly, and even sometimes daily:*

*The youth of today are doubtless unaware of the climate in which their elders experienced the events of 1943. It is enough for them to know that gaining independence was*

*considered by some as a somewhat adventurous leap at a time when it was hard to predict what would become of the East after the victory of the allied forces.*

The vote of the Chamber of Deputies<sup>13</sup> brought Mr. Bechara El-Khoury<sup>14</sup> to the presidency of the Republic on the first ballot by 44 of 47 votes (and three empty ballots), decisively demonstrating where the support of the Lebanese people lies.

After some incredible episodes, this vote brings us back to realities of life and the nature of things. It places Lebanon in its true setting and within its own traditions. The Lebanese mountains are no longer strangers to the destiny of this Lebanon, for after all it owes them its life. After years on a life-support machine, Lebanese tradition finds itself very much alive, including its taste and even passion for the outdoors, independence and the basic freedoms for which the great powers of the globe are fighting today.

The Chamber voted 'Lebanese'—nothing else. It voted, unanimously, for good judgment and for order. We are thus on the threshold of an era which, despite the war and what it has caused, will put Lebanon back into historical truth; no more hasty decision making or *coups d'état*. Obeying the law will be a substitute for illegal activities and violence. Firm government doctrine and sound methods of administration will replace demagoguery and the wonders of whims. It is a calm and provident vision of Lebanon's future.

And this is what we need.

This is what we will have, God willing, albeit once we have had time to straighten out a situation which has been weakened and compromised so often.

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<sup>13</sup> The parliamentary elections of August 29, and September 5, 1943, gave the majority in the Parliament to members of the "Destour Party" who favoured independence and the end of external control over Lebanon from any foreign power. M. Chiha was one of the main strategists in this grouping. On September 21, the Parliament elected Bechara El-Khoury, leader of the Destour (*ibid n°14*) to the presidency of the Republic. His rival in the election had been Emile Eddé (President of the Republic from 1936 to 1941 and leader of the National Bloc) who was a proponent of privileged relations with France. In his inaugural speech, Bechara El-Khoury made a strong plea for independence: "... Lebanon has always fought for independence. It is determined to achieve independence in concord and harmony, in a principal and orderly manner..., with the full collaboration of all the Lebanese without discrimination..."

<sup>14</sup> *Op. cit. n°13 - ibid n°17.*



If we welcome the accession of the wholly Lebanese Mr. Bechara El-Khoury to the highest office in the state with legitimate satisfaction, if we do all that he depends on us to do to make his job easier, and if we do our best to contribute to Lebanese recovery, we will not relinquish any part of our independence.

As free today as we were yesterday and will be tomorrow, we will be critical when appropriate, and we will always put the essential national and international interests of Lebanon, and service to Lebanon, above all else.

22 September 1943

### **A Short Commentary on the Ministerial Declaration**

The ministerial declaration<sup>15</sup> is a document that in all respects demands attention and reflection. For my part, I have found unquestionable signs of sincerity and good faith in it. I have wondered a little how Mr. Riad Solh<sup>16</sup>, whom I hold in the highest regard, would express himself in circumstances and on matters that are, of course, delicate. The President has done this as clearly as possible and with commendable concern for nuance.

I will not emphasise my few reservations about certain passages.

I will say, without hesitation, that Mr. Riad Solh spoke about Lebanon, its borders, its sovereignty, its independence, its future, and the Lebanese people united as brothers, in a way that touched me deeply. It seems to me, whatever anyone may say, that time has done its job and

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<sup>15</sup> After the election on September 21<sup>st</sup>, 1943, of Bechara El-Khoury to the presidency of the Republic, Riad Solh (*ibid n°56*) was put in charge of forming the first government after independence. He had been a proponent of unity with Syria but had recently shifted his position to support the idea of an independent and Arab Lebanon. On October 7<sup>th</sup>, he read the ministerial declaration of his new government (six ministers representing the six largest religious communities in the country). This declaration, together with the presidential address of September 21<sup>st</sup>, formed the basis of what was later called the National Pact (an unwritten agreement designed to complete the official document of the Constitution). The National Pact outlined the basic principles that were to regulate the association between Christians and Muslims in the newly independent state: national sovereignty and independence, arabism and cooperation with other Arab states, respect of the statutes of the religious communities, but equality of all citizens in civil service employment. The first measure taken to achieve independence was the amendment of the Constitution (*ibid n°17*).

Underlying the National Pact were the requirements that the Christians abandon the French mandate that many felt gave them protection and that the Muslims abandon the idea of unity with Syria. It was on the basis of mutual concessions that the two artisans of independence, Bechara El-Khoury for the Christians and Riad Solh for the Muslims, were able to reach an agreement.

<sup>16</sup> *Op. cit. n°15 - ibid n°17 and 56.*

done it well, as it has pacified people's spirits. Through the discussions and controversies of the past, political and social truth can now see the light of day.

Against all reservations, I have always claimed that harmony in Lebanon could only come from political honesty and a deep respect for the law. In our present situation, we can keep placing our trust in time, the goodwill of men and the calm atmosphere in which the government has announced it will loyally and courageously serve the country.

What the President has said about Lebanon's independence echoes the doctrine I have always held, and what he said about Lebanon's friendships and its foreign policy is a sign of the healthy reconciliation of reformist and traditionalist spirits.

I thus have confidence in the government, and stress the necessity of having public services, many public services, alongside an intelligent and comprehensive political system. Everyone knows that the Lebanese public service sector has been in a state of chaos for years. The government promises us that it will maintain law and order, justice and composure. It is exactly what the citizens of this country, long given over only to pleasure, are asking for with all their hearts.

Knowing the men who share the responsibility of power, I shall now await the Government's actions, while wishing it good luck and a long life.

8 October 1943

#### **At the Same Time**

Lebanon can freely modify its Constitution. I said this yesterday and write it again today. This right comes from within the constitution itself (article 76 and what follows)<sup>17</sup>.

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<sup>17</sup>The search for an effective and total independence in line with the ministerial declaration of October 7, led the Lebanese government to send to the Parliament for approval on November 5, a proposed revision of the Constitution to remove from it any reference to the mandatory power. Through its general delegate, Jean Helleu, France sent an ultimatum to the Lebanese government enjoining it to postpone the meeting of Parliament. Disregarding the French warning, the Lebanese Parliament convened on November 8 and unanimously approved the revision of the Constitution that led to promulgation on November 9 of a law to this effect. The revision consisted basically in 5 amendments (to articles 1, 5, 11, 52 and 102) and 5 abrogations (of articles 90, 91, 92, 93 and 94). On November 11, Helleu reacted by ordering the arrest of the President of the Republic, the Prime

Only God knows if the constitutional review of 1927 made it difficult to exercise the right of review. This review wisely surrounded itself with incredible precautions under the vigilant eye of the brilliant Colonel Georges Catroux<sup>18</sup>. So many precautions that no revision could occur without some miraculous agreement between men, the elements and the gods.

If today, taking this tutelary foresight into account, the Lebanese Executive and Legislative branches were to succeed in modifying the constitution, it could only be because a near unanimous number of Lebanese want it.

This is a fact. *Lebanon is able to freely modify its constitution* (article 76 and what follows). At the same time, however, the French authority—right now the French Committee for National Freedom (CFLN)<sup>19</sup>—can express reservations that it deems appropriate. *This is also its right*. This is where we are legally; this is how things stand.

As for the Chamber, must we be reminded that exactly three weeks ago, the deputies unanimously gave the government its vote of confidence? The government has in fact just finished reading out a programme at the forefront of which was the review of the constitution.

With the ground thus cleared, I feel justified in making the following statements:

“Right now Lebanon is exercising its rights, as is the government responsible to the Chamber. Unilaterally modifying the Lebanese constitution (because this is not about the French constitution) does not suspend any conversations, nor cancel any existing obligations.

“Let us make our laws in harmony with the independence that we have been given, that we have received twenty times in twenty different ways. *Later we can call it the law. On the one hand, there will be a constitution that is compatible with proper independence. On the other*

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Minister, the Speaker of Parliament, and several ministers and deputies. The Constitution was then suspended and the Parliament dissolved. The arrival of General Catroux, permanent delegate of the Free French Forces in the Levant and the intervention of Great Britain helped diffuse the crisis. On November 21, Helleu was recalled and the situation returned to a status quo. On November 22, all the arrested politicians were freed and the political institutions reactivated. November 22 succeeded September 1 as the day of commemoration of Lebanese independence.

<sup>18</sup> *Op. cit. n°17.*

<sup>19</sup> An organisation formed on June 3, 1943 in Algiers with the aim of directing the French war effort. It was headed by General de Gaulle and quickly became a *de facto* government. In May 1944 it took the name of Provisional Government of the French Republic.

*hand, reservations will not be prescribed when it is the law. Thus, we will live with a happy compromise saying that for now, on both sides, we will just have to take things as they come.”*

It seems to me that this is the language of good sense, a human language. This is not a time for compatibility and expertise. This is a time for love, friendship and memories.

7 November 1943

### **About a Review**

Yesterday afternoon, the Chamber of Deputies wisely reviewed the constitution<sup>20</sup>. Some articles were modified, others repealed. Talk throughout was rational, deferential and befitting the occasion.

This morning I find myself face to face with this major event without it having disturbed my sleep or troubled my thoughts. That some of the text has disappeared or taken another form changes nothing in my soul. I only feel that we are coming closer to the truth.

Phrases that, in my eyes, were only words and could be no more than words, gave way to a vision, to a less artificial way of seeing things. All these tired, worn-out terms—like ‘mandate’ as a noun, verb and adjective—were no longer themselves, or how the law considered them, or as school defined them. In my eyes, they were nothing more than a group of fictions, a collection of masks, an absence of faces.

Has France ever needed a mandate in this country? She can call herself our friend by virtue of a divine right. What does this empty, illogical, diplomatic rhetoric mean? It is true that reservations have been expressed, and others may arise. These do not trouble us. Whether or not it rains or shines today, the atmosphere will seem lighter.

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<sup>20</sup> *Op. cit. n°17.*

We other Lebanese feel, without temerity, that we are on the path to political truth. What would we not give this morning, if we were asked for it freely? ... by forgetting ulterior motives and suspicions, which have stalked us in the past, and still stalk us today ....

But time must pass. Prejudices must be destroyed, wounds healed and emotions untangled.

This morning, after the calm mediation of the night, one thing that seems beyond doubt is the quivering sensitivity of the Lebanese people who have, for so long, given up everything that political economy calls property and wealth, preferring instead the freedom to choose.

9 November 1943

### **Continuity and Movement**

The Lebanese people have made a step towards each other. A step that enables them to offer their hands to each other. Who can fault this in good faith?

This is the Lebanon that is solemnly accepted by the minority that disputes it, and considered by all to be something intangible. *Lebanon as it is today, with its current borders. An independent and sovereign Lebanon.*

I see no room for complaint. Nor do I see any danger in this fact containing some kind words—honest and manly words.

There was every reason to escape division in these circumstances.

‘But these are only appearances,’ they said to us. ‘Appearances hide ulterior motives—and what are you going to do about them?’

Ah! Yes, there are ulterior motives; there always are. Like those who pretend to be saints preaching fear to sow discord.

To these people, we must respond that the first goal of politics is to help citizens and all people live together in agreement, and it is up to the realities of life to blame those who are wrong.

The century of the airplane is not that of caravels.

Politics implies continuity, no doubt, but it also implies movement. The history of all peoples, and that of France in particular, provides thousands of examples of this. What was inconceivable yesterday becomes inevitable today. Human matter is malleable. It calls for intelligent action—potentially auspicious action.

So: we contrast good faith and our moral and material forces with real or imaginary ulterior motives, no matter where they come from. With our eyes wide open, we go on our way.

Lebanon is a country of associated confessional minorities. All these minorities must find a place for themselves and have full rights. This is both the *raison d'être* of the country and the source of its originality.

This is why nothing is more ridiculous than saying that our Armenian compatriots, for example, are threatened by some kind of danger. All that we ask of one another is that we be good Lebanese.

Lebanon offers a homeland for all those who deserve it. It always has and it always will.

30 November 1943

### **Careers**

A Westerner has many career options. We have fewer resources here, and there are fewer options the further East and closer to the Equator you go. Nevertheless, our future is linked to our horizons. We can no longer limit ourselves to the beaten track and stubbornly insist on all doing the same thing. We must have new careers, privileged careers to attract and retain wealthy clients from distant shores.

One of the best possible investments the state could make would be to contribute actively to such an effort—to create scientists and laboratories, specialists and specialities. It should see to it that large numbers of Lebanese people have general ideas and specific knowledge; and that they become experts in many different fields.

This is a condition of our well-being.

There are careers that are very noble but also very thankless. They enrich the whole city but make no one man richer. Their goal is research only for the public good and the delight of discovery. They involve humble work and a taste for sacrifice that is born of love. These careers have given a Sylvestre Bonnard<sup>21</sup> to fiction and a Branly<sup>22</sup> to real-life. They also show that a modest existence can sometimes lead to glory.

In Lebanon we need such people and heroes, but also experts of all kinds. An enormous client-base is forming around us. It will approach us from all directions the moment we have masters of arts and science here.

Palestine is experiencing this right now. Not an entirely voluntary experience, perhaps, but an impressive one nonetheless.

While racist countries brutally rejected renowned scientists, Palestine welcomed them. Now we're seeing the Lebanese head to Palestine for services that the Palestinians asked of the Lebanese not long ago. Palestine's entire economy is gaining from it. It remains for us to make a profit by becoming more understanding, and more vigilant.

1 February 1944

### **Searching for Happiness**

Ideas, as well as ambitions and capabilities, increasingly lead to war. Each school of thought (or each philosophy) sees the world—and the future of the world—in a certain way.

Well-known formulas exist. Are any still completely unknown? Everything has been said, even if not everything has been tried.

Everyone is searching for happiness, whether for themselves or for others. It is a bitter and no doubt futile search. A man's life is always too short to find true happiness.

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<sup>21</sup> French painter (1867-1947). One of the major post-impressionist colorists.

<sup>22</sup> French physicist (1844-1940). He invented the first detector of hertzian waves and conceived the principle of broadcasting antennas.

Slowly, or brutally, in accordance with climates and circumstance, a universal experience is developing. Life in society is presumptuously devoted to discipline and laws, until the moment when, tired of illusions and disillusionment, it destroys everything and starts again.

In some countries and in some regions, people's needs are much less than in others. Certain climates are more favourable than others to sensitivity and (platonic) love. Even when we examine these factors alone, how can we expect solutions to be the same everywhere?

The laziness and daydreaming of the East have their own excuses; the same is true of the bitter struggle for life in the West. East and West are two words that for me designate above all degrees of latitude: 'lands of sun and sleep' are temperate lands—lands of fog and snow are where necessity demand more activity.

What social legislation would be equally useful for all temperatures and temperaments? What ration card would be equally valid for a person from the North and a person from the South?

What random uniformity, what standard clothing, what identical material and intellectual nourishment would be acceptable for all those who live on earth? (Not to mention the merit and effort of each individual; the services which individuals render to the society upon which they depend; or variable rights which may go against them.)

As the North is more powerful than hot countries, ideologies and governments have descended from North to South. It would be foolish to say they've always brought happiness. There has been no progress without emotion and reason curbing excess. But from the moment science categorised everything except people (who remain individually unique and distinct no matter how great their number), science has deliberately come into conflict with peace—because people must defend their personalities.

If man is nevertheless conquered, if he succumbs to the incredible monotony that certain technologies impose, if he lets himself purely and simply be numbered by a machine in the name of uniformity, then the entire human race will be in danger.

People would become nothing more than slaves to their own laws and discoveries.



It's with all this in mind that we must support or reject one or another of the systems that have been suggested to us today in the name of progress and civilization.

19 April 1944

### **South Lebanon**

That little winding river at the foot of the ruins of Beaufort, the green waters of the Litani that frame the wild eruption of oleanders, must be seen in this season. It is pure joy that flows in this narrow fragrant valley. As in days gone by, the old chateau, or only its shadow, towers high on the bare mountaintop. The history of this country is inseparable from its landscape. Every rock is a memory, every village a kingdom. It is true that today's inhabitants seem indifferent to this grandeur. The site itself is more alive than they are. One must go only a little further to find, on the mountain, in houses of white stone and red roofs surrounded by greenery, poignant faces. But it all has a Barrèsian austerity reminiscent of El Greco and the area around Toledo.

South Lebanon is not renowned or loved enough. It has long suffered from a kind of disgrace. Perhaps exhausted by its vibrant past, it acts as though it is isolated from the world. Little by little, over a period of a thousand years, it has been forgotten... For many reasons, we must return here with all our hearts—to this country that is the eternal Lebanon, this extension of our mountains that leads to the gentle slopes of the Galilee, these fringes of Tyre and Sidon where sacred footsteps still echo. It is the duty of all Lebanese people, and it becomes more pressing every day.

Increasingly, our 'progress' in the South seems crucial. We must start building the settlements that others wish to build. We must line the length of the coast with the orange trees that can grow there, as well as many other crops that can be cultivated on these coveted lands.

Lebanon has obligations to the South just as it does to the Beka'a Valley. Both places have been a bit too neglected. Still, we must take masses of material and spiritual wealth from the soil and the darkness of all the provinces.

For the future of Lebanon, all of us here should know and remember this.

1st June 1944

### **Administrative Reform**

A reform is 'a change effected in order to improve something'. This must rank among the most overused words in the language. Change for the better is excellent and I am wary of disputing the good intentions of those who promise it. The important thing is that something is changed, and that improvement, however visible, ensues.

All one asks of 'improvement' is that it be noticeable, rather than simply a new definition of indifference and immobility.

For change and progress in how Lebanon (and its neighbours) are administered, the administrators must get better at discerning what they are doing, and who they are administrating.

And to begin with, one fact that has become clear: *to improve, you must do more than simply copy others*. Our administration will improve when we know more about the country's circumstances and the role of its officials. For example, is it not the case that everything, or nearly everything, stops in summer? People do nothing because it's too hot. Yet Westerners here, both military and civilian, continue to work. They wear lighter clothes, fasten a fan to the ceiling, sit near an air conditioner, plan so they work more at night and get the job done, while our people are suffocating in cluttered rooms, sweating to death, sleepy from the early hours of the morning until the moment they can seek refuge in the pleasant idleness of a seaside coffee, as though it were a deliverance.

Clearly, with summer temperatures you cannot work without making adequate arrangements. Why don't the state services capable of doing so operate from somewhere in the mountains, for instance? This would be better than plunging the administration into a state of lethargy for four months. There are remedies for heat. First of all, as we've just discovered, there

are the mountains. Then there are all kinds of machines that the New World produces abundantly in normal weather for use in the tropics. We should consider them for the future of our administration.

While one of our administration's worst faults is its ambition-sapping location, another is our inability to adapt to the climate. There is a lack of a sporting spirit in this, and too great a preference for luxury clothing over a simple uniform; luxury is the enemy of work and order. In social terms, the administration is the slowest thing we have. It recalls Rimbaud's *Assis*, or the picturesque scenes that Courteline discovered in the 'serails' of the East. People elsewhere protect themselves against cold and numbness. Here we must do something against the heat.

It is not just a matter of heat and humidity, however. We could also adopt more lively approaches to work. Perhaps we could also adopt a new spirit, a driving force at its peak, a brilliant and active inspection of everything, and a deep desire to reach what industrialists call 'an output which is qualitatively and quantitatively better at a lower cost price'.

12 July 1944

#### **Some Comments on the Chamber**

*Michel Chiha frequently reminds us what Lebanon is -- 'a country of associated confessional minorities'—and underlines the importance of the Chamber of Deputies as a meeting place: 'When you dissolve the Assembly, you inevitably move the debate into sanctuaries or their shadows'.*

*At the same time, he irrefutably demonstrates that, given our current state of affairs, confessional affiliation seems natural and legitimate for us: 'Why brutally change things that have been like this for centuries? Despite abuse and errors, it is confessionalism that has taught Lebanon tolerance'.*

*Michel Chiha gave a great deal of importance to the actual number of deputies out of concern for safeguarding public peace and a healthy harmony between the different Lebanese communities.*

In Lebanon (as in most countries), the Chamber of Deputies is an essential part of political life. Associated confessional minorities (as in our case) need *collective representation* in order to stay associated<sup>23</sup>.

None of them could actually dominate the others without threatening the very existence of the state. The oft-cited Swiss example is key to this perspective. Switzerland, the most democratic country in the world, maintains a remarkable number of governments and assemblies in the name of peace and well-being among its peoples.

A country of mountains, Switzerland—industrial, rural, peasant rustic Switzerland—maintains the most intricate and complicated government apparatus in the world. This comes from a love of order and harmony.

We do not wish to investigate whether or not other nations can avoid national representation. We only know that for us, as imperfect as the system may be, national representation is a natural condition of our continued survival. If you eliminate one confession, you will create a rebellion. This has been proven to us hundreds of times. If the different elements that make up Lebanon do not find themselves at the heart of the Assembly, they risk scattering. The ultra-conservative European delegates from 1860-1864 understood this well enough. (They were not content with establishing the principles of electoral representation; they even controlled the mixture.)

The history of contemporary Lebanon has given us extreme proof that every time the Assembly has disappeared, every time the principle of representation has died and died violently,

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<sup>23</sup> The repartition of parliamentary seats between the religious communities had been made until 1989 on the basis of 6 seats for Christian communities against 5 seats for the Muslim ones. The Taef Agreement of 1989 modified the Constitution and adopted the principle of equal representation for Christians and Muslims.

a truly confessional authority has replaced the Assembly, and one or more sanhedrins were born *automatically*. The nature of things makes it this way. *When confessions have no political representation, religious chiefs will naturally represent them*. Thus, rather than tempering themselves and blending into the life of the nation as befits a country this century, confessional issues bounce back and are exacerbated.

All of this seems very clear if you genuinely want to apply its spirit. Having accepted the principle, however, when you devote yourself to an Assembly, this Assembly must still do its job. The holder of legislative power must sit and study, debate, deliberate and legislate.

Today I will not discuss the whole problem, or what must be done so that the Lebanese Chamber gets a better 'return'. I am content to note that like all institutions and enterprises in this country, it must confront the heat and laziness of the summer for several long months each year, and that it is no doubt difficult to ask deputies to meet normally and attend to their work from May to November. Nevertheless, the affairs of the state can clearly not sit idle this entire time.

Why doesn't the Chamber of Deputies convene outside Beirut in the summer months, somewhere cool and pleasant up in the mountains? Why not in Bayt ad-Din or Dayr al-Qamar, for example?

Taking such a decision is easy. And yet we wait, at some cost to the deputies, who must be asked to sit and work even in the heat, aided only by some fans and cold drinks.

The dilemma is as follows: on the one hand, the Chamber of Deputies is a vital institution in Lebanon; on the other, when it performs badly, it quickly becomes unpopular.

Obviously, then, we need a Chamber of Deputies, and it must work and deal with the affairs of the state in a reasonable way.

If we do not deal with the difficulties of our extremely long summer, the Chamber will lose four or five months to lethargy. As for the rest of the year, the Chamber itself must be more conscious of its role, power, and duties (it is a question of habit and thus tradition and time). Commissions must meet, reporters must make their reports and the government must not be

reduced to impotence because of the Assembly's inaction. In short, each and every person must work.

30 August 1944

### **Lessons of the Past**

We will not copy those who, after toppling a political regime (be it a monarchy, or something else) in their country, become bent on destroying all its monuments and symbols. Such an act turns the most civilized people into barbarians.

This comment is only meant by way of example. Political evolution (according to the laws of nature) *demands respect for the past. Without it, nothing in this world would remain standing.*

Every age has its greatness, even in its most tragic and sombre moments. When we discuss the Middle Ages, we forget chivalry and cathedrals. When we discuss the monarchy, we forget that it built the world and spawned republics. When we discuss republics, we forget it was they that showed the people the importance of the individual, as well as our weaknesses, and the role that each citizen can fulfil in his own country.

Whether ancient or recent, famous revolutions have certainly shown where the unleashing of angers and passions can lead. They have brutally suppressed philosophers, scientists and poets, and they have destroyed monuments of human art and intelligence. All that we can say is that they were wrong, and that such violence was a grave insult to reason and beauty.

In gathering my thoughts around my memories this September 1<sup>st</sup>, as I do every year, I am taking pains to reflect upon the need to advance politically and socially without burning the bridges which have allowed us to cross the gulfs of time. *Ours is one of the longest histories there is. It is full of all sorts of events. It is familiar to the whole world from the teaching of ancient history. It is part of the heritage of all of civilized humanity.*

It is this long and endless history which led us, after innumerable upheavals, on one September day after the Great War, with changes and emotions still running through us, to define our living space and to give this eternal country its physical form which had shifted for so long, like the long, transparent veils of women blowing this way and that in the wind.

What excuse does this country have for not closely following its history? Who will understand it then? The narrow, mountainous and maritime land that we live in bears the imprint of the most venerable human activity. All the museums of the world have mined elements of their greatness from this land. They proudly display mutilated statues and fragments of columns with their residual, infinite variety of ancient, wonderful and laborious art.

We recall these things with a wisdom inspired by the soothing lesson of time. This country has long served as a route and passageway for empires on the move. It is one of the few countries that has always seen this as a necessity, not an affront.

Experience has shown that you cannot escape unscathed from such a fate, and that it is one of those places burdened by a sort of servitude to human space in motion. Courageously, this country has assimilated all those who have extended their stay here.

And so here we are on September 1<sup>st</sup>: more alive, more lucid and more determined than ever. We are certain to obey eternal forces by leading them to our aid.

On this first of September, Lebanon is clarifying the national and international stances of the Near East in its current shape. *In a friendly and brotherly way, it presents itself as an historical and human necessity, and it is welcomed as such by the universal brotherhood of nations.*

1 September 1944

### **Languages are a Blessing**

It is good to 'outfit' and 'equip' a country. These words are fashionable today, as vague as they are, and a sign of progress. Today we know what 'outfit' means. We also know that it is agreeable to possess all kinds of new scientific inventions. Let us outfit ourselves then; let us

equip ourselves, since this is the price of both our individual and collective happiness. Let us not, however, take the path of decadence.

If we in Lebanon had to choose between a five-year plan and the loss of a language, we would keep the language and the knowledge that it represents.

We are not under any illusions. No outfitting, no equipment is worth intellectual and spiritual decline.

I write this assessing what this country will become if its means of expression are diminished rather than increased, if for the somewhat egotistical and futile pleasure of confining it to one language, we prevent its intelligence and its opinions from blossoming.

In Palestine, by reviving Hebrew with pomp and ceremony, Zionism sought to strengthen its historical and political situation. Its attempts to retain universal languages are minimal. Except for its origins, there is no relationship between the dead Hebrew language of the past and the Arabic language of today, as sonorous and alive as ever. If the supporters of the Arabic language, of which I am one, want it to live because it is not only an instrument of poetry, but also a means of power, they must understand that it cannot live with the windows shut; the vast supplies of oxygen that surround it must be replenished (as is the case for all languages given similar conditions).

The current and future glory of the Arabic languages requires that today, thousands of the most educated and learned Lebanese people not be condemned to silence. For a time, it will need to support a legitimate effort to make Arabic, to a large degree, *the distinguished language of everyone*, and so that Lebanese people can express themselves in a way that feels good and natural to them.

What is more, rights acquired over twenty-five or thirty years cannot be abolished in just one day. And it is in the interest of the country that they are not.

Many Lebanese people, and important ones at that, grew up in a certain intellectual environment, where they reached the most significant positions in the service of arts and letters. On the strength of treaties, their minds were nourished by renowned foreign authors, which is



why they have been, without exception, a great honour to Lebanon and other Arab countries. It should be noted that they are not any less Lebanese or any less patriotic. Today this country cannot be condemned to silence without depriving it of one of its most obvious blessings.

Here I appeal to all those who cherish Arabic, to the most refined, educated and learned people. These people are also those most devoted to the life of the mind and, when someone speaks to them of equipment and various other issues, they know how to defend our possessions and our most sacred freedoms with all their heart.

7 November 1944

### **On Public Opinion**

Public opinion is what the masses think. It is vital to bear this in mind whenever the masses are in command.

For a long time the masses were nothing in this world. Absolute masters of peoples and cities were never held accountable to anyone, except in those tragic moments when the masses swept everything away, like raging and unbridled elements of nature. When the masses just go with the crowd, however, they are not public opinion; they are herds and hordes. They are merely a force of nature: the opposite of an instrument of intelligence and reason.

People need to think, and they should be able to express their thoughts on matters of public concern. That they should join together with those who govern them by demonstrating their propensities and preferences is to be expected. Nevertheless, this obviously assumes that they are people of a certain quality, and that philosophers and learned men are not put at the mercy of a brutal and stupid will.

There is a greatness in consulting the people, but to prevent it from becoming madness the people must be elevated to a relative understanding of their elite, and to the common sense that acknowledges the superiority or authority of the few.

For people to formulate their opinions sensibly, it is important to give them sufficient awareness of the mechanism of the state, the political system, and the administration of the country before they form their judgements.

Who would dream of turning to public opinion to resolve a mathematics or physics problem? To make this feasible with politics, the people must be educated, beyond their instinct and intuition, towards a clear sense of the public interest.

This is why public opinion only exists in places where citizens are worthy of the phrases, in places where the social environment is developed enough to have reached an acceptable level of civilization.

This century, no mass of people with overly primitive customs can run a society safely. Letting them do so would be even more dangerous than letting children vote. Public opinion is malleable material, however, and human intelligence is keen and lively. You can find men, peasants of humble backgrounds who have lived far from towns, express themselves on the subject of government with great wisdom. (Villages and regions distinguish themselves in this way, and you will notice that in certain places and certain regions people have a natural instinct for what is in the public interest that does not exist a short way down the road.)

To return to public opinion more directly, allow me to insist we educated it so as not to become subject to its whims and eccentricities. *Today, the authorities must speak to the people to teach public-spiritedness, outside school: this is our most influential plan yet.* A people like ours must be able to read, every week, in newspapers, on seraglio doors, the walls of buildings, and even in the smallest villages, a brief, clear and substantial message from the authorities, telling them *what is expected of them, what proposals have been made for their welfare, and why things are working or not working.*

Almost all Lebanese people are literate. They now must be given something of substance to read.

16 November 1944

### Simple Speech

“*Let no one say that I have said nothing new—the arrangement of the subject is new.*” So said Pascal,<sup>24</sup> and we should heed his words.

Incidentally, originality is not a prerequisite for truth. When your mission is to write, you don’t always need new subjects, ‘new subject matter’. Sometimes you must repeat the same things, without fear, out of concern for the truth (and out of respect for yourself, your readers or listeners).

If someone approaches a subject with some originality, we will follow Pascal’s lead and not complain. Nature, the same as ever, changes from one minute to the next. A bit more light or darkness and the whole landscape changes. We are offered an evocative word, image, or symbol and suddenly we find ourselves in a new state of being.

For every latitude, or even for every country if you like, there are a certain number of predestined subjects. It all depends on the people being addressed: their tastes, temperaments, preferences and weaknesses.

When it comes to politics, sociology and even morality, people from cold countries must be spoken to differently than people from hot countries. Talk of discipline would shock English or Scandinavian people. Discipline is in their nature; you could say it’s in their bones. Suggesting romanticism as the rule to the people of the East, meanwhile, might simply encourage foolishness.

Moralists, sociologists, politicians and journalists are constantly addressing people. *It is thus natural that the same speeches are repeated, the same words start to enlighten the people and inform them about vital subjects.* It is also natural that rather than stir up dangerous passions, they aim to fascinate people’s hearts and minds with the noblest causes.

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<sup>24</sup> French philosopher, scientist and writer (1623-1662). He dedicated his life and his writings to faith and piety.

If I often speak to our compatriots and neighbours about discipline, if I consider the formation of willpower as the starting point for public-spiritedness, if these basic things recur time and time again in my writing, it is because in our country, these ideas are as necessary as our daily bread.

In Lebanon (and the region), *it is a fact that people are generally very indulgent of themselves and very harsh on others*. We wish to see the opposite: *for people to be more rigorous with themselves and more tolerant toward others*.

Critics must adapt their actions to fit their haranguing. They must not do that which they criticize and denounce.

To conclude, I return to Pascal.

Pascal says: ‘When we find words repeated in a discourse and, in trying to correct them, discover that they are so appropriate that their modification would spoil the discourse, we must leave them alone; this is a sign ...’

Recalling Pascal, we once again ask the Lebanese people to strengthen the country by their individual efforts, and to serve it by submitting to the basic discipline that constitutes group effort and makes it efficient; we must never grow weary of repeating these same words.

What the law forbids must be accepted as forbidden. What the state requires must be considered as due. Taken in the right way, this does not in any way exclude admonitions and disputes.

16 December 1944

### **Public-Spiritedness and Social Duty**

A daring and vigorous New Year’s resolution is to do your duty as a citizen as strictly and fully as possible. This is perhaps what is most lacking here in Lebanon: the community, public interest, and the meaning of public things. Whether in terms of obeying the law, paying taxes, or social services in any form, we must take the necessary decision *to submit ourselves to*

*the responsibilities of living in a human society.* At the same time, we must *learn to take the idiosyncrasies of life in Lebanese society into account*—the extreme diversity of backgrounds, customs, needs, and obvious facts that do not allow people to be strictly categorized, forced to use the same supply card, or given the same traditions.

Lebanon is one of the most diverse countries in the world. On another level, the mountains and the sea make it so wonderfully homogeneous. But its people, its ‘citizens’, make turn it into a bizarre picture of striking differences.

Personal status codes and laws, ideas, manners, distinctive ways of living and thinking, different and contradictory customs, the sophistication of some and the simplicity of others, desires as varied as the colours of the setting sun, innumerable dreams and illusions, shocking archaism and unprecedented modernism, contrasts, and an inevitable mix of everything...

We should not fear displaying this picture in all its stripped-down reality to make Lebanese teaching specialists and sociologists think more rigorously and to temper the strictness of theorists and critics. But this does not mean that we shouldn’t appeal to the elite here; to the people who feel, reason, and understand more.

Clearly, if we needed to make laws for each category of individuals, personal status codes and laws would expand to alarming proportions. *We must search for a way that is acceptable to everyone*, something that will satisfy at least the rural and urban person, the people of the mountains and those of the coast, the Lebanese people of the South, North and East. An infinite variety of atmospheres and peoples, but a relative uniformity of landscapes and space.

It must be said to the most enlightened, understanding and solid citizens: the future of this country is *what you make of it*. Whether or not you accept your social duty (which is one reason you deserve your elite status) will determine whether this country lives or dies. Its ability to withstand its weaknesses depends on the extent to which you choose to help it. All the same, there are enough Lebanese people who we can justly ask more of this New Year, Lebanese people from whom we can justly expect a greater effort and contribution than others. This is obviously true from a material point of view, but is even truer from a moral point of view.

If you'd rather not understand how difficult it is for this country to cut across and consolidate itself without a thousand daily allowances, at least give up the idea of philosophizing in a vacuum.

Lebanon is like a building in which the biblical patriarch and the civilized decadent live in close proximity to each other.

By generously carrying out their duties, average Lebanese people (which, unparadoxically, means the elite) should be able to understand that they are the backbone of this country and the very condition upon which its continuity rests.

3 January 1945

**Selim Takla<sup>25</sup>**

A patriot. A brave man. A friend for many years. I will not hide my sorrow and distress. Service to Lebanon enlightened and dominated the life and death of Selim Takla. This man died working hard, in the prime of life, at the height of his faculties, with a maturity of reason and emotion. He died under the weight of daily tasks and fulfilled duties.

If a good worker's day is now done, this brutal end was not expected. Yet for weeks Selim Takla made it understood like a secret complaint. Fatigue weighed heavy on his shoulders. Weariness dulled his eyes.

A twenty-year long political battle drained him of energy. This was one of many battles in which for years he found incomprehension, persecution and injustice. When faced with this ordeal, he bounced back with magnificent courage each time. He emerged from these inhuman experiences each time more of a man than before.

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<sup>25</sup> Selim Takla held the Foreign Affairs portfolio in the Cabinet formed by Riad Solh in October 1943. He was the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister of Justice in the government that Abdul-Hamid Kerame had just formed in January 1945 when he died suddenly, right in the prime of his life.

When harvest time came, before the wheat was ripe, before the time had come for well-earned satisfaction, for meagre earthly rest, for the relative peace that befits our destiny, Selim Takla died.

Is true that, in any event, we had finally done justice to this upright and honest man who was so nobly above all material things; to this Lebanese man from the Zouk hills, from the ancient and tender mountains, from the landscape of the sea that saw us born and that is our whole life; to this great servant of Lebanon, who departed just as soon as he had taken our foreign affairs into his hands for a second time, as Minister of Justice.

I was moved by the fact that Salim Takla was, this last time, Minister of Justice for just one day. Because he was a just man, he was extremely scrupulous about equitable justice. I do not believe that in his life he ever did anyone wrong. Thus, I can see him appearing before God as an honest Lebanese man, a defender of the law, and simply as himself—a citizen and father of a model family.

The farewell that I address to him here is a farewell of friendship, affection and respect. It comes from the bottom of my heart, the soil of Lebanon and all our tears.

12 January 1945

### **Let Us Reform**

The report of a conference held by a young lawyer, Mr. Georges Pharès QC, at the Phalange House, brings us an account of a searching comment made by one conference participant: *'I blame not our independence, nor this or that political regime that is worth less than the people, but rather each one of us...'*

The title of the conference was: *Let us find a solution for disorder.*

It is comforting to see that the ideas I have struggled for over such a long time have finally found their voice.

For more than twenty years, the trials and tribulations of the Lebanese Republic have been blamed on its laws. These laws have been criticized with rage and modified with passion. We have refused to consider that these laws were made for people, to be applied by people; and we have forgotten, or pretended to forget, that the laws are only worth what the people are worth.

In a nation where many people lack the necessary education, the Decalogue itself and all the Constitutions in the world will be of only trifling importance. Laws have virtue only insofar as they are understood and obeyed, and insofar as it is true that 'ignorance of the law is no excuse'.

If you impose the most learned legislation on a country with anarchic ideas and lax morals, it will only lead to disorder.

In the same case, moreover, the more complicated the law, the more deadly any disobedience.

How can we ask men of the people, and the bourgeois as well, who we still cannot convince to obey a law forbidding them to throw their rubbish in the middle of the street, to obey a law requiring them to pay income tax strictly?

How can we ask people who have been taught to believe that stealing from the state means they are clever and can stand up for themselves to build up the country and care about the public interest?

If the law is powerless, this is without a doubt because it is at times poorly constructed, or has failed to adapt easily to its human environment, but by far the most common cause is a prevailing lack of discipline on the part of both individuals and the group.

Besides, critics of public life too often commit the same reprehensible acts for which they reproach others so vehemently.

They denounce abuses from which they secretly benefit and, with their sarcastic remarks, condemn the law that can do nothing about it...



There is no law, human or divine, that has not been violated. The entire question is one of individual morality and the meaning of life in society with the help of the law. These things must become its unshakeable foundations.

I have pointed out many times that the Lebanese people no longer have much time for traditions. Speed and discovery have added to the human ebb and flow in our country. Modern life has subjected us to an incredible amount of coming and going.

The country is feeling the effects of this, as is the law.

The first way to correct all of this is education, an individual's upbringing. This means, first of all, a solid conception of the family, and then of social life—and *with it all the conditions of life in a homeland*. Here, the diversity of Lebanon and its people is a problem and a stumbling block. Rather than attacking laws, in agreement with Mr. Georges Pharès QC's report, we must first vigorously ask each person to reform himself: what is vital to public-spiritedness is, above all, a sense of propriety.

19 January 1945

### **'Confessional' Lebanon**

When we are seriously ready for Lebanon to stop being a 'confessional' country, each confession will have to accept occasional under-representation without too much fuss. Such moments would be balanced by moments of overrepresentation.

Personally, I see no reason why this shouldn't happen, but we have formed a bad habit of locking ourselves into a pattern of incredible rigidity. Bad habits are persistent. Like most errors, they give the appearance of truth. When their point of departure becomes no longer visible, their point of arrival takes on incredible proportions.

In Lebanon, the strictest proportional confessional representation is, sensibly, respected in the all-controlling Chamber of Deputies<sup>26</sup>. For the time being, we have acknowledged that this is an excellent and necessary balance. But elsewhere? In the administration and everywhere else? *Is it not enough that the basic guarantee of proportionality exists in the Chamber?* Must we necessarily follow the liturgy of St. Jacques the Minor, St. Maroun, or St. Jean Chrysostome to fulfil such a purpose in the state?

My point here is equally obvious and equally valid for all communities. If a well-respected Druze, for example, represents everyone in a certain circumstance, what problems will we encounter? And if at a certain moment in time two or three confessions are not present at the heart of government, what will happen? Everything will proceed in the same way, provided, of course, that no one is harmed. But this is what we must agree on. If every community, and every people wishes to live holding a scale in their hands, weighing one minister across against another, one court clerk across against another, we might as well give up. The price will be unsolvable problems for our country.

May I make an appeal here to religious leaders who are also leaders of confessional communities? Their tolerance will, to a large extent, inspire the tolerance of their citizens. If they decide to teach their people how an excess of justice can lead only to excessive injustice, many ambitions and fervours will subside. Then the Republic, by respecting everyone's laws on a daily basis, would function more normally to the greater benefit of each one of us.

It is well known that I am one of those people who vigorously maintains that because Lebanon is made up of confessional minorities, there must be a permanent balance between them for Lebanon's survival to be assured. This balance is found in national representation and must be sought in the Chamber. As for the rest, should we not slowly let go of our prejudices and give more flexibility to the workings of the machine?

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<sup>26</sup> *Op. cit.* n°23.

If the strongest communities act as an example, the others will naturally follow. The stubbornness of some is due to nothing more than fear. Would just a moment of tolerance not ease all of this for good?

26 January 1945

### **Culture and Languages**

There's nothing misguided about stating that Lebanon needs more culture. Nothing 'cultural' ever frightens a place. We will incorporate everything 'cultural', to use a useful neologism, throughout Lebanon.

We speak the Arabic language to perfection, but not at the expense of other languages. We believe ourselves perfectly capable of managing several at once. No form of ignorance will persuade us to become ignorant along with it.

We will not relinquish any of our means of expression, or what makes up our future and our strength.

It is in the interest of the Arab world that we read all its books, absorb knowledge on its behalf, and converse easily with the wider world.

This is the eternal mission we are blessed with, and we will not impoverish ourselves to satisfy puerile prejudices.

The true masters of the Arabic language, its greatest servants, are those who have acquired vast knowledge of it and beyond it. You cannot put yourself on the same level as the elite of the globe without having contact with the rest of the world. There is no weakness more dangerous than that which forces you to turn to a translator: 'traduttore, traditore.'<sup>27</sup>

Thus, it is proper that all young Lebanese people should know what we hope for, and what we wish for them.

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<sup>27</sup> *The translator is a traitor.*

There is no educated person in Europe or America who does not speak two or three languages. International assemblies, international relations and the interdependence of nations call for this and require it. We have more natural ability to become polyglots than most.

I am not writing these lines to appease people—that would be to diminish the importance of the country. I am simply writing about a basic truth, a daily necessity, and a fundamental element of our national and international existence and evolution. I feel sure that in saying this, I express the deepest sentiments of the elite, not only of Lebanon, but of all Arab countries.

Lebanon has served the Arabic language with distinction for more than a century. It will increasingly be one of the guiding lights of this renowned tongue. Lebanon, however, will also speak and write French, English, Turkish, Persian, Portuguese and Spanish as it pleases, insofar as it is necessary or pleasurable.

Eventually, Lebanon will be able to translate all the literary and scientific masterpieces of all languages into Arabic for the use of all Arabs, and pass on to the rest of the world everything beautiful and exhilarating that the Arabic language has managed to, and will continue to, produce.

27 May 1945

### **Horizons**

To renounce certain topics of conversation in Lebanon, we'd have to close down museums and give up discovering. At first, before getting upset, we'd all laugh. We'd wonder what major reason there could be for abolishing events that are doubtless fairly ancient, but have clearly had some impact on the world. Let's also recall, in order to satisfy certain people, that Arabs were Arabs long before Islam, and that Arabs—wherever they are and wherever they live—should not forget or renounce any part of their origins or their past.

The important and essential thing is that we are able to teach our children history without upsetting anyone, and also find reasons in history to ennoble and unite us.

It is a weak argument that tries to trace a country's beginnings to a specific moment in history. A nation's life is manifestly indivisible. Whether we like it or not, just as every living person returns to the very origins of life, current nations are the present end point, the result of a long evolution.

Such comments help us consolidate our social and political existence and continue beyond distorted memories and verbal conflicts.

Persistent little suspicions must become milder and less frequent.

*All we have here is a past and a history, just as we should share above all a desire to live together and make each other happy.* This is the only reasonable political and practical truth there is. What good will it do us to start discussing the Flood? The time has come for all Lebanese people (and definitely for all Syrians) to see things from a broader perspective, to nourish themselves with true freedom and real independence, in the individual and collective sense of the word. They must finally widen their horizons to match their destiny. The time has come to seek above all else to learn and understand, to gather the substance of the teaching of all human knowledge.

Anxieties that limit a vast world to a few borders, formulas and dates are pathetic anxieties indeed! Concerns that have no goal other than to shrink the curiosity of our children and our contemporaries are also pathetic.

In one fell swoop we must escape from our somewhat obscured location to address all these people resolutely, sensibly and indefinitely about tolerance and peace, peace and justice, justice and reason, reason and tolerance.

Only with tolerance can we build an indestructible house with the noblest materials of the East and West.

27 June 1945

### **Architects and Decorative Arts**

In general, the Lebanese lack the taste for order and smooth lines. They do not care for beautiful things and perfect work. For them, finishing touches are secondary or unimportant; too often, flaws that are largely out of sight are out of mind. Despite the serious progress of the last few years, they are clearly still lacking in artistic sensitivity.

There are many differences between indoors and outdoors, public squares and streets, houses and furniture. In general, even though some interiors have become charming, ugliness is the rule. Streets and façades have grown hideous since concrete became king.

Houses built fifty years ago or more are worth infinitely more than almost anything built this century. As basic as it was, there used to be architecture. Not any more. This isn't always the fault of architects; it is not them I am addressing.

Still, some outrageous errors in Beirut, some horrors, are attributable to amateur architects who should go to prison for their misdeeds.

When you build against the rules and against good taste, you make an error that lasts for eons. Revolting façades imposed on citizens offend everyone's eyes.

We can no longer leave our towns, villages and their architecture to the taste—or lack of taste—of each individual. Individual and group monitoring has become a necessity.

Besides, we should all remember that a badly built building, a building that lacks architecture, loses a considerable part of its value the moment it is finished.

We must hope that our children are better informed and more demanding than we have been in these matters.

It is time to improve Lebanese interior design by developing individual tastes.

The few attempts to save money still made by the petit bourgeois lead, too often, to hideous furniture. Government offices are distressingly furnished.

One way to inspire a Lebanese renaissance is to teach people to appreciate attractive buildings and beautiful things. Like everything else, this will demand some effort. Will they claim there are more pressing matters? No. This duty is as urgent as any other. Developing taste and harmony within cities complements independence. At a time of rapid construction and huge

furniture construction in Lebanon, there is no excuse for allowing this country to be content, indefinitely, with tasteless, poorly made, unfinished, ugly work.

13 January 1946

### **The Ideal and the Feasible**

*'Man is made in such a way that the religion of his heart changes with the times, and worships a master after worshipping freedom.'* Thus Mr. Camille Jullian<sup>28</sup> summarised a chapter of Fustel de Coulanges' work, *The Political Institutions of Ancient France*.

These two lines sum up the eternal saga of republics, empires and domination. History is made of such oscillations and rhythms. Anarchy calls the saviour 'providential', and the saviour himself, blinded by his power, perishes in the slave revolt.

Who would have thought that democracy—so highly vaunted during six years of war—would spawn so many avowed, secret detractors so soon? You would never have thought that the fervour with which people loved it would end in such a bitter awakening. Illusions are fading at a frightening rate. Anger and powerlessness are appearing on political stages everywhere. Elections, when they occur in Europe, are nothing but a demonstration of public opinion. Factions are on the rise. Sadness certainly, but hatred and the wish for discord even more so, are rising 'like the sea'. The world is not mature enough to escape the control of the gods.

I love democracy as much as anyone, but I cherish moderation along with it. Freedom has no more passionate supporter than I, but I know no freedom that comes without balance and constraints. I say that the world must breathe, but it will not breathe better with empty lungs.

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<sup>28</sup> French historian (1859-1933).

It is right that we denounce the disturbances responsible for the errors of our time. The only goal of those who preach revolution is profit. People with a grudge against the elite and the traditions of others only wish to impose their own will and laws on them.

Let me add one further thought on Lebanon. A certain unrest surrounds our institutions here. In truth, this is nothing new. Every other Lebanese person believes he is equipped to found and develop a constitution. All of this leads, depending on moods and circumstance, from democratic rapture to authoritarian rapture. The truth, however, after years of foundering in the mire, has become blinding.

*First of all, we will always need an Assembly, and all of this country's truly representative Assemblies will be of equal worth. On the other hand, our Constitution is one of the most authoritarian in the world.*

*In such conditions it is people, not laws, that we must focus on. It is people that must be reformed, in the sense that they must be educated politically. This will take time.*

Lebanese governments are not dismissed by the Chamber. They wear out on their own. They wear out so quickly because they do their job so badly. Rather than die a violent death, they fall into a fever or paralysis, and in trying to survive on credit, vanish even more quickly.

Such a spectacle prompts those with a taste for authority and order to react—and calls for 'strong government' to be built.

*Lebanon will long be a country of confessional compromise.* Let us not ask it to go against its nature. It will always be worth more walking with a limp than totally ruined. This should in no case be taken as an invitation to inertia.

22 February 1946

### **Need I Say It?**

*'When necessary, I will criticize the Lebanon of today as much as that of yesterday and tomorrow,' wrote Michel Chiha on September 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1943. While recognizing the merits of the*



*independence regime and its praiseworthy achievements in several spheres, Chiha devoted himself to identifying its errors and showing, with detachment and clarity, how to rectify them. No part of national life escaped his insight, and once he had detected what was wrong he would suggest an appropriate remedy. However, it was fundamental issues that engaged him the most—the singular nature of Lebanon’s calling in the world, the qualities of Lebanese people and their moral framework, the subordination of private interests to the public good, and safeguarding the noble face of freedom, spirituality, tolerance and independence in the Lebanese homeland.*

Let us take up the weekly title of Bainville<sup>29</sup> once again.

Need I say it? The dirty politics that have carried on for some time in Mount Lebanon is disturbing and upsetting. Rather than calming passions, it awakens and agitates them.

Repeated complaints can be heard in Kesrouan, the Shuf and elsewhere—I find these upsetting.

Without calling anyone’s good faith into question, it does seem that the mountains are too sensitive a region to be played with in this way. Mount Lebanon remains the nerve centre<sup>30</sup> of the country in more ways than one. For many reasons we must promote order and harmony there above all else. I am aware that dirty politics have been rife in Mount Lebanon since forever—but with Mount Lebanon, proper politics could never happen. *This, our most ancient province, which naturally incorporates Beirut, is the hardest to govern, and should be treated with the wisdom afforded by a calm, objective approach.*

As it happens, this doesn’t seem to be the case: I do not approve of the formulas of divisions and discord favoured by certain ambitions.

The troubles in the mountains didn’t begin yesterday<sup>31</sup>. That said, this is the region which from 1864-1914—fifty whole years<sup>32</sup>—knew an admirable peace. There is a happy medium and

<sup>29</sup> French historian (1819-1936).

<sup>30</sup> It was around Mount Lebanon that the state of Greater Lebanon was established in 1920 (*op. cit.* 12).

<sup>31</sup> Disturbances and massacres took place in Mount Lebanon (divided at the time in two caimmacamats) between Druzes and Maronites in 1841, 1843 and 1860.

a harmony in the mountains that should be respected and maintained. There are personal and confessional positions that must be considered and handled carefully. If we include all the mountains, then it is in the Shuf, more than anywhere, that we would like the coasts and the peaks, Shwayfat and Mukhtara, our friends the Arslans and the Joumblats<sup>33</sup>, and all the princes and barons, to stand by each other, help one another, and grow stronger instead of making war on each other. A similar truce would be infinitely desirable in Kesrouan. *The mountains are too dear to us, and their future is too promising for us to allow discord to prevail there, unimpeded.*

I know this is a tricky subject. As I touch upon it lightly this morning, I do so with all my fondness for the heights from which our horizons widen and stretch away endlessly into the distance.

Permit me to mention here that I was born more than fifty years ago in the Shuf. Here on the slopes of these mountains, in a place where the cicadas sing in the pine trees and from which you can see the dark velvet of olive trees extending all the way to the sea, I have a taste for peacefulness and order, particularly in what is for me the centre of Lebanon—the long chain of happy villages where the ancient heart of this country beats strongest.

7 March 1946

### **Balance and Moderation**

Must we really use even more serious language to speak of domestic affairs? This country seeks and desires peace. It needs it in every way—to settle its economic and social problems, to carry out administrative reforms, to establish its international credit.

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<sup>32</sup> After the massacres of 1860 that caused thousands of deaths, an international commission was set up, composed of representatives of the five powers (France, Great Britain, Prussia, Germany and Russia). In collaboration with the Ottoman power, the commission restructured the administration of Mount Lebanon, regrouping the two caimmacamats into one "Mutasarrifiah" that lasted until 1915.

<sup>33</sup> Two great feudal families that led the Druze Community.

This is why no system of fighting makes sense today, nor any scheme that risks creating passionate controversies and domestic battles.

Everything in Lebanon is balance and moderation. The general balance is our primary, permanent concern. So are local balances, of which the most immediately visible and noticeable is that of Mount Lebanon, that classical mountain where everyone is involved in politics, from the biggest village to the very last hamlet.

No government worthy of its name can fail to maintain balance and respect the traditional bases upon which it is built.

It is of course paramount that power in Lebanon always remain in the strongest, most expert hands, *but those who best take care of the country will inevitably be those who can keep the peace.*

Understand me well: peace for us is not simply the opposite of war. It is not merely a state of noticeable disarmament, it is not order which happens only in extreme circumstances with the consent of citizens. *For us, it is a profound tranquillity resulting from an equitable political system that forbids all violence against any minority at all, here in this country of minorities.*

*It is about bringing all the Lebanese communities together in a greater Lebanese community, and about resolving the big problems of the world that echo here. It is about governing this country with the active, tolerant and patient wisdom of its leaders of old, like the Great Fahkreddin<sup>34</sup>.*

Today's circumstances are of course different, and in some ways times are harder. One more reason, then, for us to find a place for all loyal forces and traditional values within honest, democratic, national institutions.

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<sup>34</sup> Druze Emir who, during his reign (1590 -1635), managed to achieve the unity of Lebanon within the geographical limits of the Greater Lebanon of 1920. He maintained his rule through a policy of alliances with all the tribal leaders of the country (principally the Maronites) and developed strong ties with certain countries in Western Europe (he spent five years in Florence at the court of Cosme II of Medicis). Annoyed by his increasing power and successes, the Ottomans had him executed along with three of his sons in Istanbul in 1635.

To do otherwise would be to lose ourselves in illusions, and to go against the grain at time when so many national and international questions demand our attention.

16 May 1946

### **Practical Elements of a Government Programme**

The first obligation of the coming government<sup>35</sup> is to re-establish the hierarchy of civic duties, and begin by maintaining order.

A misconception has led the public powers to resign (so often and so dangerously) as a stopgap measure rather than assert and courageously defend a principle.

Flattering the masses wrongs the people. Pretending not to see an error only makes it worse. This country needs order, more order, and still more order. I have been whispering and shouting this with the regularity of the passing seasons.

Governing is not for amateurs. You do not occupy the minister's chair to wait for people to come and shower praises on you amidst the commotion, or to prepare a lengthy and expensive election campaign. *To govern is to plan and to act, it is to battle against everything that is knowingly or unknowingly anarchic. It is to build up the country, not to help in the collapse of its foundations.*

The profound wish of this country's citizens is for a general turnaround, one that is psychological and moral above all else. *This means that it must start by regaining trust*, the basic element that has sadly been eroding and crumbling away for some time.

Whether lost or diminished, trust returns with the people and methods which inspire it. I know well that, for parliamentary or confessionary reasons, we only have a limited number of people to choose from here, but we can still find the right ones and see to it that they do more serious work.

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<sup>35</sup> Saadi Munla, who succeeded Sami Solh, formed on May 22, 1946, a cabinet with eight members. He resigned on December 10, following a vote of no-confidence by the Parliament against the government's economic policies.

What we lack hugely is an administrative doctrine. *The administration must finally be controlled honestly, and experts must be allowed to help it out of its self-inflicted ruts.*

Is it too much to ask for experts and inspectors? Is having a more vigilant and disciplined police force (in the most general sense of the word) too much to desire? Or leaders in sensitive positions who are leaders rather than weak and servile instruments?

In this newspaper, our long tradition of independence is matched by our ancient tradition of fairness and moderation. Here, truth can defend itself well enough by itself, and with simple words.

Thus, let us say with steadfast assurance that only control and technical expertise will defend us against anarchy. Because almost everything has become technical now. The age of inconsistent but rousing speeches, of unwarranted assertions, and well-turned but hollow phrases has passed.

The state and its officials, businesses and their staff, 'workers' of all categories, bosses and labourers, and all kinds of paid employees are panicking and being panicked. We must end this anxiety, this individual and collective agony, and this panic, which is all too often artificial. We must not improvise laws and decrees for everything and for nothing. Legislation has started to resemble a one-minute omelette. Why? Because formal demands and threats have abruptly succeeded slowness and forgetfulness.

An extremely competent and well-informed legislative committee devoted to studying, evaluating, and developing laws is absolutely essential. Too often this serious duty of the state is left *in extremis* to civil servants who are as devoted, brilliant and capable as one could wish for—but overworked.

Clearly we are stemming the flow of blood with bandages in more than one place. It is time, however, to end all of this trouble for the sake of the honour, security and tranquillity in this country so that dubious forces do not become the powers that be.

I know better than anyone that, on some level and for some time, good work has been done here. On another level, though, the opposite is true, albeit with all the best intentions in the world. Like many, however, I cannot be content with mere intentions.

22 May 1946

### **For a Return to Reality**

They say only provisional arrangements last. Will this remain true now that almost everything, everywhere is provisional?

All vaguely serious Lebanese policies will not lose sight of this mobility. The lesson we must take from this is that in the middle of provisional arrangements (and even though this world is fleeting), we can still successfully defend ourselves against political games and chance.

For this reason, we must above all maintain our balance when others seem to be losing their heads. Next we must avoid discord and rally all possible forces around everything that unites us.

I speak for our small country. The same formula is valid for bigger ones, even the biggest. But as I wrote some years ago, small enterprises sometimes run better than big ones.

When faced with the instability of others, let us take care of our own stability. Amidst universal disarray, let us endeavour to put our own affairs in order. Our problems are not always the same as those of the rest of the world. Let us therefore use methods most suited to solving our problems. And for our own safety, let us resist the seduction of the conflicting doctrines of our times.

Our country is structurally different to theirs. We ignore this fact (or pretend to not know it) when we somewhat foolishly transplant theories from the East and West on to Lebanon.

Here we should be watchful witnesses to the social tragedies of the world. We must be spectators who *are resolute about advancing further, who are better than others when faced with facts*, and who are determined to protect our most cherished possessions from anarchy.

What, then, are all these parties, party projects, and the dust they leave behind? Do we no longer happen to know what the Lebanese people consist of, or what ancient stuff they're made of? Are they not compartmentalized enough to escape further subdivision?

Liberalism, communism, socialism, authentic or false democracy (and not so long ago, hateful Nazism and fascism), to say nothing of perpetual opportunism—are these political triflings really made for us, a people that has been gathered together, *forever, in the name of the spirit of freedom, tolerance and faith*, in a protective and (above all else) spiritual homeland?

When all around you succumbs to empty and fearful unrest, it's clearly time to think about these things and return to reality. What tragic and futile experiences others have!

Here in Lebanon everything suggests that we proceed with wise and measured calm, traditional moderation. *We know that all the countries in the world still envy us, as we are.*

Let us not, by our own doing, commit the error of compromising what peace and happiness could remain for our people.

21 June 1946

### **Unemployment Problems**

Unemployment has been causing anxiety for quite some time. We have seen spiritual leaders be stirred by temporal things and legitimately ask for 'the daily bread' of those out of work. We need to help them so that heaven can help us.

Meanwhile, we have spent the past ten or twelve months without too many difficulties in this respect. The progress made by the construction industry has helped things and activity in this sphere continues. When construction moves forward, everything does.

So long as the state (and certain others) initiate work, and so long as there is an abundance of public works enterprises and sites, corporations that use manual labour will manage. This is the situation today. It is public knowledge that labour remains dear and rare.

What is hardest to make sense of is the predicament of ‘workers of the mind’, as Anatole France<sup>36</sup> called them; not only unemployed intellectuals, but those more humble people whose job is only to write correspondence or accounts. This category of decent people depends on the progress of business above all else. When business is slow, employing these people becomes difficult. Many an employer suffering from poor turnover is forced to lighten his expenses to survive.

Business feeds a good part of the Lebanese population. Assuming that the age of business has passed here would be a grave mistake. If not stifled by laws, the Lebanese will always find a way of buying things in order to resell them. They know how to operate among those less keen and mobile than they are.

The laws regarding foreign business that govern them, however, must still become less inhuman and more flexible.

Lebanon is an exceptional case in the Middle East. Elsewhere, very limited needs correspond to an often primitive agricultural or pastoral life. Here, the situation is different. Our needs are great and the standard of living is, in most cases, closer to that of the West. Here, even peasants are a different quality of people; they have other requirements. This is nothing new. For social and moral reasons, it has been like this forever.

We won’t be able to resolve the problems in Lebanon without remembering the huge variety of minute details and exertions that represent our individual and collective struggle for life. We change jobs here more easily than people almost anywhere else, and very often we’re not content with just the one. By dint of cleverness and mobility, it is eclecticism that saves us. *If we only had school, precepts and critics to educate us, the Lebanese would already be lost.*

But thank heavens it hasn’t reached this point. *Let the mobility of this talented people not be restricted, and let them not be condemned to paralysis under the guise of managing its economy.*

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<sup>36</sup> French writer (1844-1924).



If there is one place in the world where the formulas of physiocrats remain important to some extent, it is here in Lebanon: 'Let them do as they please, let them go where they please'.

Without some imagination and tolerance, what would we be and where would we go amidst the draconian constraints of this era?

10 July 1946

### **Back to School**

Going back to school should be a major event here.

It would be preceded by official ceremonies and celebrated by national leaders. It's not hard to imagine the senators haranguing the people to take more interest in the education and upbringing of their children.

Despite laudable efforts, we no longer give school the attention it deserves, nor the importance it deserves, considering this is where people and citizens are made.

Our schools are, on average, still not very good, and we foolishly attach more value to quantity than to quality. This is a grave error.

*More than for any other country, schools and education are decisive elements in the heritage of Lebanon. They guarantee our future.*

We don't merely educate our children here; we claim to be merchants of knowledge and dispensers of science. Yet we concern ourselves relatively little with the quality of what we are providing.

Lebanon should be a breeding ground for languages, culture and the life of the mind. It should possess all the knowledge of the East and West in the service of the Middle East.

It should, therefore, devote itself to the starting point of primary schools so that they become the strength of the nation, a blessing, and an example.

We are yet to see how much it would benefit us, living at the latitude we do, to help our children avoid the inconveniences of a hot, humid climate, putting altitude, the mountains, fresh

air that makes for healthy work, strong lungs, and sturdy muscles in the service of a sensible education.

These are new methods for our nursery and elementary schools; we are waiting for a more complete understanding of Lebanese children, a more profound knowledge of their physical, intellectual and moral needs and of their future and the future of Lebanon.

I am convinced that it is up to us to provide our children and our schools with more abilities, education, health and knowledge.

In this and many other ways, the time for the expert, the total educator, the specialized schoolmaster has come. We are waiting to receive them.

4 October 1946

### **For Unemployed Intellectuals**

Nourished on humanities and the sciences, they are embarrassed by their existence. Dreaming in front of their luxurious and ornately lettered diplomas, they find knowledge a poor provider.

They wonder how a man could fail to live off so much philosophy and literature and so many resolved problems. They envy those who found affluence speculating on the stock exchange, and instead of finding consolation in masterpieces of the mind, have become embittered measuring the evils of the age and the severity of those who govern.

All intellectuals in the world are in crisis. While machines are being perfected to lessen or eliminate human work, they themselves increase.

While knowledge is being gained, opportunities for those who know are diminishing. In the end there is simply too much knowledge —just as, some years, there is too much sugar cane or too much coffee.

The tragedy is precisely that work is becoming scarce while science is growing. Man's intervention is becoming less and less necessary; machines that do sums are replacing the people who do them.

Because work is increasingly limited, will we limit the field of intelligence?

Nowhere is the situation more acute than here in Lebanon. We perish without diplomas, and with the way things are, we will perish even with them.

But this is the age of equality, and access to knowledge will grow easier by the day. No one curbs or checks the need to know. If only the humblest of men applied himself to learn all there is to know about life!

The truth is that science must stop being a luxury, and those who possess it must stop believing themselves its masters. The truth is that the greatest amount of knowledge must remain compatible with the most humble jobs.

Spinoza<sup>37</sup> wrote the *Ethics* while working, polishing optical instrument lenses. Let us do as he did, if need be.

The day of academia being ruled by men of letters has passed (as has their puerile disgust for manual labour).

Even a poet should know how to till the soil, and even a bricklayer should know how to create architecture. This approach can only lead to more beautiful creations, as was well understood in Antiquity, the Middle Ages and the Renaissance knew this. They incorporated manual labour and genius in all their works. Virgil lived 'the Georgics' before writing them. We hardly know the names of the inspired builders of the great cathedrals. Michelangelo worked like a maniac.

There is nothing wrong with wanting culture without having to live off it, in agreeing to become a licensed doctor without that becoming demanding and pedantic.

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<sup>37</sup> Dutch philosopher (1632-1677).

Sadly, these serious words cannot prevent our emigration applicants from growing too numerous—a development which is already causing problems. Trying to convince them to change the direction of their dreams is not enough. But if they agree to modify their ambitions, then the state could and should come to their aid.

A census must be taken of doctors and people with diplomas and degrees. They are the only people with a serious unemployment problem (usually that of workers in industry and commerce). We must support the young men who carry the daring ideas and discoveries of tomorrow in their heads.

If this help consists only of moral support, it won't be in vain.

The state's indifference to this issue discourages the elite. *Lebanon's composition is such that it deserves to have an organization dedicated to taking care of intellectuals and helping them find their way, without demeaning itself by handing them over to transactions of profit and payment.*

Health will come through dual action—action by interested individuals and action by the state.

All because we refuse to accept a decrease in those who would know what stars are made of and how far away they are. Nor do we wish to see them leave, as did their progenitors who made the North Star their beacon. We wish to keep science, as well as those who represent it, here in Lebanon.

So we work wonders to draw from our land all that it holds. For their part, philosophers will deign to once again take up the tools abandoned by city-smitten peasants. They will be a salutary example for the people.

No, we will not allow ourselves to die!

May diplomats act like other citizens, and may they gather together and defend themselves!

Then, by showing a bit more strength than usual, the state will do what it can for them.

13 October 1946

### A Necessary Institution

If there is one necessary institution in Lebanon it is the Chamber of Deputies<sup>38</sup>. Not because of a love of democracy, but because Lebanon is a country of associated communities (of which no one group alone represents a majority).

Nevertheless, our Chamber of Deputies is a disparaged institution. Its reputation is constantly slated and its unpopularity frequently noted. Many of its members make a regrettable spectacle of negligence and confusion; *and this comment applies, in varying degrees, to all Lebanese Chambers since their inception.*

The truth is that the Lebanese Chamber of Deputies has seldom created a bad law. All the Chambers have become famous for their obedience. For twenty years the Chief of State has hardly used his right to delay promulgation and ask for a second session of deliberation.

I have often noted that it is the behaviour of certain deputies that is deplorable, not the laws that they have made.

For a better Chamber, *more deputies must respect both themselves and their mandate.* At the root of all this is the civic and moral training of the electorate, the people. You don't need to be a philosopher to elect a deputy correctly. It is enough to have a sense of civic duty. Training is a gradual process.

While we wait for this to happen, in order to have peace we must always have a chamber. The executive branch is so strong in Lebanon (contrary to childish and stubborn prejudices) that it has the power to mitigate passions rather than encourage them.

*In Lebanon, the Chamber of Deputies, a necessary meeting place, a symbol of the desire to live together as a group, is the very condition for peace and harmony.* Its absence has always automatically signified the brutal return to a confessional system of organization. Its

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<sup>38</sup> *Op. cit.* n°23.

disappearance has regularly meant the transfer of political debates into churches, mosques and synagogues.

This is why, in our country of confessional communities, we must have a Chamber of Deputies, be it good or bad—though preferably good (which we can't always ensure.)

24 October 1946

### **Convictions and Tolerance**

*'You can never have too much conviction, nor too much tolerance. You can never have too much courage of your own convictions, or too much respect for those of others.'* We must all heed these words, spoken by Reverend Father Rector of the Université St. Joseph at the academic year's opening ceremony. It defines and praises an attitude that has not always prevailed in the East and around the world.

We have seen, and continue to see, the intolerance of disinterested people and sceptics all around us. Even in politics, the righteous anger of opportunist critics has scandalized everyone.

One of the direct consequences of the Reverend Father Pruvot's lesson is to condemn those who constantly change their convictions, unfailingly attacking the convictions of others.

Because truth is found in the firmness of religious, political and social faith, it is also found in respecting the faith of others.

We must remember and reflect upon the critical words at the heart of the Rector's speech.

Today, without strong convictions, you are not qualified to organize the country or aspire to a government position. The age of indifference and systematic doubt has resulted in catastrophe and ruin. The time has come for us to cling passionately to the truth. It can no longer be avoided. If it escapes us we must drop everything until we find it. 'You wouldn't be looking for me if you had found me.'

All the reconstruction work occupying eastern countries would run contrary to their *raison d'être* were they not based on an absolute respect for convictions. For them, intolerance would mean servitude, darkness and death.

'You can never have too much conviction, nor too much tolerance. You can never have too much courage of your own convictions, or too much respect for those of others.' This is the prerequisite of brotherhood and communal living.

13 November 1946

### **For the New Government**

No matter how our new government is formed<sup>39</sup>, or how broad the official smile is, or how great the worries of its members are, both the principles and the problems that define this country will remain as they are, as will the people and their customs.

We must always advocate a policy of peace, harmony and unity, an honest, resourceful and thrifty administration, more frequent recourse to experts and critics, and a firmer grip on the forces of the state.

All programmes, complaints, and wishes will revolve around these certainties. We should discuss them right away as much as anticipate what is to come.

If true political evolution in Lebanon is naturally and necessarily slow, if cutting corners on this level is made impossible by historical structures and inherited mixtures, the same will apply to other matters of government.

You need not be a wizard for the administrative machine to function better, for the state's money not to be wasted, for holidays not to become even more numerous, for an election not to become a deception, for citizens to find civil servants who listen attentively, and for favour and intrigue not to violate laws systematically.

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<sup>39</sup> Riad Solh (*ibid* n°56), succeeded Saadi Munla on December 16, 1946, and formed a government of national unity comprised of 9 members. The government was unanimously approved by the Parliament.

*Lebanon is calling more than ever for selflessness and vigilance from those who govern it. If the new government were to announce to the country that it would be selfless and vigilant, it would do more good than a programme. It (and the whole Chamber along with it) can only provide the skills that it has, to the degree that it has them. For this government as for previous ones, this absolutely demands recourse to experts on all technical matters. Even children know that our age is one of science and technology. It will no longer tolerate improvisation and vagueness.*

As for the so-called ‘organized’ forces of the state, insofar as their leaders are not leaders, it is clear that they are disorganized and dissolving. No Lebanese person in uniform should be allowed to become a comic character or a scarecrow. If favour further permeates the police force and Gendarmerie, for example, then there no longer will be any order or security in the state.

Finally, as it was an economic debate that helped prompt the previous government to step down, let us remember that economic issues are even more technical than others and that protracted, trivial discussions and aggressive statements will not resolve difficulties.

The government has a primary duty to economic affairs, which is to have the spirit of initiative and to show itself to be firm and just. Everything else—that is everything that results from general policy lines—is clearly the domain of specialists and experts.

The whole problem is in this collective position; this is what decides the fate of ministers. We shall see what comes.

12 December 1946

### **A Date and An Inscription**

On the sheer rock face at Nahr al-Kalb (the old Lycus), our Annals will be enriched by a new inscription<sup>40</sup>. After so many arrivals and departures over four or five thousand years of

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<sup>40</sup> The engravings on steles and rocks at the mouth of the Nahr-el-Kalb river, were made by the various armies (Assyrians, Babylonians, Greeks and Romans...) who conquered the area. The English and the French added their signature to proclaim their



campaigns, we, on the threshold of 1947, will record “the evacuation” of this country by the last of the Western armies<sup>41</sup>.

We would have done the same with armies of the East.

After so many occupations, invasions and conquests, Lebanon has decisively affirmed its independence. Next to those of its successive masters, its inscription declares that it has finally conquered itself, it is responsible for its own future, and it will chose its own alliances and make its own laws.

These are certainly great days. They mark a date in our history. Our policies must be wiser and broader than those of all our predecessors put together, so that historians are not sceptical when considering the natural dangers of our habitat, and so we do not have to endure their ironic remarks.

Those who do not know the history of Lebanon, which dates back to the fourth millennium before our present era, must now devote themselves to learning it. They are incapable of conceiving of the future without the lessons of the past.

*‘Byblos, outer harbour of Asia, became an international economic centre of primary importance, of which first of all Egypt under the Fifth Dynasty, then Mesopotamia, then the rule of Sargon of Agade tried to gain control...’ (Pirenne, Main Trends in World History).*

From this moment on, from century to century, millennium to millennium, seen from different points of view, it is the same thing. Jbeil, outer harbour of Asia ...? In forty centuries, the outer harbour has slid all the way to Beirut. From the highest point on our promontory we can still see everything that remains of our prestigious past.

The secret inscription that we will etch into the rock at Nahr al-Kalb next to the others is as follows: *“Henceforth we shall be good men. We shall put our freedom above food, and our ideals above our shops. We shall have a tolerant spirit and the broad views that our political and*

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victories in the two World Wars. A new stele was engraved to commemorate the departure of the last French troops on December 31, 1946, after Lebanese Independence was achieved.

<sup>41</sup> On March 23, 1946, following several months of negotiations, a Franco-Lebanese agreement is signed in Paris on the departure of French troops from Lebanon. On December 31, 1946, the evacuation was completed, putting an end to a quarter century of French occupation.

*geographical situation demands. We shall be a link and a permanent maker of peace and civilization between East and West”.*

The earth has changed so much and so well that now the future of the ancient world depends largely on the new one. The great empires of old changed their borders and their names. The rest of us remain in our places with greater duties and risks. Our independence is more logical and necessary than ever before. We must know how to serve and defend it.

31 December 1946

### **An Appeal to Intellectuals**

Do Lebanese Muslim intellectuals know how much I would like to see them contribute to the progress of intelligence here?

Hateful prejudice has increased the barriers and obstacles between different ways of thinking.

All Lebanese intellectuals, whatever their beliefs, should come together to investigate the great ideas and great works of all countries and all times.

Faced with a world that has become accessible from all sides, why do Muslim thinkers close their doors to the rest of the world? Why do they not seek to walk the paths of domestic and social life in almost daily contact with others?

All material progress in the East will be empty and superficial without the simultaneous development of faculties of the soul that fosters a common consciousness.

All the different ways of thinking in Lebanon, all of the different aspects of our spiritual destiny, do not meet often enough.

Nevertheless this country has always had, and always will have, the greatest tolerance and respect for legitimate freedoms. *Nothing will deprive it of the serendipitous trio of sea, mountains at their most exhilarating, and the universal sources of spirituality.*

What Lebanese intellectual, Muslim or Christian, would not be sensitive to the civilizing qualities of such a heritage? Is there even one who does not feel a pressing duty to devote his efforts to building the country of tomorrow?

On this lofty level, our country now has the harmonious hum of a beehive. A task more essential than the production of fragrant mountain honey is at hand.

30 March 1947

### **A Place to Meet and Study**

I would really like to see a circle of Lebanese intellectuals here. Something more vibrant, accessible and luxuriant than an academy, and less solemn. A place to meet and study with books and maps, a place of free exchange of thoughts and knowledge<sup>42</sup>. *A house welcoming enough to receive the best people, and reserved enough to repel disorder and demagoguery.*

Lebanese intellectuals are too bohemian. Their fate is a sort of anarchy, and considerably fewer earn an easy living than struggle bitterly to get by, *leaving some of their appearance and dignity in the brambles by the side of the road.*

As well as the paramount role of nourishing the mind, my ideal circle would provide a library of world classics, newspapers in all the major languages, and some type of worldly nutrition (so you can make an honest meal, demanding less of your money and more of your soul.)

Lebanese intellectuals need the material aid of the state. They need an organization and discipline on top of the freedoms and natural fantasies they enjoy. By encouraging the creation of a circle of intellectuals, by donating the premises, by furthering the beginnings of the institution, the state would perform a great and honourable deed.

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<sup>42</sup> On November 18, 1946, Michel Asmar inaugurated the "Cénacle Libanais – Lebanese Cenacle" that will continue its activities until 1974. The Cenacle, a free forum for conferences, dialogues and discussions, encouraged an interchange of ideas among Lebanese of all persuasions to serve the common national interest. M. Chiha sponsored the establishment of the "Cénacle Libanais".

It would be wonderful to afford a hundred or so qualified Lebanese people such an atmosphere without games of chance or political passions, to offer them mooring after their long drift, and to receive intellectuals, scholars and great artists passing through Lebanon. This would have a terrific impact both inside and outside the Arab world.

For Lebanon, this direct way of opening up intellectually would increase the country's authority and prestige. Writers, professors, journalists, poets, philosophers and lawyers would meet there, as would representatives of the fine arts. Women could also be included, which would be a welcome innovation to high society circles.

1 April 1947

### **The Sorcerer's Apprentices**

It's becoming increasingly obvious that the essential reform to which Lebanon should aspire is *moral reform*. The only serious point of departure for such reform is the better education of children. Clearly this will be a lengthy venture. *It is only another form and better quality of education that will better make civic discipline accepted.*

You cannot easily change a man who is thirty years old, nor even a man of twenty. The habits you have acquired aged twenty stay with you for life. If you develop a taste for disorder and contempt for the law, you will have it for as long as you live—*unless each person declares war on it, to the death.*

Incidentally, psychology itself is weakening in Lebanon. Perhaps it is beyond any reflection or analysis. *We don't want to acknowledge the heritage weighing on the confessional families of this country* that make morals, and the ability to evolve in a certain way, differ for different people.

This is why (as has been said time and again), alongside a better knowledge of context and well-ordered reform, much of it must be left up to time.

*Compromise and harmony are the rule as we wait for our differences to gently diminish.*

This seems so obvious that it is surprising we have not acknowledged it sooner.

All we hear is clamouring and demands, though the root of the problem is still not understood. We have not considered *that in the Legislature the problem is the same as it is with the people*, although no doubt to a lesser degree.

These remarks may not seem timely. They nonetheless seem necessary. They illustrate the importance of personal experience in a country where politics presupposes a certain amount of psychology.

Concerned with fulfilling their missions honourably, Lebanese governments and deputies must ask themselves the same questions that we are asked and that we ask ourselves.

Lebanon will only begin to progress decisively in this area when, instead of trying to panic the country on the pretext of reforming it, reforming apprentices decide to accept the lessons of geography and history: *i.e. obvious facts and life itself.*

21 May 1947

### **Another Little Speech**

At this point, it is imperative that domestic politics holds everyone's attention. I do not return to it so urgently for my own pleasure.

Lebanon should never have to know another political and moral upheaval like the one we have just had<sup>43</sup>.

The error must not be repeated. If I use the word 'error' here in the singular, although the obvious errors seem to be plural, it is because, when looked at closely, the essential disorder seems to have one main origin.

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<sup>43</sup> The parliamentary elections of May 25, 1943, took place in a climate of fraud and strong pressures that resulted in the election of an assembly totally loyal to the President of the Republic, Bechara El-Khoury. A year later this assembly voted unanimously to amend article 49 of the Constitution, thus allowing El-Khoury to present his candidacy on an exceptional basis to serve a second term in office. His mandate was renewed on May 27, 1948 for a period of six years but he was forced to resign on September 17, 1952.

It seems to me that for too long in Lebanon, the normal progression of things has been distorted by the zeal of those trying to prepare for the future in a way that conforms to their wishes. Let us be clear: I am alluding to shadowy people, strangers to the state. Is there anything more worrying than the zeal of those who claim to want to do us good, in spite of ourselves?

Only one political future ought to be considered—*that of the country*. It looms high above all the others.

No one person in Lebanon is indispensable, but *Lebanon is indispensable to us all*. This is what I wish to declare and what each person must know.

Lebanon should be well governed. For this to be the case, it must be governed without illegitimate ambitions or ulterior motives.

Whether one man, whoever he may be, does us a personal service or disservice should be of secondary importance to those who govern. What matters, what must matter, is that he serves his country.

Great things have been happening in Lebanon for some years now. An unbiased history will testify that the Lebanese have built the foundations for a new construct. An enormous amount of work has been done in all fields. Our ‘technical’ situation is remarkably healthy and strong. The fairest possible future awaits us.

Political meaning and public-spiritedness must increase and develop in a way that reinforces all of this, rather than weakens it, with selflessness and harmony between the Lebanese people as its primary goal.

7 June 1947

### **Living Dangerously**

Some countries are destined to live dangerously. There is nothing they can do about it. Their paths are peppered with ambitions and debates.

Other faraway or island countries, even whole continents in times past and of late, could think themselves indefinitely out of reach. They are no longer anything of the sort, but degrees and a sort of hierarchy of dangers remain nonetheless.

At the height of their glory, the Roman Empire and China knew nothing of each other. Neither one existed for the other. Today, paradoxically, the new world determines their affairs and their destiny.

Today, the frozen poles have become paths. Their mysteries uncovered, as though their masks of snow have been torn off, they are now naked and exposed to profane glances. It is already possible to spend a weekend on the pole. If Mother Nature was guarding her charms for those who could discover them, she has given away her secrets.

With no true refuge left, many people look at each other more ferociously. Even those harbourers of wonderful humanitarian dreams often imagine reaching them with using force and violence. The most noble, universal political and social enterprises quietly conceal endless traps and threats.

Will people be able to escape the abyss in which they find themselves, alone? Just as we learned to question their virtue, so should we question their intelligence.

The most threatened countries have only one choice: to learn courage, so crucial for facing danger, and then to construct a spiritual and material life using all their mental resources to do good.

Wisdom has not been completely banished from politics, and the interdependence of everything has still left some opportunities to foresight.

Lebanon is a country that has always let conquerors pass through it. The famous inscriptions at Nahr al-Kalb<sup>44</sup> are a permanent testimony to this. But if in extreme circumstances we let some people through, we must at least prevent doctrines of death from passing through with them.

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<sup>44</sup> *Op. cit.* n°40.

We have reached an age where it's not territories that hold firmest, but the characteristics of peoples. It is here, clearly, where their fates and origins lie.

14 July 1947

### **The Swiss Example**

As a fundamental institution, the Lebanese Chamber of Deputies must not be ridiculed. If it defends itself badly against such ridicule and indeed lends itself to it, however, then it should be deplored. (It gets precisely the respect it deserves; people are willingly ironic about the ridiculous).

*As I have explained for some time, for us, the Chamber of Deputies is a meeting place for associated confessional communities before it is an expression of democracy.* It is the official demonstration of our 'desire to live together' and the will to share in the state's gestation period. If we abandon this, we will instantaneously fall into religious assemblies, a Sanhedrin.

In Lebanon, the Chamber of Deputies basically represents an original side of federalism. Just as Switzerland has cantons, here we have confessional communities. The first has territory as its base, the second only legislation, and support for personal status codes. Both cases contain aspects of social and political life that should not be confused.

In Switzerland, the entire political system would be simpler if the cantons agreed to disappear. They do not want this, however, and for perfectly good reasons. For the time being, the same is true of our communities (because truth does not always lie in centralization and unity).

This leads me to repeat that our Chamber of Deputies is not and cannot be anything other than a reflection of our country (a collection of the images that it represents). All that we can hope for at the moment is that the best and *most informed deputies apply themselves to disciplining the others, and that their behaviour sets a good example.*



30 July 1947

### The Government and the Chamber

The deputies wish to meet. They wish to call for an extraordinary session. They are using legal means to ask the executive branch for this. They're not wrong.

A Chamber of only fifty-five deputies (the statutory number of our chambers) *is inadequate to deal with the legislative work of the state*. There's no reason not to say this, considering the bad habits that it has developed, like working very little (if at all) and being on holiday for half the year? I don't mean the part of the Chamber that works with the fervour of novices, but the institution itself.

One group of deputies is competent but preoccupied with personal matters; the other group is incompetent and also overly engaged in the same (good-humouredly; they don't even hide it). How can you expect affairs of the state to progress in such conditions?

*It is manifestly expedient that the Chamber convene, and that the government encourage its formation and information it by sending high ranking civil servants and ministers before it. The constitution permits this and, if you read between the lines, even recommends it.*

Committee work must be carried out more attentively and more seriously. The government could also contribute to this effectively by taking the right steps, and by the quality and diligence of its representatives.

But it seems *as if the President of the Chamber and the President of the government have made a pact to trouble* each other as little as possible, be both present and absent at the same time, performs for form and for show, and make occasional scenes in the courts.

In Lebanon, the government—no matter what it is—is largely responsible for the Chamber. Insofar as it loses interest in it, ignores it, and avoids it, *it destroys it*, even more so by gaining votes from individual favours. I have noted more than once that the ministerial instability in this country is rarely attributable to the Chamber. Rarely has the Chamber withdrawn its

confidence in a government. When the government falls, it has generally been exhausted from within.

In short, the Lebanese Chamber of Deputies should work harder to know and fulfil its duties. It must make an effort to learn to do its job so it can perform it in conditions less open to criticism. In its current form it exposes itself to criticism from all sides, unsurprisingly inviting irony and satire.

The Chamber must hold itself to higher standards, and respect itself more so that others will respect it. Can the government be seen to ignore all of this without falling into disrepute?

7 August 1947

### **Variations on Electoral Law**

The newly proposed electoral law is designed to ensure, above all, more honesty in the vote; (there are also some technical reasons for it).

When you take all kinds of precautions, it is because you trust neither your fellow citizens nor the state itself. A Redskin's mistrust. It is truly ridiculous to have to defend laws against the amorality of a democratic government and a sovereign people at the same time. That this is the case calls for an urgent educational effort. What is universal suffrage if it requires the absence of principle and the art of the conjurer? We must recognise that, from one country to the next, everything changes; democratic institutions change, and people change.

When citizens go to the polls in Switzerland, England, or Norway, why do they not fear each other and the state? In such countries, civic integrity is valued so highly that the process barely needs checking. It is a question of morality, and thus also of customs and upbringing.

Here, bad examples have come to us from far and wide. They have long adopted an ambiguous air of legitimacy and know-how. A shrewd and authoritarian political regime will tend without hesitation towards universal suffrage when it harbours the perverse intention of rigging votes: 'What does the bottle matter, so long as you're drunk?'

People have long voted like this here in Lebanon, knowing that their vote would ultimately be modified by the paternalistic attentions of the state. There is no greater tribute to lies or more formal sanctioning of deception. But the West largely bears the responsibility for this bizarre outcome. It has too often allowed its morals to be sacrificed in the name of its inventions. Not losing has become paramount.

Thus, the institutions of England (and Iceland before it) went round the world, without anyone ever knowing that they would adapt from the fortieth degree of latitude all the way down to the tropics and the equator.

Let me repeat clearly—across the East, *citizens, voters and legislators still need educating.*

You cannot but be moved when you think of the laudable candour of one of our most militant civilians who made the plural vote his priority. We will surely never find the same incredible advantages in the plural vote discovered by our zealous comrade. We might even believe that should this relic somehow surmount the difficulties posed by the demographic composition of Lebanon, it would come to nothing. *What is striking is that the government had this plural vote at its disposal on its own behalf twenty-five or thirty years ago in such a way that it eventually took over from all the doctors, bureaucrats, degree holders, intellectuals, shop owners, and fathers of families in the area.*

This is what we must consider first of all—to have the plural vote, to vote many thousands of times, is brilliant. No one ever has ever bettered that, anywhere.

16 August

### **The Return of Emir Bashir's Ashes<sup>45</sup>**

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<sup>45</sup> Emir Bechir II Shehab governed Lebanon from 1788 to 1841; he was exiled by the Turks to Istanbul where he died in 1850. He was laid to rest in the Catholic-Armenian crypt of Galata (Istanbul) until October 1947 at which date the Lebanese authorities undertook to transport his ashes to the palace he had built for himself in Beiteddine.

Ceremonies like today's are designed to cement a nation's unity.

The people are moved by a great sense of remembrance when they near the ashes of a famous man; they quiver with the same passion that they would for their own altars and families. This deep disturbance is unmistakable—the decisive sign of our solidarity with one another, of what makes us determined to live together in good times and bad.

*It is not a shared language that makes a nation.* Nor is it a community of faith. Countless lessons prove this beyond doubt. *It is above all the desire and the will to live together: this attachment and link, this secret force which makes us love living in the company of people made of the same mettle as we are, who hold dear the same freedoms as we do, under the same sky.* This is because a shared life—the same earthly food, the same reactions of flesh and blood, the same free habits in the humble daily lives of the mingling, chattering masses—unites people even beyond death. This is why Emir Bashir's ashes return to us, for all our differences, as if each one of us were repatriating a grandfather's sacred remains.

The marvellous thing here, the miracle, is that each of Lebanon's confessions can claim this man and claim him forcefully, for the same apparent reasons they do his great ancestor Fakhraddin. Admirable examples of human brotherhood speak to us from times when the West was less tolerant. What is termed 'Oriental fanaticism' could well be the artificial consequence of a prejudice stubbornly maintained in the name of historical accidents; a prejudice easily manipulated by foreign policy which, feeding on an ignorance of the realities of this century (like those of a more distant past), has awoken the few narrow and quarrelsome spirits that have repeatedly set us against one another.

By taking Emir Bashir's ashes to their final resting-place, we remember what unites us, lending an ear to what might unite us further.

Our generation answers for this eternal Lebanon, so much greater than the area it covers, whose history, under different names, is taught by all civilizations—because its destiny lay at the heart of the ancient world, and no doubt lies at the heart of the future

2 October 1947

### **A Voice in the Desert**

What this paper accurately called ‘the abdication of the legislature’ yesterday is a disappointing reality. This reality has been common knowledge for a long time, and is all the more surprising for the number of intellectuals at the heart of the Chamber.

The other day, while chatting with a deputy and medical doctor friend of mine, I remarked that when more than half of the legislature is made up of doctors, lawyers and others with respectable degrees, their silence and inaction is such that you wonder whether they’ve forgotten their mandate, having grown weary of never using it, or indeed renounced politics altogether. If this is true, it must be openly acknowledged and explained. Similarly, opinion should know what it’s clinging to; the public needs to be informed.

My friend replied, not without melancholy: ‘When you decide to speak to the Chamber about anything of any substance, you’re immediately inundated with ten voices telling you to desist and be quiet...’

Words are no doubt silver, and silence is golden. These are not my words, but the wisdom of nations. I too love silence, which lets us create and consolidate action—but only when we use to actually act, rather than withdraw and grow systematically lazy.

It’s not about seeing the Chamber’s court pour floods of words and misery on the people, day and night, like some endless hailstorm. It is about expecting reasonable, well-timed statements from people made wise by science and experience, people who are, by definition and by mandate, at the basis of the executive branch of government.

Elsewhere, general culture extends beyond poetry and eloquence; it may use poetry and eloquence to rouse, inspire and reform, but it doesn’t restrict itself to florid vocabulary or depend on well-turned, balanced phrases. I cannot imagine that the deputies who are ‘intellectuals’ would think otherwise.

Some things need to be said about the state on a daily basis to prevent it from becoming unsteady and falling apart. There are texts and figures to discuss, budgets and laws to modify and be proposed; when laws are your initiative, you must use your prerogative.

*During the few short moments the Chamber meets, nothing is produced except a series of increasingly stereotypical gestures. Votes—either for or against—are hardly counted. Weariness (or a desire to be elsewhere doing something more serious) soon reigns, until everyone escapes and scatters like autumn leaves.*

We do not ask that the Chamber bring us the moon. We know its potential and its limitations and we only want to do it justice. My writing here is in defence of the Chamber of Deputies. *For the government to be respected, the Chamber must also be respected. For this to happen, it must act completely differently to how it has been.* I have shown one hundred times that this is what holds everything together.

If the Lebanese Chamber of Deputies is, first and foremost, a place where all the elements of a multi-confessional country come together, and is thus a natural creator of harmony and unity (rather than a Sanhedrin and theocracy), *its mission is also to control the executive branch and to make laws. When the Chamber comes to a standstill, so does everything else. When we question its value, we question the value of the state.* When it is paralysed, then paralysis is spreading across similar organizations. If the Chamber is not completely prepared to fulfil its duties, *it is up to the government to help it in any way possible;* this is a far more important task for the government than aggravating its natural weaknesses through ridicule and sabotage.

How can six doctors and twenty-four lawyers—the majority—resign themselves to this? That is what preoccupies and perplexes me.

18 January 1948

### **On Constitutional Reform**

*In 1947 Michel Chiha rejected the idea of reforming the constitution to allow the renewal of the President of the Republic's mandate (op. cit. n°43). Many attempts were made, in vain, to lead him to change his opinion. Finally, Le Jour, which was the only Lebanese newspaper to address the question critically, published the following piece, signed by its founder.*

***Just as this article was being sent to press, I learned that the wish to reform the constitution is only intended for the current president and will not modify any other part of constitutional law. This is no doubt an appeasement. It is not for me to comment further on this, because of the issues I have outlined below, which will explain my discretion well enough.***

At least forty deputies have expressed the wish that the constitution be reformed to make the President of the Republic immediately eligible for re-election. This was done in secret. These gentlemen have signed a document that must rest in a safe somewhere before it sees the light of day. Or so they say, as everything has happened so mysteriously.

There is something distressing about this approach to the constitution and public affairs. It bears witness to the unhealthy state of political norms, and the need to fix it.

Familial, affectionate and close relations, a shared existence and activities, and common struggles have bound us to the Chief of State for time immemorial, for an entire lifetime. If it were just a matter of showing our human and brotherly feelings, we would be blatantly happy for the state and for ourselves.

But this is a question of principle; it relates to an exceptional procedure; the future of the state could depend on it. This is why, well before acting as individuals and implementing our hearts' desires, we must speak as citizens first. When you write for the public every morning, you bear some moral responsibility, and forfeit the right to keep your thoughts to yourself.

My infinite respect for laws, customs and proprieties should make it obvious that I am not in the least calling into question the Chief of State as a person. To examine his character would be to recall facts that demand the highest praise and respect.

In carrying out my most basic duty, I am addressing the Chamber, the government, and public opinion.

While the Chamber that legislates today was being disparaged and abused by an angry populace and a more or less unanimous press, I alone was defending it for higher political reasons and the public interest which otherwise escaped it. I refused to watch it founder in popular discontent, and refused to watch the nascent independence of this country be compromised by irreparable excess or be exposed in one way or another to foreign intervention.

Today it is my duty (perhaps more than that of anyone else in Lebanon) to remind this Chamber of its obligations to itself and to our people. Such spectacular precedents do not form the basis for healthy traditions. You do not normally reform a constitution on an issue such as this, a year and a half before the end of a presidential term. What might once seem imperative for a deserving person could become terrifying in someone else's hands.

This matter has spread like a disease, faster than reason. But it will be pondered here in Lebanon. This country of jurists and public law specialists has no lack of enlightened and experienced citizens. Political science is no mystery here, and we deserve the honour and respect owed to an advanced people. It is important that Lebanon watch over itself and control itself in these essential political actions, and that our domestic politics do not become a succession of foolish mistakes.

Perhaps our parliamentary life will long be faltering and vague. This is no reason for our institutions and organic laws to be mere pretence and façade. *The government has immense responsibilities in this domain. Our present indulgences will be adopted and exaggerated by our successors. This is why we need vigilance.*

I have often shown how the executive branch in a country like ours is in fact more powerful than the legislative branch. This imbalance needn't be translated into acts that sign away our future and put our freedoms in chains.

Untimely events always surprise and sometimes shock. They begin to feel like anomalies. They needlessly disturb the citizen and the country.



If constitutional law, twenty years ago, established that the outgoing President of the Republic would not be eligible for election until six years later, this was, as in the case of many other constitutions, to stop any temptation he might have to think of himself before thinking of the state. A good and sound democracy demands these types of measures. (Look at the prudence and moderation of the Swiss, for example.)

I can imagine how an exceptional man might be preferred and justify a breach in the law.

But the day after his departure is as vital to consider as the reasons for the breach.

I do not write this for the fun of it. We are in a country where the law, increasingly threatened, must be defended. *This is how we will alleviate our conscience.*

The Romans said: ‘Dura lex, sed lex’—*the law is tough, but it is the law*. This knowledge protected it from hammer blows.

I will stop my discourse here. It contains the simple expression of national duty, political duty and civic vigilance. I will express openly what I disapprove of, and what demands blame and reservations. For we all know that today, we cannot remain silent.

13 April 1948

### **Precepts**

A people looks at its leaders and mimics their behaviour. If the leaders are strict with themselves, the people more easily accept their discipline. If the leaders slacken, the people will slacken with them. Setting an example is critical—which is worrying, because this more often operates for bad than for good. It is difficult to adopt someone else’s scruples, but easy to imitate the foolishness and fantasies of others. Look at what fashion makes of us. Examples set by leaders have the same effect on the people. They do what they see done, even if it means regretting it and destroying their gods.

This is because human nature does not naturally tend to the good. We carry error within ourselves. We gravitate toward it because of weakness of the flesh. Our judgement strays when we're faced with illusions, deceptive as spring breezes.

For a people such as ours to remain confident and steady, to confront so many dangers, to make a living honestly, to accept the sacrifices that it may have to make, it must become tough. To toughen yourself is above all to keep courage and a steadfast soul alive within you. It is to better confront risks by not fearing them.

*It is to value spiritual goods. It is to strengthen the authority of judges and the law. It is to learn both to command and to obey.* There is no person, no matter how humble, who does not have a moment of being in command, even during a long period of obedience to someone else. Besides, you must always be in charge solely of yourself and always act with the greater good of the country in mind.

Our climates are places of great temptation. *All the dangers of a comfortable and remarkable life, all the risks of being at a crossroads and meeting point, are found here.* We treat the most critical issues incredibly lightly, and risk our homes for the thrill of lighting bonfires.

Lebanon (and moreover, its neighbours) *is a nation that cannot help but live dangerously.* We must give it a sense of order.

A close inspection of the state here would demonstrate an endless number of irritating little matters, of favours and preferential treatment, and would be faced equally with irritation, suppressed or avowed anger, and finally weakness.

Simplicity in work and other serious matters is the secret to good government in Lebanon. The Swiss also have this tutelary rule. We should bear this in mind.

14 April 1948

**To understand what's really happening**

I have just heard a rumour that we might be given a second chamber. First of all, let us see to it that the first one is actually a chamber—in the sense that it does its job, debates in public sometimes, and occasionally legislates on its own initiative. *What good is a second court if the first remains mute? And if they intend to give us a ‘Chamber for thought’, what exactly will it think about? The deputies hardly seem mentally overworked.* They have the constitutional right to initiate laws, but only appear to use it on measures for which the government wishes to avoid responsibility.

This, it seems, is how things stand. For some time, my own theory has been the following: *The Chamber is an essential body in Lebanon, it is the condition for ‘the desire for a shared life’ of the communities that make up the Lebanese people, and it is the guarantee of our future.* Without a Chamber, representatives of religions are substituted for representatives of the nation. Seeing as the Assembly is essential, the executive power—which here is very powerful—must do its utmost to make it respected and credible.

The facts, however, are against this. The spectacle that we are witnessing is one of constant undermining. Even the policies and procedures of the Chamber have become so questionable and empty that it’s no longer clear whether a deputy is resigning or not, or whether or not he should be replaced. This goes on to unimaginable lengths.

Had I not been among the first defenders of the institution (for reasons of doctrine and faith), I would not have taken the trouble to write as I do.

The Chamber is acting, however, as though it were not the legislative branch. Rather than using its authority and public opinion to form an image of the nation, the executive branch seems to see it as a kind of obedient tool. This has happened in other countries, too—and every time, but it does the state a great wrong.

The Constitution of 1926<sup>46</sup>, which was almost entirely drafted by my own hand, made a provision for two chambers<sup>47</sup>. The Senate that was appointed lasted only one year, because it

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<sup>46</sup> *Op. cit.* n°3.

blocked everything. Its suppression is the origin of this strange, hitherto unseen mix of elected and appointed deputies. Because the Senate was suppressed, its members were simply added to those of the Chamber.

The time of such whims has passed. And let us avoid at all costs a return to the unpleasant experiences that have kept it mired in chronic unrest for twenty-five years.

*I believe that the Chamber must either correct itself or be corrected, before all else.* The executive branch has the authority to dissolve it. If it only threatened to use this power, the Chamber might recover. Instead, we are left to hear that they are contemplating a second chamber in order to temper the executive's right of dissolution. As though the executive branch were abusing its rights! The irony is outrageous. In this country, all the same, there are enough politicians (not to mention students of constitutional law) to understand what is really happening here.

I repeat that *this country needs moral reform* before all constitutional and other reforms, on a practical, lived level, not a legislative one.

Is this what they want the second Chamber to think about? Why don't we each think about this ourselves?

13 June 1948

### **A Reminder of Some Principles**

When we discuss, in these pages, fundamental questions with our government that affect our future balance—questions of harmony, security and the future of the country—it's clearly not just for the fun of it. On the contrary, it would be lovely to not have to discuss it at all. But it is nothing new to recall that *to govern is to foresee, to go as far beyond the present as possible, without getting lost in the distant future and the vagueness of the unpredictable.*

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<sup>47</sup> The Taef Agreement concluded in October 1989, that led to the constitutional amendments of September 1990, revived the idea of a Senate selected on a sectarian basis. But it was meant to be formed only after the abolition of political confessionalism at all levels of the state.

Lebanon is a country in which the lessons of the past are so ancient and so strong that they can be taken as the rule. Though they may look different, today's Lebanese are made in the image of all historical Lebanese, and events may well take the same course if we do not stubbornly persist in new acts of will, courage and faith to overcome the dangers. *Our first task is to preserve the clear, gentle and noble face of freedom, tolerance, spirituality and independence.*

There would be no cause for concern if the discussion were only about petty expenditures, petty errors, petty favours, petty politics and petty things. Most governments are tainted with such peccadilloes. We can blame such abuses on ambition, vanity and human frailty. But they're not the only issue.

Looking more closely, we worry about individuals, *about people, about our race in the most human sense of the word.* What good is it when, thanks to years of plenty, we have more public roads and buildings if we just boast about we're leaving to posterity? What good is it if we spread out our plumage and our façades seem more opulent, but have little or no courage? What good is all the pomp, all the official demonstrations of happiness and elation, all the lights and the flags and the generous gifts given to the people from their own farthings, if already detestable political practices sink even lower? If politics and business—rather than being subordinated to the public good—merge miserably and endanger the entire structure?

*Lebanon is one of those places where everything must be conceived in the service of individuals, their worth and their souls.* In this way, four or five years of wins and losses have an enormous value. It's in our people's nature to model themselves on their leaders. If you indefinitely present them with questionable behaviour and the villains of political opportunism, they will do likewise out of necessity and habit. If you present them with examples of pride, impartiality, public-spiritedness (however powerful or obscure), they will imitate these instead, while you will have served the nation and spiritual values at the same time.

The last type of regime that should be recommended to the Lebanese people is one that would draw its inspiration from the platitudes, fears and cowardice of the Ottoman era. Here in Lebanon we need men—not slaves and pashas.

9 July 1948

### **Moral standards**

If we fail to raise the moral standards of the Lebanese people towards various basic principles, we will have achieved nothing. We will have achieved nothing if we do not replenish the elite by adding to their ranks, and if we do not awaken a clearer awareness of our duties and a clearer sense of mission.

Lebanon, next to a wild and unbridled Israel<sup>48</sup> and many other perils, is administered today in the same way it was in the time of the pashas, the Sublime Porte, and the entente between the powers.

Obsolete systems triumph, especially in the ancient mountains, and this deplorable custom of systematic enslavement to the family and the clan, this deluge of favours great and small, rains down on those beholden to a patron (this latent persecution, the fate of those people who chose freedom). This is too much like a medieval narrow-mindedness, when what is needed is a great individual and collective realization.

*In other words, we must struggle for traditions and not for constraints; we must put dignity and the soul above the humiliating benefits of political clientelism.*

Young people must rise up against the practices that are provincial relics of the Turkish era; they (alone, if their elders are not capable) must react against the servility that inhabits antechambers and back staircases.

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<sup>48</sup> Three months earlier, on May 14, 1948, the State of Israel had been proclaimed by Ben Gourion in Tel-Aviv.

Lebanon needs tonics, moral strength, and strong words. It needs to gather together and become hardened rather than to scatter.

We are witnessing, however, an insidious process, an inconsistent and derisory process that is too often devoted to helping smugglers, social climbers, and corrupt civil servants at any price (because they can guarantee popularity).

If the Lebanese people do not free themselves from this degrading system of guardianship, they will lose three-quarters of their strength and vitality. Leaders also have a moral obligation to address this, but they seem to love nothing more than flat backs and bent spines. Things were thus, some forty years ago, when only flatterers, informers, servants and profiteers filled the serails.

‘Me, I belong to so-and-so’, ‘I belong to someone else’. Slaves and children of slaves! *Say that you belong to a principle, a tradition, an idea, an ideal, to yourself*; do not say that you belong to the fortune of any man, no matter who he may be, like a dog on a leash.

Though we must above all cultivate our noblest sentiments—justice, duty, honour, unselfish love, and freedom—nasty attitudes are back in fashion, attitudes where hands are kissed while laws are broken. This is quite simply odious.

It has become truly urgent that Lebanon react against this grovelling, this archaic and mortifying form of servitude.

11 August 1948

### **Freedoms**

Today I would like once more to say a word about freedoms. In countries where principles are hunted into exile, everyone tries to rediscover them, knowing they are essential to life. Without freedom of conscience, what is a person? Without the freedom to work within the realm of legitimate freedoms, what is human society?

People are dying from the constraints imposed on them. Legislators make these constraints proceed generally from the idea of justice. *But while the most cunning individuals,*

*those with the most daring, the most protection and the least public spirit rise up in large numbers against the law, ultimately it is the citizens who obey the law who are sacrificed and lost. This is why the government cannot ignore the moral or amoral tendencies of the disciplined or undisciplined mind-set of the citizens it governs. The same laws that may be good or even excellent in some countries are ineffectual or disastrous in others.*

It's a fact that the East obeys restrictive laws badly, while representatives of the state, at all levels, increase such breaches by lack of virtue, character and authority. In our climate, for the sake of decent people, therefore, intolerable laws that breed privilege and injustice must be limited.

Such considerations are worthy and relevant to the current dialogue on economic issues between Lebanon and Syria<sup>49</sup>. Some of us can see how much even those countries with the strongest economic guidance are struggling. *How will a country cope when such guidance is fatally uncertain and impotent?* Theory may be excellent, but only when it does not contradict obvious facts and the nature of things.

When the sea was closed because of the war and its risks, and foreign business in our country was more strictly limited and subjected to quotas, *we saw how trade in influence and favours led to abuses. Now that the sea is open, while the entire West struggles desperately to give individual initiative its rights before our eyes, we would be mad to let ourselves be closed in by excessive constraints, which would soon result in deficiency and death.*

People cannot live on theory alone. Beyond what economists teach, hard experience fiercely defends its prerogatives and, on the streets of misfortune, pulls human claims back to moderation and truth.

7 October 1948

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<sup>49</sup> The disagreements between Lebanon and Syria over 'common interests', and over the finance and customs systems and regulations that had been put in place under the mandate, deepened after 1948. The dissociation of the Lebanese currency from the French franc (Franco-Lebanese monetary agreement of January 24, 1948) necessarily implied its independence from the Syrian currency with which it had remained united for a quarter of a century. This divorce was reinforced by the suppression of the customs union between the two countries on March 14, 1950, each country taking a different economic orientation thereafter: Lebanon towards liberalism and Syria towards greater state control over the economy.



### Knowing how to Say “No”

Chamfort, whose spirit has not aged and whose judgements are still appreciated today, wrote this powerful thought: ‘Nearly all men are slaves for the same reason that the Spartans assigned for the servitude of the Persians—lack of power to say the word ‘No.’ To be able to utter that word and live alone, are the only two means to preserve one’s freedom and one’s character.’ This does not mean that you must always say ‘no’ and always live alone. What is unfortunate is when you are no longer capable of saying or doing it.

One of the defects of this country (and the East in general) is that the leaders themselves let citizens become servile, and that citizens do not mind seeing their personalities destroyed. This is totally at odds with the duty to be disciplined and the need to obey laws. *Because self-discipline and obeying laws makes governing the state possible and manageable.*

*In the most advanced countries, people scrupulously obey laws, and strictly submit to stringent rules, but these are also countries where people know how to say ‘no’ with more strength and confidence.*

Here, the ministers themselves hardly discuss what lies within their competence and sphere of activities. They think, why expose ourselves to the moods and displeasure of certain people? As for the people, *they obviously belong to the most extreme school of obsequiousness.* They will often say the opposite of what they really think for fear of being badly received or persecuted. These appalling habits should be left to countries where freedom of thought is defunct. A person who acts like this is no longer a person, in the words of Chamfort himself: *‘he is a thing’.*

*Character is being able to do as you feel you should, and to say what you think; it’s never renouncing the basic freedom of defending a principle, and always questioning errors.* It is not saying ‘yes’ systematically because you are afraid to say ‘no’ and because you are waiting for a secret surrender or weakness which will offer advantages that no one will openly acknowledge.

Knowing how to live alone can be essential for protecting your character. This does not mean you should force yourself to stop being sociable, because as we all know there is solitude, and then there is solitude. But today's society is full of dissimulation and lies. To be honest, it always has been (writing these lines, I think I hear of Alcestis's mutterings and Philinte's voice); what is important is that you escape sometimes to protect your deepest emotions, your threatened convictions and your soul.

*Until the government here learns to respect the opinions of its citizens that are not direct calls for sedition, it will remain suspect in the eyes of the champions of human dignity.*

Anyone with the courage to say 'no!' should be praised, not bullied. Nor should such a person ever cease to find, a functionary in the service of the state to help him manage things or a magistrate to bring him justice.

8 March 1949

### **On the Number of Deputies<sup>50</sup>**

This may seem like a minor problem. In truth, however, it is serious. Those who now consider deputies to be nothing but useless mouths want as few of them as possible. Those who think there should be enough to maintain domestic peace and some equilibrium here want more. There are other considerations, however, for us to consider.

It must first be said that, in the absolute, regardless of the size of the country in question, the number of political representatives cannot sink too far below or rise too far above a certain figure without becoming absurd. An Assembly that must partially or fully form a country's government (eight or nine ministers on average in Lebanon), plan for a majority and an opposition (here, the opposition is hardly seen), form committees, make or consider laws, vote on a budget, supervise the implementation of the budget and progress in general—such an Assembly cannot numerically be reduced to nothing. This is even more true if its members work

<sup>50</sup> M. Chiha had always favoured a broader legislative representation to allow for a better operation of the Parliament and a greater sectarian representation. The number of deputies in Lebanon increased from 30 in 1926, to 45 in 1927, 25 in 1934, 60 in 1937, 55 in 1943, 77 in 1950, 44 in 1952, 66 in 1957, 99 in 1960, and 128 in 1990.

little and are preoccupied with other things (it is understood, for various reasons that I will not list here, that every Lebanese Chamber has included an impressive number of deputies from whom we have long been unable to expect any serious effort).

What is the real number of deputies among the fifty-five? How many can do their job—at least in theory? With such infrequent attendance and such superficial meetings, how can a rusty, squeaky machine be kept in working order?

You might think that I am putting the institution on trial. I would calmly reply one more time that in this *country of associated minorities; by defending the existence of the Assembly and the proportional representation that is its basis, I defend the very existence of the country itself.* Disturb this balance and imagine what would follow—at least for a while. This is why in Lebanon *the duty of the executive branch, which is powerfully armed for this by the constitution, is meant to do everything in order to raise the standard and productivity of the Chamber, although we have been seeing the opposite for such a long time.*

An essential organ (like the human heart) needs to stay in perfect shape; you must look after it the best you can. You cannot consider it an extravagance.

*Here in Lebanon—bearing in mind what we are, the composition of our people, our traditions, our unique and original assets—we must give our people an Assembly that both reflects them and fulfils its mission.* With a few more deputies in Lebanon, a reasonable opposition could potentially grow inside the Chamber rather than out on the streets. It might also mean better executed work, an alternative governing staff, the intervention of deputies in the slightly devalued administration where appropriate, better equipped Chamber committees, some new faces and some new endeavours. *Finally, there will be new debates and somewhat developed laws that will not make such pathetic spectacles as those we have seen all too often.*

If my wish to increase the number of deputies had prevailed before the last elections, we might have largely avoided the brainwashing that this country has suffered over the past two years; however petty considerations, which I still deplore, played a part. Now, we must correct the error, all the more so since the population of Lebanon is increasing markedly. This is one

more justification that we cannot ignore. Our country has twice as many voters in 1949 as it did in 1929. It has also been blessed with independence.

Before independence, another power above our own was able to keep everything afloat, was able to block, amend, and invalidate everything.

So for us today, 66 deputies are better than 55, and an even higher number would be even wiser. Because of the confessional system of representation, we can only increase by the same multiplier. If we consider, for example, the figure of 77 in place of 66, we will be giving logic and experience their due<sup>51</sup>.

That the Syrian regime is provisionally keeping the figure at 60 does not concern us. Technically we could venture to call this an error, but in so deciding, *Syria is abandoning the statutory representation of minorities, and giving a special council to tribes*. These are two extremely delicate points, the first of which is more important than the second. *One third of the population is being gambled*. In any case, things in Lebanon are fundamentally different to things in Syria. *Once again, Lebanon is made up of associated minorities, not one of which can be sacrificed—this is a condition of order and peace of mind*. In Syria, on the other hand, a majority is confronted by a considerable and extremely diverse minority. This minority must judge its situation in Syria for itself.

What counts for us, the Lebanese people, is that we all have rights, that domestic peace prevail and that citizens—evermore tolerant and understanding of each other—have more and more confidence to reach a clearer conception of the state's political system.

We do not have to be a slave to any foreign theory or example. Our duty is to do what is right for our people.

5 May 1949

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<sup>51</sup> The new electoral law of August 10, 1950, raised the number of deputies to 77.

### The Same Old Story

Talking about appointing deputies is like talking about elections for military officers. The contradiction between the means and the end is so great that it is obvious even to the ignorant.

For more than fifteen years, we have had 'appointed deputies' in Lebanon. This is because in 1927 we incorporated members of a Senate into the Chamber of Deputies that systematically, and with an excess of public-spirit, blocked state affairs. Though selected from amongst the hoariest, most serious of characters, the senators tried to hold everything in check and made the government's life impossible (back when it was not the Chamber that disrupted the Republic).

Appointed deputies came to us from the fall of the Senate in 1926, and the 1926 Senate represented an experiment created on the insistence of the late Henry de Jouvenel, himself then a senator in France and the High Commissioner in Lebanon.

If this experiment seemed reasonable to use as we implemented the 1926 Constitution, it was because we also believed that an appointed Senate would provide political assurances and guarantees. Things developed differently, however, and the Lebanon of 1949 is not the same Lebanon of twenty-five years ago.

Traditions have been established and the state has taken on a new shape, especially since independence. The Chamber of 1927 inherited some venerable senators. This unforeseeable event paradoxically created appointed deputies. *In this way, the government became, legally and without profiting anyone, the main elector in the country, leaving the Lebanese people the task of electing citizens not chosen by the government beforehand.* In fact, appointed deputies were designated after elected deputies, even if it meant the government gave a second chance to some unlucky candidate by appointing him to office.

Here you can see how deputies were really appointed, and how the process was effect by chance and turmoil in the Senate.. Talk of a return to this system would be unreasonable, however small the numbers. It would amaze and amuse the fifty odd powers with whom we sit at

the United Nations, and would acknowledge the suppression of what little remains of public opinion in this independent and free Lebanon.

It will not surprise you if I remark at last that we have enough appointed deputies today without compounding a tacit fiction with another, legal and even more scandalous one.

All in all, considering elections alone, lists favours and pressures will ensure there are always enough deputies in Lebanon.

12 May 1949

### **A Return to the Evidence**

Because Lebanon is not given to chauvinism, because nationalism does not assume exaggerated and inhuman forms here, it should protect itself against excessive doctrines, violent enterprises, and totalitarianism in any form. A country like this one which, in people's private lives, is the very image of a diversity of thoughts and traditions, finds its *raison d'être* above all in this *desire to live a shared life, one which attests that people here are happy to live together.*

You only have to open up your window and look around you to ascertain that no normal Lebanese person would be happier anywhere else.

*Our heritage that comes from our past, our hard work and providence is such that it ought not to be confused with any other.*

Viewpoints are only valuable when they are consistent with facts: nothing is more annoying, when presented with such naturally cheerful and peaceful dwellings, when faced with such harmonious lines, than hearing people singing the praises of Spanish chateaux

*It must finally be understood that Lebanon is like no country but itself. It is unique seemingly the only one of its kind. The madness of theorists, or their tragic childishness, is their wish to unite things that are dissimilar in order to even out something that cannot be evened out, to make malleable clay out of human material in the hands of a wild potter, devoid of reason.*

Rather than taking a mountain for a mountain and an oasis for an oasis, they set aside mountains and oases and go so far as to make the sea, steppe and desert into things that have the same nature. Different ways of living and different civilizations are even more noticeable, but this they also stubbornly refuse to see. *Rapprochements in this domain, of which Lebanon is a conclusive example at the crossroads of races and nations, can come neither from violence, nor from laws. They are created from sentiment and time, customs and intelligence, from the heart and reasons of the heart.*

*By its nature, Lebanon unites and satisfies elements that would elsewhere seem contradictory and incompatible; but while it assimilates arrivals well enough, it cannot assimilate what lies beyond its natural borders.*

The only valid theories for Lebanese people are those that take its flesh and blood, phenomena and customs into account, not those that strive for imaginary structures glimpsed in the clouds.

*After such follies, let us return to ourselves, and consider the reasons for loving each other infinitely greater than the reasons for hating each other.* But may our government also understand that it can no longer play with the patience of its citizens like children do with their mechanical toys, knowing that when they break them they will be beyond repair.

9 July 1949

### **For a Political Doctrine**

This morning I would like to draw attention to one point about the domestic politics of this country (though it calls for many comments). More than any event or phenomenon that has filled this column in the past month, I am most struck today by the feeble predicament of political groups when faced with feudal lords. I say 'groups' so as to not say 'parties', because there are hardly any political parties worthy of the name; failed attempts no longer count.

Lebanese citizens have no desire to force themselves to follow party discipline (unless, as we have seen, the organization assumes one of the aggressive forms frequent in the contemporary world that here could only apply to the P.P.S.).

*Common sense demands that in a country like ours, political organization develop and expand and the feudal system lose ground and decline. By feudalism here I mean the type of clientelism that only a deep ignorance of the realities of modern political life could keep alive and that deprives individuals of all personality.*

*The first observation is it is the duty of the state to encourage political parties in principle, provided that these are parties in the government—that is, parties capable of governing within the system.* The whole Lebanese political machine is moving towards weakening and desegregating organizations of this kind. It puts obstacles of all kinds in its way. It only takes a quick look around to notice it. The Lebanese State does not like parties, it likes partisans; as long as they are *its* partisans, of course; the nuance escapes no one.

Let us remember by contrast that we have seen the governments of major countries, momentarily subjected to totalitarianism, end by creating opposition themselves where it no longer existed. This attitude was born out of necessity. England, where the ‘opposition’ is called ‘His Majesty’s opposition’, is a well-known example of this.

*Another observation is that the paradoxical rise in feudal spirit is ruining our chances of civic progress.* We’re creating more, and more servile, clients when what we need is a greater number of conscientious citizens.

*We all know that in this century, wherever citizens are not conscious enough of what they are, the entire political system is warped.* I would love some myth to remain here, and in many countries; yet myth must not become the rule, and the whole political structure should not begin to appear to be a lie.

*If in Lebanon, serious parties do not find their way when free, we will witness the slow death of legitimate freedoms. This would then mean the increasing subordination of the entire elite to the crowd.*



But I also know how difficult it is for a party to establish itself here by normal means. So what should we do?

This question must not remain without a response. The government knows perfectly well that a more objective, dispassionate way of governing would help to establish what those in power insist on ignoring.

*The executive branch in Lebanon is faced with no force other than that of violence. Arms are increasing while moral fibre is declining. Let us think on that which should move and concern those who still bother to think.*

21 July 1949

### **We Need Good Men**

For quite some time now, the state's error has been to speak more to the stomach than to the brain, *with the result that politicians only want to be business men, when what we need are honest politicians and statesmen.* We have more businessmen than we know what to do with; their abundance here is all too clear.

This is not to say that, on a material level, despite a feeble administration, the state has not managed some significant results, obtaining a measure of success and striking a welcome balance more than once.

I myself bear witness to this, for several reasons, and evidence suggests we are faring better than our neighbours, all things considered.

We are well aware of this, and justly proud; however this is not my issue here.

When we defend financial stability (and consequently social stability) and its resulting confidence—the security and well-being of the Lebanese people—and when we say that the future of Lebanon depends on this stability, as prosperity, capital and work will thrive where no one fears for their life or their heritage, we defend a fundamental aspect of our country's

existence. As essential and vital as this aspect is, however, it is not the only one. A lively and provident political system demands that one pay even closer attention to a nation's moral fabric.

*Material progress is made for men; if men lose their quality, all else is lost with them.*

*So I say that we need good men.* Because this country is suffering morally: in its political institutions, its press, in how it expresses public opinion, in its increasingly apparent slackening of education.

These big questions are sinking in the fuss and unrest of petty political and money-making schemes. *They result in a deficit in our country's moral heritage, and in the forces of courage and intelligence,—our only security against our well-known series of grave external dangers.*

21 August 1949

### The Rule of Money

Almost all of the opposition's vehement reproaches to the government *concern material things*. Not that the opposition's hands are always clean. But the moral is that *when you are governing you must always preach by way of example, to show yourself to be stricter with yourself than with others*. As the Romans put it, Caesar's wife must be beyond reproach.

Even if it is innocent, the government still seems guilty because of its indifference to the sinking standards of political practice. Even more so when it partakes in intolerable levels of indulgence.

In a country whose *raison d'être* is largely spiritual, the love of money has taken on extreme proportions. Conditions are ideal for this to happen. And since only the first step costs, it triggers one hundred more.

So tolerance increases capitulation; weakness increases weakness. We have become like the first couple standing in front of the tree of good and evil. To taste the forbidden fruit or to let

Michelle Hartman 4/9/14 10:39 AM

**Comment [1]:** I think "Money Rules" sounds either too colloquial or too abstract. Do you agree? I changed it back... to capture more of the Chiha voice, but I could be convinced otherwise

Nadim Dimechkie 4/11/14 7:47 AM

**Comment [2]:** I see your point. But I feel 'rule' here sounds ambiguous, like it could mean 'the law of money'. How about 'The Reign of Money'?

it be tasted—*like all businessmen and politicians so dangerously involved in business, we can no longer clearly distinguish between good and evil, between the licit and the illicit.*

Money has too frequently become the motivation for actions, but a political system that relies indefinitely on this kind of backwards philanthropy is no political system at all.

The most cynical people are the best served, and the most gluttonous are the most satisfied. *Too often here in Lebanon opinions are formed only for gain, and too often silence is bought with generous and unjust gifts.*

*Let us recall that badly controlled resources give rise to temptation and doubt, and that proper control of the usage of public funds, favours and other things do not exist here as they should. If such control did exist, the governments themselves would be relieved, and more easily prove their virtue.*

*Selflessness and moral strength remain the primary political capital in Lebanon. There will always be some money that Lebanon must resist in order to survive. This is why the government should try hard to maintain the state's reputation for honesty, and ensure respect for moral rules that promote the public good.*

20 November 1949

### **Fear of God**

We must always remember that a people's strength is their moral strength.

*The stamina of the spirit has always withstood brutality, but no people can survive spiritual and moral weakness for long.*

Moreover, in human society, purely material considerations cannot indefinitely replace reasons for living.

There is only instinct and flesh, money and provisions. *Paradoxically, and contrary to all good sense, families and inheritances are being unreasonably hounded almost everywhere now.*

*The height of the paradox of our century is that the spiritual and the temporal are both attacked in Marxist countries.*

This is one of the strangest developments in all of history. In a number of countries, quite a few in fact, people must accept a Draconian collectivism which, on top of a pitiful life, renounces all hope. *People are wrenched away from the joys of this world and the next at the same time. So much so that there is no way out except in nothingness.*

*If an economy must be protected by a collective will, on a higher level, a civilization must be protected by a collective soul. This is where collective action is important— not in the absurd negation of free enterprise and individual initiative.*

*In this way, the political side of defending religion is taking centre stage all over the world. In the end, a people must fear God to be governed without tyranny. A people that has abandoned God sooner or later will abandon laws. For relative peace to exist in the world, one must fear one type of justice in the framework of the other.*

Such comments apply everywhere, especially in hot and passionate countries where temptation is stronger and sensual pleasures are more intense.

‘Fear the person who does not fear God’, as the saying goes here in Lebanon. Clearly the state should fear him also.

4 December 1949

### **Moral Fibre**

In Lebanon, we must reawaken our long-dormant moral fibre. We must cling to it. *This is the time to remember that our country was founded on moral fibre and spirituality, and the spirit of tolerance and freedom it represents.*

This is time to realize that all material progress will be hollow if our spiritual forces are lost, and that roads, buildings and five-year plans are nothing without freedom. *To build upon the ashes of morality is to work for the enemy.*

For too long here, the rallying cry has echoed the early stages of France's Third Empire: 'Get rich!' Getting rich is all very well, but not at the price of discord and moral and civic deficiency. Business, work and enterprise are wonderful things, but they are not everything. *For us here, they are not even essential.*

*What is essential is to manufacture good people—this is more urgent than all heavy or light industry. It is more important than anything else is.* Material things prevail over what has become human material, over true strength which is dissolving, over the final instruments of resistance, over the state's *raison d'être*.

You do not expose your country to disintegration just to maintain your political clientele, nor do you leave civil servants in their positions indefinitely on the pretext that they are grateful, devoted and loyal. But this is what happens when political enterprises take too familial and paternal a turn. The meaning of government gets confused and all the niceties are no longer enough. *With the best intentions in the world, with the best will in the world, and without even realizing it, we are moving away from the nation's goals.*

*Lebanon's basic political system should be compact.* If it isn't, it must become so. Power must no longer hold a monopoly over the price of various devices and the Administration must stop being the very image of privilege and favours. The Assembly must proceed sincerely and in good faith. Moreover, the opinions of others should be heard and respected —unless they harbour revolution in their ranks.

One of the underlying errors of the whole system is to have imperceptibly and perhaps subconsciously wanted to resemble neighbouring monarchies too much, with all their anachronistic and out-dated features.

We have become stilted by vocabulary and customs that are alien to us. *What we need now is a return to order and to nature.*

As the year comes to a close, such statements offer some comfort. It is like climbing a mountain and breathing pure air into your lungs. And goodness! This is what all good people desire, ulterior motives aside—and with some determination, it's not all that difficult to achieve.

29 December 1949

### Small Processes

Under the guise of reform, an administrative reform long in the making, which is more electoral than rational, has been skilfully prepared. Skill is certainly not what is lacking in those who govern us, but these little procedures can lead to grave outcomes.

People keep being posted or replaced not on the basis of competence and merit but rather for empty reasons of propriety. *This is happening with the elections in mind—they are not being held tomorrow, but they must be thought about from today. This much is clear.*

My objectivity is well known. I do my best to consider everything from the point of view of the public interest, so I describe things as I see them.

*While these administrative games go on, I would argue that this country has no political future if the Lebanese voters do not advance in freedom and civic integrity, and the quality of the Lebanese citizen continues to sink. Such are the causes of my legitimate concerns, which are heightened by external dangers.*

Lebanon is made in such a way today that each one of a small number of men is the master of his own province. *United, they constitute a political association that governs us. This is the medieval system to which we are in fact subject. If those who hold power so decide, this system could last for a long time, but then it is the country that will not survive.*

These ills are more perceptible in the Mount Lebanon district and in Beirut than elsewhere and for obvious reasons the situation there is tricky. It seems that that the capital and the ancient mountains are the most manipulated regions. The framework of these two vital centres of our political life is being removed by the shrewdest devices. The same thing is happening throughout the country, to varying degrees.

*Let me say again, clearly, that it matters little to us which of these people govern us, provided that the foundations of this country are not weakened, the progress of its material life does not destroy its raison d'être, and petty politics do not kill great politics.*

*Personally, I am very attached to the stability of power, and make no objections to it. What bothers me is the stability of disorder and the shameful political customs of our people.*

*If we suppose, for example, that it would be correct to guarantee seats to certain men now and in the future, then the republic would be turned upside down and its administration would become the sad case it is today. It is unacceptable that, in the end, everything should focus on this electoral clientele, sent to the polls like cattle having been kept at the price of privilege and anarchy for years.*

We are entitled to think that the resources and favours which the government has at its disposal go too often to the most cynical Lebanese people, to those whose political practice set the worst example. *This is what I find so shocking.* Obviously, you do not want the Sisters of Mercy to govern your country, but there are limits to the excesses whose ultimate goal is so distinctly electoral.

If I'm using the changes in the administration to make these somewhat harsh comments, it's because I'm concerned with the public good. All I would like to see prevail is the public good.

11 January 1950

### **Commerce in a State of Lethargy**

Every effort Lebanese commerce makes to organize and discipline itself should be received favourably. It is one of our great strengths and our primary means of existence.

Rather than be scattered about as they are, merchants should group themselves around a solid and outstanding hierarchy. A sort of Lord Mayor would be suitable, and one of them should

be chosen for this position each year—someone with connections both to business life and that of the country.

We know that in London, trade associations elect the Lord Mayor for one year. He is always a businessman and is the most important magistrate in the City of London. Similarly, in Paris of old, the provost of merchants was also the most important municipal magistrate.

It is important for Beirut to have such official representation. *Commerce in the capital should become aware of both its dignity and its responsibilities. Naturally it follows that it will subject itself to stricter and loftier rules. It will be a powerful aid to the state in times of moral and material crisis, and will give the profession opportunities and a status that it currently lacks.*

A maritime republic is always a merchant republic—the laws of geography and history demand it. *In such a republic, it is just that the merchants, inspired by the highest kind of public-spiritedness, know their rights and duties better. They also should be more closely tied to public life and the making of laws, and feature in the Council of State in a more respectable and effective way.*

For my part, I would like to see fitting residences for the important Lebanese Chambers of Commerce, and would also like to see the recently revived ‘Merchants Association’ better housed, more active and more aware of its potential. So many things depend on commerce here that it is hard to see it as weak, eroded, pathetic as it is, and subject to the often demagogic fantasies of legislators.

Lebanon can draw its inspiration from great historical precedents—Hanseatic towns like Venice and Genoa—and even more legitimately by going much further back to Tyr, Sidon and Carthage. But the present day is full of plenty of lessons, its needs more than enough to light the way for our merchants. So let them get moving—for their profession, and for the honour and wellbeing of their country!

20 January 1950

### **On Freedom**



Freedom is both taught and learned.

*Lebanon has a particular talent for freedom. You could say that it was born of it and for it, born of the need to let those whose character demands the right to nourish a civilisation think freely and make their own laws.*

When discussing freedom, I always mean *legitimate freedoms, those which honour people, not those that belittle and disgrace them.*

*Lebanon should set a great example of what public powers and citizens make of people's dignity. For this, the elite must be given its due and permitted to keep its status, not bullied and handed over to intrigues. Finally, our tribunals should express free, well-thought out and courageous opinions, and our press not print against the convictions of its writers—not for money, not out of fear, nor to appease someone or maintain order.*

Then our natural neighbours and the rest of the world will know the Near East and the Middle East better, as small as our territories and populations may be. *They will know the raison d'être of our country, our people and our nation. They will know that here we seek order, not to harbour disorder; that our goal is elevation, not civic and moral collapse, or enslavement.*

*This is because Lebanon will not cope with being treated like a feudal country for much longer, being governed as though, far from being the paragon of pioneering leadership, it has returned to eighteenth century formulas, which here are thirteenth century ones.*

Our people needs to blossom; *and our resources, which are so varied, need to serve as something other than a way to increase the number of debased constituencies.*

Terrible habits have been formed, and are still being formed, *which will continue to have a profound effect on the life, soul and evolution of Lebanon.* Rather than being governed from on high, it should where possible be governed down here, on our level. Once we revive the feudal lords, we will inevitably be bent to their will, bow to their whims, and return to the bad habits that reflect their mentality. *Instead of creating more citizens worthy of the name, we aggravate the overcrowded masses with a surprising indifference to the pressing needs of the future.*

Right now we must strengthen the country, not make a name at all costs by often artificial, illusory means. It is about turning the Lebanese people, who are destined for it, into *the Eastern political community's authority on the normal exercise of freedom and freedoms*, rather than just another deceptive, depressing Asian adventure story. For obvious reasons, historians of the future will be less friendly and indulgent towards us than today's diplomats are.

It is crucial to remember these basic notions from time to time, much like the morning reveille is crucial to military groups. Just as in the days of Padishah, we have let ourselves develop the lazy, lethargic and servile manners of an antiquated Asia, which is dying while the fervour of revolt simmers inside it.

3 February 1950

### **To Make Us Think**

Every now and then, one hears talk of creating a second Assembly<sup>52</sup> in Lebanon. If the government thinks this will satisfy public opinion, then it is sorely mistaken.

A Senate in Lebanon would not matter to me, were I not convinced that ridicule would kill the institution. And it could do serious damage to the regime. We have seen enough walk-on parts like this one to resist turning this little drama into a huge spectacle.

*These days people want to make Senates everywhere into 'Chambers for Thought'—so that their level-headedness might oppose the impetuous, revolutionary spirit of the other Assembly. This might be useful if the Chamber of Deputies were to make life impossible for the government. But isn't it plain that here in Lebanon, the Chamber of Deputies ratifies everything that the government wants, and nothing can be devised to oppose it? On the contrary, when asked to grow a backbone and do its job, it does nothing but curry favour from those in power.*

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<sup>52</sup> *Op. cit.* n°46 and 47.

*In fact, the executive branch in Lebanon suppresses the Chamber. This is blindingly obvious. What else would a possible Senate do than make the government machinery a bit more cumbersome and further thwart legitimate freedoms?*

The Senate of 1926 that Henry de Jouvenel wanted lasted exactly one year. It was appointed entirely by the High Commission and made of sixteen senators chosen from among the most virtuous men in the country.

After twelve months, political life was so obstructed and so poisoned by the new Assembly that the Senate had to be dissolved. This resulted in the unexpected addition of senators and deputies that eventually brought an unknown marvel into the world—appointed deputies.

I speak of these things because I lived them. I was the deputy for Beirut then, and I myself drafted the constitution which inevitably led to the Senate experiment, so strongly desired by Henry de Jouvenel, himself a French Senator. There was no reason to insist against it. *As always, however, reality triumphed over theory with lightning speed. And yet we took precautions in the constitution to make the Senate as unobtrusive as possible; the legal projects which it did not seize in the eight days were deemed accepted by the High Assembly.*

If the government dreams of creating a Senate for making appointments, let us at least call it what it is, and abandon all other illusions. But two Assemblies instead of one, the way things stand now, *will give us two evils instead of one.*

*Let us remember that the Chamber is necessary here in Lebanon, first and foremost because it is the meeting place for its composite confessional minorities. This is where the nation is built. This is why I reproach the government so strongly when, rather than putting the Chamber in its place, it turns into a registration chamber, reducing it to this in the eyes of the people through its constant reciprocal favours.*

*My thesis is that for the good of the state, the Chamber of Deputies in Lebanon must become more aware of its dignity and its functions, especially as it is just a stone's throw from*

*the Chamber of Deputies in Israel.* This comparison should not become embarrassing for us—that would be a social and political disaster.

*I would like to see the Chamber improved, rather than watch the government simply sign away this country's politics and future even further by creating debts in a second Assembly that is even weaker than, and constantly in conflict with, the first.* A second assembly, as things stand, would bring actual ridicule and unease to the second house, which could expand exponentially.

*Here in Lebanon, it's not a 'chamber for thought' that needs to counter the Chamber of Deputies, but the government itself. By creating its own Senate in some sort of comic production, the Government would be the master of both houses even more than it is today.*

16 June 1960

### **Bairam**

I share in the joy of Islamic festivals with my Muslim compatriots. Reciprocity in this sphere pleases me as much as any other. It is always a pleasure to be surrounded by happiness.

Here in Lebanon, the multiplicity of faiths means more legal holidays—an excellent way to have more leisure and pleasure in the spirit of brotherhood. The only thing we wouldn't want to see more of is the noise.

Today, more than ever, such celebrations are being incorporated into the life of the state; despite all the separations, the state bases its political system on confessional matters. In its battle against communism, for example, it recognizes the importance of faith.

For my part, I am happy to highlight, whenever possible, the necessary mutual understanding between monotheistic religions in all their various aspects: an understanding justified by the nature of things, by a shared recognition of the Eternal, that is essential in the face of those who deny it. Broad political tolerance and understanding naturally proceeds from this principled stance. Gradually we discover that we are not, in the end, as different to each other as we thought—or as our fathers thought. Every era thus has its own orientation within the

wider realms of truth. Each moment in history carries the shared tendencies that stem from the wisdom that inspires us.

*In Lebanon, Islam is exceptionally well placed to serve humanity and the world. When we reach out to it, it is certainly not for nothing, but so that it reaches out to us. We share with it the very foundation of life, the act of creation that made all of humanity. The time for hatred and mistrust is long gone.*

*This is a time for reflection, understanding and love. Faced with raging materialism, the future of the spiritual is at risk.*

It is with most sincere affection that we offer our Muslim compatriots our greetings and best wishes.

18 July 1950

### **Press Laws**

Many foreigners find our press laws surprising, not to say scandalous. Most people are surprised by their strictness. This is also true of Lebanese people who see in them not a guarantee of freedom, but a means of violating it.

*It's not that we should tolerate or permit everything. But between freedom and the violation of press laws there is no longer room to breathe.*

*As we wait for the law to be modified, the time has come for judge-made laws. It's for the judge to interpret the law more reasonably. It's for the judge to understand that he is replacing the jury—that is, the people—rather than the state police; and that, up in his chair, his duty is to act like an average citizen and person of his generation, and to free himself from the narrow-mindedness that leads to inhuman rigour.*

Our judges who specialize in press law violations are few. Not having the privilege of knowing any myself, I honour their virtue, but I do not approve unreservedly of their usual

interpretations of these laws. I would also like to appeal to their spirit of independence and courage. They *occupy the space where legislative justice meets public opinion*. If the letter of the law is too binding, they must find a solution in the spirit of the law. *This is because the letter kills, whereas the spirit revitalizes*.

Most of our press thoughtlessly welcomed the press laws as progress without assessing its dangers; but *they have all the makings of a gag, of some instrument of repression from another era*. The powers that be wish to be beyond reproach. This is impossible in a country with an active intellectual life and a closely argued dialectic. In criticism as in praise, there can be no eloquence without some bitterness or hyperbole. *The journalist who writes for the next day, or even the next hour, does not have time to calm down when his blood is boiling*. This must be taken into account and understood, and public figures must steel themselves, and be as calm as readers.

Of course we don't want any excess, nor would we allow any if *the good of the state were at stake*; but between what is legally permitted and forbidden lies a huge number of possible legitimate freedoms: the right to just criticism, even in cruel language; the right to use severe but expressive vocabulary; the right to be angry in response to irritating attitudes, or grow indignant in response to reprehensible acts.

The press is an essential counterweight in a country like ours where little, or next to nothing, is said in the Chamber.

We must also recognize that the government has done its best to reduce the press to the miserable state it is in now, *which is often one of servility and fury*.

Will the journalist be forced to choose between money that binds the conscience, or chains? *If this were to happen, who would evaluate the state of our customs and the quality of our laws?*

Were someone to confront me with my own writing, I would respond without hesitation that age and experience helps me, attributes which cannot be prerequisites. *Admittedly, everything can be said with tact*.

On the other hand, shouldn't those who govern us finally understand that Lebanon is not a totalitarian country? *And that the freedom to express one's self within agreed limits should be taken as a blessing?*

Our government officials at all levels should not be panicked when a newspaper, satirical or not, takes an interest in them—even when it writes with vitriol. As for members of Parliament, it is their job to be discussed passionately and, at times, mistreated; *we can no longer send journalists to prison for so little.*

The government's means of defence are above using defence as an excuse to reduce all voices to silence.

From Mr. Thiers all the way to Mr. Auriol, the official residence of the President of the French Republic (the Elysée) belongs to conversations from Montmartre to Montparnasse. In Hyde Park Corner in London, just as in *Punch* and in the *Times*, English people say what they please. *We are not so demanding here, but simply prefer that the thick smoke of incense does not stifle human voices with impunity.*

*Here in Lebanon, continuous streams of praise are permitted and even recommended, praise that goes as far as platitudes and indecency; critiques, meanwhile, are instantly turned into drama.*

*More moderation and fairness, and thicker skin, is needed in all of this.*

19 July 1950

### **Abdul Hamid Kéramé<sup>53</sup>**

A man of noble stock, a lively spirit, a lofty soul, Abdul Hamid Kéramé was above all loyal.

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<sup>53</sup> Deputy of Tripoli of which he was the unopposed leader, he was appointed President of the Council from January 9<sup>th</sup> 1945 to August 22<sup>nd</sup> 1945. He died at the age of 55 after having contributed considerably to the conquest and consolidation of Lebanese independence.

Always true to himself, he embodied better than anyone a proud and chivalrous world of days gone by.

Within this captivating figure, who adapted so well to the changes of the twentieth century, was a man of the fifteenth or sixteenth century who maintained traditions and spoke with a voice from the past.

Lebanon and Tripoli are mourning one of their most representative sons, a man who each person learned to love because his noble spirit and generous heart shone brightly amidst all the vicissitudes of life.

This man of stamina gave the new Lebanon the irrevocable support of his thoughts and emotions. He was bound to his word like a vow; he had too much self-respect not to respect, indefinitely, a freely taken decision.

The mountains of Tripoli, Lebanon's ancient mountains, were as attached to him as the rest of the country, and devotion and affection followed him closely.

Seeing him in front of you with his azure gaze, his blonde, eventually gray hair, and his youthful appearance, one might well have mistaken him for a Northerner, lost on our shores.

What ancestry of charming traits gave him this spearhead of a body, this luminous face? At heart, this pure-blooded Arab was a man of the sea, the child of a halfway insular town which for centuries had three towns at its heart and illustrated the diversity, grace and the flowered openness of our gentle coast.

Abdul Hamid Kéramé's death leaves all of Lebanon in mourning—the people and the public powers, clergy of all confessions together with the secular population.

Personally, the memory that I will keep of his dear friendship will last forever, especially the time when he was in power and constantly showed us all how generous and humane he was.

He had a heart of gold inside a fearless soul. To use an image he would have liked, he had something of both the lion and the gazelle in him.

May his soul rest in peace! May his memory be honoured! May Kind and Merciful God cover him with blessings and mercy! May dark irises and fragrant myrtle flourish and blossom at



his tomb forever! May he know the peaceful rest of the wise and strong, this man whose burning faith brought him closer to God!

Yet, for his homeland and his fellow citizens, Abdul Hamid Kéramé will remain above all a gentle and just man, someone who gave his all even when he was in danger.

I loved him because I knew him and found in him a completely brotherly affection. Let us bid him a farewell that will not distance us from his light and smile.

25 November 1950

### **The Role of Women**

Not long ago, when confusion reigned in the city, Lebanese women made their voices heard. They are invited to make themselves heard more often.

They add their disapproval to that of men, and fulfilling a duty in the process.

Women were not born to be mute. And order is obviously their domain. All they have to do is speak with moderation and we will not do them the injustice of believing them incapable of controlling themselves.

It is time for women have a place in public life here. A place befitting their dignity, one which isn't exposed to vulgar attacks. The whole nation together must progress further socially, so women can confront brute force by the grace of their weakness alone. We must seek a fair balance.

So while a woman's place may normally be in the home, as soon as the future of families and the nation is involved it is in government buildings too.

And there's no reason for women not to be heard in public. Why shouldn't they speak if their voices can discipline men who have strayed, if they work for a love of duty, if they speak on behalf of children and the weak? Or if they are speak out to improve social mores, and more generally in favour of making life happier, more noble, and more humane?

There is an 'Executive Committee of Women's Organizations' in Lebanon, which has many responsibilities. I am told it engages in a wide range of activities. *As long as it acts reasonably, men have reason to support it.*

This is all because in the end women are the companions of men, not their objects, and their initiatives are often more pleasant than male ones. Women are often greater forces of balance, more sensitive to order and disorder. Women work too and are more able than ever to earn a living.

*In their deeds, women are moving ahead of us. More women than men are involved in social work and charitable organizations; they are more sensitive to suffering and more devoted to serving spirituality.*

*The major nations have all accorded women their rightful status. Asia lags behind Europe, and the Far East behind Western Asia; but of all the changes we're seeing in the world, we should find a place for this one. It causes much surprise to learn that while clubs and social circles are open to women, public and municipal assemblies are not. That men should desire this is an aberration. We acknowledge that a woman can play, but not that she can consider the functioning of the state; that she can beat a man at cards, but not be present in the fight against a rising, demagogic tide.*

I have reached the conclusion that if we're to reform social mores, women must act—so long as they are thinking women, who are free of whims unwittingly produced and sustained by feminine sensitivity.

*If women in Lebanon wish to get involved with affairs within the limitations of their nature, they have my full support.*

31 December 1950

### **The Real Criterion**

For Lebanon to not get lost in politics, it must keep returning to its *raison d'être*. That's where the true criterion for our actions lies.

A country's appearance is based on a collection of physical and social necessities. If, on this most sensitive issue, you lose sight of the 'why', you'll advance no further without getting stuck.

Lebanon's historic mission is not debatable; all history attests to it. This long history must still be remembered, its evolution followed, its sources returned to, and its people and things identified. *The commendable desire to adapt to the present should not make you forget the past. The past in Lebanon is something much deeper than one might imagine.* The current abilities of Lebanese people, their tastes and predilections, have their origins in ancient experiences and tendencies.

When you spurn history, you expose yourself to regret, because the past directs the future. Alexander's short rule, after more than twenty-two centuries, still marks human destiny; and the Eastern Mediterranean, more than any other sea, is the sea of humanity.

Finally, it must be said that the laws of a country, its living legislation, are a conception of life that cannot ignore ancient traditions. Governments with short memories usually end badly, and history is harsh on their ventures.

In Lebanon, starting with the permanent safeguard of tradition, everything is understanding, adapting and moderation, But we cannot innovate without assessing the distance we will place between ourselves and our point of origin.

This country, whose inhabitants are so adventurous, should for its own sake abstain from audacity as a nation. It is too mobile and volatile on an individual level to blithely allow itself political and social disruptions on a collective level. *No one wants to see such an active and vibrant country stuck in attitudes that have no future. No one wants to stubbornly preserve that which should have decayed. But no thinking Lebanese person would accept to see their country's fundamental political system sacrificed to the misfortunes of its daily politics.*

10 February 1951

### A Question of Life and Death

I would like to say more about the politics of this country. Increasingly, we are seeing how much it is dominated by its moral aspect—the ‘moral and social’ aspect, according to social science, which aims to improve the quality of humanity.

This is a country where character building should be the state’s main concern, yet it is what worries us the least. You might even say that abasing one’s character has become a sort of means of government and a premium for success. We must grovel for opportunities and to benefit from favours; we must humiliate and compromise ourselves to avoid offending anyone. And abusive favours too often immorally reward the services of the least worthy.

*This is odious, not doubt, but also potentially fatal.* Of course Lebanon needs riches, *but it needs people more.* More than accumulate goods, it should develop a taste for detachment, *the kind of spiritual detachment that subordinates all material riches to each of the essential freedoms, and even more so to freedom as a whole.*

*All things demagogic in Lebanon run counter to the fundamental laws of this country, which have been balanced by time and experience;* all xenophobia negates geographic and political truth; and all slackening of political and social morals is an attack on the nation’s framework, its *raison d’être*, and the conditions for its existence.

Every country that, like ours, must live dangerously just to sleep in peace is in a constant state of resistance. This spirit of resistance instilled in the Lebanese is essentially *a spirit of order, a collective social spirit*—a reaction against the excesses and dangers of personal power, which is always fragile and exposed to weakness and error.

We can no longer make concessions here that weigh on the general political system in for the benefit of individuals. On the contrary—because ultimately, this is a question of life and death—the personal must be subordinated to the spiritual.

We try to solve everything with money and honour; we must yet be able to solve some things with reason and justice.

11 February 1951

### **A Lasting Dialogue**

For quite a long time now in Lebanon, dialogue between the Lebanese government and the elite has run more or less as follows:

The government says: ‘How can you want all elections to be full elections, free elections, elections where each person’s opinion is freely expressed? *Look how backwards people are. Look how much they belong to their feudal lords. Look at how resigned they are to everything.* A religious leader only needs to adopt the first person that comes along for that person to be made deputy the next day. Merit and money combined may always go far, but what should we make of a candidature founded on money alone, and on the brazen contribution of massive sums to a person or a list?’

The elite says: ‘Listen, government: as well-founded as these points are, you cannot use them as justifications for your actions. Your job is to redress this state of affairs, at least partially. Yet your secret or acknowledged encouragement is contributing to this problem. You are very much in the wrong when, for your own comfort, you consider a single list the ideal solution. *A single list is the solution of prior capitulation or even tyranny.* By contrast, rivalry between two good candidates or two lists is a good thing. It’s practically the rule of the game. Because the whole system is based on the presence of political opponents to counter the allies of those in power. When there was no opposition in Turkey a few years ago, they had to create one. There is nothing fair about a regime that subtly attracts all opposition to its side, and ceases to find opposition because it has managed to obtain the consent or silence of all.’

‘But,’ replies the government, ‘is it natural for us to create our own opponents? Is it normal to give ourselves competitors when we could do without them and keep everything for ourselves?’

The elite responds: ‘Not only is it normal, but it is necessary— because the country and the public interest should be served first. This is not about using public power in all its many guises to keep your options open. *The first concern of any self-respecting government must be to raise its citizens to standards that also raise those of the city.* Doubtless nothing absolute can exist wherever diversity is the rule. *But given the scale of the means at its disposal, a Lebanese government that comes to power can, if it wishes, keep itself in power indefinitely.* Everyone accepts this is an obvious fact. So this does not give us any stability of power. It is a type of violence that looks a lot like coercion.’

The government then says: ‘*But if people are as unhappy as you—the elite—claim, let them show it.*’

The elite responds: ‘*That’s exactly it: they cannot show it,*’ replies the elite, ‘*they can no longer show it. Citizens can only show their displeasure through violence or the voting booth. If the voting booth has lost all meaning, then the only tactic left is to pitch force against force: the worst of all outcomes. And no one,*’ adds the elite, ‘*wants this for Lebanon. This is why political morals must improve and civic virtue must regain some value on the market.* These values are obviously in a state of collapse, which is why it is so hard to swim upstream...’

Whether the dialogue continues or stops there, it’s plain to see where it is heading. When the government takes too little interest in the civic and moral standards of the people, it is up to the elite to call it to order; but the methods of persuasion at their disposal lack the immediate efficiency of the government’s. Therein lies the whole problem and drama of power.

For the time being, what we need is enough deputies who are good men.

3 April 1951

## You Must Vote

Elections testify to civilization.

A good man makes a good voter. Wherever people are reduced to serfdom, votes no longer mean anything.

Depending on whether they are sincere or fictitious, whether they take place in order or disorder, *legislative elections reveal either the maturity or immaturity of a people, the state of their morals, the value of their laws. They mark a nation's moral status within the international community.*

Addressing citizens so that their choices and opinions can trigger the organization of government is to deem them sufficiently qualified to make such decisions, and aware of the importance of the act; it is to pull people away from the desires of one particular man or group of men.

*One voice more or one voice less could decide the fate of a programme or the future of a nation. That's how crucial it is to vote. To abstain from voting, or let your voice be bought, is to fail yourself and your country. It is to act like a stranger in your own home.*

An election has no meaning unless it starts from freedom—that is, unless it proceeds with human awareness. Without this awareness, in every sense of the word, it is nothing more than a mercenary or idiotic act.

*This is where the importance of the education of citizens becomes clear.*

I do not attach such a price to the free expression of people's will for nothing. I know the imperfections of universal suffrage well—its share of illusions and its dangers. They are visible to the naked and untrained eye, *but they are not the worst evils.* In this century, as long as the vote is free, *a people that does not vote is a people whose minds are numb.*

*True, some citizens will vote well and some will not.* So that the worst do not outweigh the best, I have taken a stand for smaller constituencies. *Once accepted, this reform, as partial as it is, freed communities that knew how to vote; it enfranchised the voices of free while we waited*

*for freedom to progress and become more widespread.* The structure of Lebanon is such that we must put up with an imbalance in freedoms for some time. Some will advocate them as the greatest of all goods, others will ignore them and bypass them as their fathers did.

*Our elections will thus be worth what they are worth; their ultimate goal is to improve citizens' conditions, to make clients into good men.*

*The following is a definition of a client in ancient Rome: 'A plebeian who put himself under the patronage of a patrician'. The dictionary cites this example: 'At dawn, clients came to greet their patrons'.*

*This kind of joke must stop. And for this reason, all voters worthy of the name will go to the polls tomorrow.*

11 April 1951

### **The Chief of State's Message**

The Chief of State's message<sup>54</sup> does justice to everyone. *It is an excellent message.*

He spoke to the Lebanese people as citizens, and addressed them as such.

In clear and moderate terms, in the sober and refined language for which he is renowned, the President of the Republic drew a lesson from the elections. This was to honour the virtues that constitute the strength of nations—character, honesty, uprightness, impartiality and courage. *Because to practise freedom with dignity presupposes all of these things.*

*Suffrage in Lebanon has been rehabilitated after a sad decline, and abroad our country has found a hard-won prestige in terms of its institutions.*

A great step has been taken, whose primary cause was to subdue demagoguery and put faith in the people. *The evidence for this is undeniable.*

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<sup>54</sup> The day after the legislative elections of 15<sup>th</sup> April 1951, whose results did not create any opposition, President Bechara El-Khoury addressed a message to the nation.



*The April elections have not only much improved on those of 1947<sup>55</sup>, but on all elections of the past 30 years. I learned for myself in the elections of 1925, for example, what it means to try for election when the executive power uses all means at its disposal to tip the scales against you. I myself know the anger and spirit of revolt engendered by such abuse.*

*This time we have been spare such evils, as far as possible. Thank goodness. This country, low on vital energy, has suddenly rediscovered its taste for the saving grace of freedom.*

*The President of the Republic has publicly rejoiced over this, and I enthusiastically join in his approval. *There is certainly more honour and pride in governing a free people than a servile one.**

*A very clear recommendation to the new Chamber can be inferred from the President's message, and it must be respected—by the Chamber itself, no doubt, but also largely by the executive branch, which in Lebanon one may not displease except at great risk and peril to oneself.*

*I hope the Chief of State will address frequent messages to the Chamber that will highlight its prerogatives and duties. *This constitutional procedure is ten times more pressing here than in France, for example, and is a link not just to the Chamber, but to the people. Because as we all know, executive power goes much further here, in fact and in law, than the Chamber. To the extent that in Lebanon, if the Chamber fails in its mission, all that remains is an unbridled and omnipotent executive power.**

2 May 1951

**Riad Solh<sup>56</sup>**

<sup>55</sup> *Op.cit. n° 43.*

<sup>56</sup> Sunni president of the first government after independence, he remained Prime Minister from October 1943 to December 1944 and from December 1946 to February 1951. Proponent of the unity with Syria, he shifted his position to support the idea of an independent and Arab Lebanon, thus becoming, with Bechara El-Khoury, the two artisans of Lebanese independence. In July 1949, the Syrian Popular Party (SPP) was accused of an attempt coup. Its leader Antoun Saade, along with six of his companions, were condemned to death and executed. Two years later, on July 16, 1951, Riad Solh was victim of SPP's vengeance; he was assassinated by one of their members in Amman at the [end](#) of a visit to King Abdullah of Jordan (*op. cit. n°15, 16 and 17*).

Public life always has always had its risks and its dangers, but seldom have we seen these passions foment such obstinate hatred and violence as they do today. Riad Solh met his end violently. His was a cruel and premature death. *In him we have lost a politician of the highest order, one of the most representative and characteristic figures of the Arab world, along with his state of mind.*

After a turbulent career in dissidence and resistance, Riad Solh became a man of government when we gained independence. These new times brought him to the power for which he was born and for which he battled so long. Power, however, makes harsh demands. Events often govern us more than we govern them; even the strongest personality can, in exceptional circumstances, not have a choice in his decisions.

For his virile performance as a man of the state, Riad Solh found himself pursued by the spirit of revenge.

For years he had to take precautions to protect his life, but no one thought that he would meet his destiny when we went to Jordan. It is as though he had a *rendez-vous* with death in Samarkand, like in the legend.

This is a real tragedy for Riad Solh's family and all his fellow citizens. Riad Solh was loved just as he was hated—passionately. It is a feature of people of such enormous character that they provoke such strong emotions in people. *But every one of us recognised his superior qualities; Riad Solh certainly stood out in the vigour of his thoughts and the scope of his plans.* His life was a constant chess match with fate, a constant adventure.

No one mastered the art of using intelligence and time better than he. He could fathom the depths of human nature and its weaknesses. He knew that time always gets the better of arguments and desires. Riad Solh didn't attack things head on, but still managed to succeed, with his long Eastern patience born of sunny, sleepy climes that baffled his Western counterparts.

*One could say that for over forty years, Riad Solh was never absent from Arab politics for a single hour, day or night. This is a lot to say for one man. Such a presence could not but influence things: it is a part of our history. Negative or positive, it is still a presence.*

*At a solemn turning point, Riad Solh could be seen to courageously renounce every idle ideology with extraordinary lucidity, and recognise the facts. The time came when he perceived the Lebanese reality clearly, and it became very important to him. He was in fact too well-read politically, too reflective and experienced, to not enter politics sooner or later. At almost fifty years old he lived one of the most unassailable positions in the Near East. All Lebanese owe him a debt of gratitude for having such a perceptive attitude, as well as admiration.*

As I write, I recall memories of some essential conversations I had with this great mind; what dominates my memory is the subtlety with which he showed his intelligence, but also its clarity and strength. His reasoning was always humane. It took circumstances, people's reactions, and life into account. Few men of state in the East are so aware of psychology and had such knowledge of their fellow citizens. Riad Solh, however, also knew world politics. His inferences were the keenest and his observations were the broadest. You should, for example, hear his commentary on the Yalta conference of 1945. He had read every available text about this famous meeting ten times, and knew the subject better than anyone else in the East.

Lebanon is in mourning over the death of Riad Solh, which resonates profoundly across the Arab world. It is disturbing and overwhelming as it was unexpected and brutal.

18 July 1951

### **Solving a Moral Crisis**

The reality of power in Lebanon is that it is shared between Maronites and Sunnis<sup>57</sup>; we should be under no illusions about this, things being what they are. I don't debate this, having myself argued, out of reason and love for this country, that *confessionalism in Lebanon is a necessity*.

*Lebanon is a country of associated confessional minorities.* But in fact, rights vary widely from one minority to another. This explains a situation that should not remain obscure. YOU CANNOT REALLY TAKE POWER IN LEBANON UNLESS YOU ARE A MARONITE OR SUNNI. This may be wrong, but this is how it is.

*What is important to us is that, while we wait to widen our political horizons, we widen our human ones.* We are witnessing havoc in each of the two dominant communities. Let us call it what it is.

Havoc: because when in power, no one wants serious opponents anywhere near himself. Consciously or unconsciously, this phenomenon has become glaringly obvious. This outcome has been chronically translated into a 'massacre of innocents'.

The present Lebanese regime is a veiled dictatorship. What advantage would there be in turning it into an open dictatorship? That of exposing it and laying it even more open, perhaps!

*The worst solution that can be imagined for the country is that its voluntary balance be disturbed. One deputy, one civil servant more or fewer, can trigger either discord or peace.*

*Who cannot see that in Lebanon, the Chamber is virtually powerless, as are the individual ministers?* The reality of power isn't what it seems. This is due to many factors, the first being that personality and character are lacking in both the assemblies and the streets.

THE MORAL CRISIS THAT LEBANON IS GOING THROUGH MUST BE ADEQUATELY RESOLVED, by human and moral means. *It is by following bad examples that we will perish.*

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<sup>57</sup> From independence in 1943 to the Taif agreement of 1989, power had been held by the political representatives of the Maronite and Sunni communities. It was only after the war (1975-1989) and the Taif agreement that the Shia community began to play an important role in the state.

Assemblies during the French Mandate were sometimes dismissed with scenes of booing and hissing *because they were said to be ungovernable. It took fifteen years to notice that they never let a minister fail freely. The responsibility for instability and disorder lay elsewhere. This was a time when the President of the Republic was nothing but a petty dictator.*

Here in Lebanon, it's the Executive branch that helps ruin the Legislature, which is itself mediocre and fragile by nature.

Deputies, instead of being 'representatives of the sovereign people', receive favours so long as they act as obedient instruments; otherwise they are bullied and persecuted.

*Between the executive and legislative branches, there are only Chamber capitulations and government favours. This is what destroys the spirit of our laws and leaves the state in the appalling condition it is in today.*

*Authority and responsibility are dissociated when they should be joined.* Normally, constitutionally, the President of the Republic is an arbiter. The President of the Council of Ministers and other ministers—who are meant to be happy where they are—act only with extreme caution.

*We are once again under a dictatorship in disguise, dictatorial in an oligarchic sense, as power is applied first to feudal lords. A quick look around you will confirm this.*

*All this can only be corrected by a different conception of the exercise of power. A republic remains legitimate or turns into tyranny depending on the behaviour of its real leaders.*

*Everything is thus in place for the Lebanese Constitution to be manipulated every few years. This profound defect in the system cannot be attributed to the people.*

30 May 1952

### **Doctrinal Stances**

Might I be permitted here, ten years after they were written (when we were in the middle of a world war and Lebanon was not yet a sovereign nation), to reproduce the words with which I

tried to formulate the fundamental principles of a general Lebanese political system? It is always worth confronting the actions of the present and the rules of the past with some distance. This is how we evaluate the merit of such rules, and rediscover the profound reasons for the loyalty we owe them.

I wrote: *'Here is what should be one of our first doctrinal stances—to know that politically Lebanon is not a country of hasty actions and coups d'état. It is a country which tradition must defend against force. Each shock that it experiences more or less compromises what time has done for it.*

*'... I am thus opposed to the excesses of movement that throw us off balance, of stable institutions that will resist all assaults if we can keep them intact for just ten years...*

*'...What Lebanon needs today is sufficient knowledge and understanding of its geographical position and the 'natural' constraints that burden it; and also of the nature of the different groups who collectively form the Lebanese people. If they do not take these profound realities into account, organic or ordinary laws will never be viable in Lebanon.*

*'...Therefore I say the following:*

*'1<sup>st</sup>: Given the shared control over political and national life which exists in this country of associated confessional minorities, Lebanon can not exist for a long time without an Assembly that serves as unifying meeting place for all communities. When the Assembly is suppressed, the debate inevitably moves into the domain of religion or its shadows, which slows the progress of civic education...*

*'2<sup>nd</sup>: A country of such diverse social strata, ranging from the extremely archaic to extremely civilised, Lebanon, which already has enough personal status laws, cannot follow laws which are only valid for one or another group of its citizens, or for one or another of its regions. In some cases, extreme progress in the legislature could catch up to extreme errors in the government and administration. The laws of a country are made to apply to all of its inhabitants with, at least, sufficient means to justify them.*

‘3<sup>rd</sup>: Surrounded by lusts and desires... and threatened by the various encroachments of those searching for the Promised Land, Lebanon must therefore see to it, for at least some amount of time, that compared to others its fiscal and general laws contain advantages, bonuses, and tolerance, so that its rebellious elements relatively happy and its neighbouring attractions are rejected.

‘4<sup>th</sup>: This country built on a crossroads, which is to some extent a public place, *must use laws to strengthen the framework of its traditions, by then strengthening the Lebanese family using any means necessary, and by teaching its children to subordinate temporal things to spirituality, well-being and freedom.*”

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*Each of us will judge for ourselves to what extent these rules have been followed, broken and threatened since independence. To me, they seem as valid today in 1952 as they did in 1942, and I see no need to change anything.*

*It seemed timely to bring them to the attention of my readers once again this morning.*

17 June 1952

### **On the Presidential System of Government**

Sometimes we talk about the ‘*presidential*’ system of government in Lebanon<sup>58</sup> *without really knowing what we’re talking about.*

*Well implemented, the presidential system of government is one of a federated country, like the United States, with all the domestic political machinery of the States. Badly implemented, this system of government will from time to time allow violence, upheavals, and crises more like South and Central America.*

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<sup>58</sup> Until the Taif agreement in October 1989, executive power was held by the President of the Republic. After the amendment of the Constitution, on September 21, 1990, it was transferred to the Council of Ministers.

In Lebanon, we cannot imagine a presidential system of government as 'a right'. *If we happen to have it as 'a fact', we should be wise enough to be happy with this.*

Lebanon is a country of associated confessional minorities. Theoretically, perhaps, we could conceive of it as a sort of *omnipotent 'board of directors', but as soon as this board of directors wished to talk to the people, it would find nothing but spiritual leaders before it. This is what happens every time this country, for one reason or another, does not have an Assembly.*

It is always the same story. When we decline politically in Lebanon, we retreat into religion. *A bad attitude.*

*The best equipped president in Lebanon is the one who, in accordance with the constitution, decides not to stand for re-election, and who the people then begin to love dearly, to the point of trying to force his hand at the end of his second term of office. Here, the exception proves the rule.*

*When you want to stand for re-election, we have all seen how much of a prisoner you are to the Chamber and its passions. When you don't want to stand for re-election you are independent and can improve moral standards and apply the law.* This is the reason for the Lebanese constitutional clause adopted by the United States as a principle following the precedent of the late Franklin Roosevelt's last re-election.

What is happening right now in the United States is crucial. President Truman, who decided not to stand, could very probably get himself re-elected if he wanted to. President Truman, however, sees things as George Washington did in 1797.

*Lebanon's best chances lie not in personal power, but in personal talents. In terms of those with true authority and the people who surround them, this should be sought in simplicity, selflessness, character and the power of example.*

ON THE OTHER HAND, TOO OFTEN WE FORGET THAT THE PRESIDENTIAL SYSTEM OF GOVERNMENT, ACCORDING TO THE AMERICAN MODEL, HAS NOTHING TO DO WITH PERSONAL POWER. *Compared to other systems, the presidential system of government presupposes vast decentralization. Consequently, it presupposes federated states that are governed internally as*



*they see fit (like Swiss cantons). It also presupposes federated Chambers that make up Congress and approve the appointment of the most important government officials, as well as a superior judiciary power that judges the constitutionality of laws and regulations. This is represented by the Supreme Court in the United States. Without these checks and balances, presidential power would simply be unbridled personal power. But it would seem that we do not know or no longer consider all of this when we speak about a 'presidential' system of government for Lebanon.*

Furthermore, the election of the president by direct popular vote<sup>59</sup> in Lebanon signifies an unprecedented and uncontrollable use of schemes, pressure, rigging, money and favours. The entire country will become rotten. Elections in these conditions are a fiction, a disaster, or both. *And, in one Lebanese region or another, the candidate will remain dependant on the same feudal lords and powerful voters.*

In order to clarify this picture, let us recall that we must also elect a Vice-President and a Senate to add to the House of Representatives.

*All of this is unreasonable.* Have we not recently seen a country as developed as Uruguay prefer to adopt a system of government based on Swiss cantons, rather than a presidential one?

*These explanations are essential. When you approach questions of such importance, glib remarks are not an option, and you must start by understanding them thoroughly.*

24 July 1952

### **The Path of Reform**

The winds of reform are blowing. Lebanon has always been the most democratic country in the Near East. Its nature makes it so. Its privileged historical position no doubt facilitates the task.

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<sup>59</sup> The President of the Republic in Lebanon is elected by the members of the Parliament.

As imperfect as it is, Lebanese legislation is modern in almost all sectors. Perhaps too much so in some, taking the diversity of the population (and the disparities in this diversity) into account. We know this from experience.

The difficulty of legislating in Lebanon has stemmed from the fact that normally you should legislate for an entire people, rather than for a certain town or region. A matter as sensitive as social security is further proof of this. You must nevertheless act within reasonable limits, and even a little beyond them, but without attempting to create new legislation in a void, leaving its application to the whims of chance and future generations.

Let me remark, one more time, that to this day the Lebanese population is made up partly of landowners and peasants and partly of merchants (with intellectuals left more or less in turmoil). In human terms, new contributions have given rise to new problems. It is nevertheless clear that we cannot reproach Lebanon for being socially backwards because it is made up of such diverse elements and it has shown itself to be unfailingly hospitable and generous.

Unlike all the other countries in the Near East, Middle East, Mediterranean, and Western Asia, Lebanon thrives—politically and socially—on a balance of confessions and civilizations. This balance in Lebanon is like precise clockwork. It must not be touched if there is the least fear that the watch will stop. This stands to reason and is why I wrote ten years ago that: ‘Lebanon is not a country of hasty actions and *coups d’état*, it is a country which tradition must defend against force’.

In terms of personal status, Lebanon’s political well-being is rooted more in its customs than its laws.

For Lebanese laws to be effective, they should be lived by the people who make them, otherwise they have no meaning. It is not worth making more laws if tradition and order do not penetrate people’s minds first. By order here I mean everything opposed to material and moral disorder. By disorder, I mean everything that unsettles a society.

Ministers should be drawn from wherever we wish to draw them (we recently tried to take some from outside the Chamber; this was the case for several who were leaving disillusioned, I

believe). The executive power, however, should act as such—wherever you may find it. It should give the Lebanese people a living example of what it wants them to be. This is vital for our little republic.

I say ‘our little republic’ though, in my eyes, it is equal to the biggest ones, morally and intellectually.

The first reform needed in Lebanon is to establish a hierarchy of values and to apply them to the nation.

7 August 1952

### **Proof of Maturity**

The domestic situation has developed in a most reasonable manner. The Constitution has been respected. The Chamber will meet on Tuesday to elect the new Chief of State<sup>60</sup>. *In its domestic politics, Lebanon is showing evidence of maturity that calms the present and guarantees our future.*

*It is this that counts above all else. We have always elevated the debate to the national level in order to establish connections with the world starting from there.*

We would like Lebanon to remain an onlooker of political innovations and always to ensure the progress of institutions without revolutionary actions. ‘*Because Lebanon is not a country of hasty actions and coups d’état*’.

By handing in his resignation in the most objective and peaceful conditions, conditions that truly honour him, the President has done Lebanon a signal service in leaving. Things would have

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<sup>60</sup> Facing popular discontent and serious opposition, President Bechara El-Khoury resigned on September 17, 1952, in order to avoid a crisis. On September 22, Camille Chamoun, the Shouf deputy, was elected President of the Republic. His mandate ended with the insurrection of 1958 (between Christians and Muslims) caused mainly by his expressed desire to get re-elected.

happened differently, you must admit, in most American republics. I say this with all due respect.

*We must now calm our ideological passions, and all the communities in our nation must only speak the language of brotherhood. For all Lebanese, Lebanon is too beautiful a homeland to be exposed to excessive controversy and discord. Some propaganda should trouble even the least wise Lebanese people and prevent them from the political one-upmanship that sacrifices some of their country's foundations.*

Occasional changes in a nation's government are inevitable. And there is no harm in responsibilities changing hands. What should never change here is the tradition of balancing powers, the desire to live a shared life, and the spirit of freedom, moderation and tolerance on which our spiritual homeland is built, and on which our temporal homeland's survival and growth depends.

20 September 1952

### **Lebanese Truths**

There are Lebanese truths that each Lebanese generation should pass down to the next, because they are not found in Western books.

LEBANON IS UNIQUE IN THE WORLD: *essentially, it is a country of refuge, with the Mediterranean at the threshold of Asia; a country of both the sea and the mountains; a country with a fundamentally very diverse population composed of a long series of families who were persecuted for their beliefs and ideas. It is also a collection of confessional communities, each with its own personal status codes; it is a nation of born-travellers with a social and political tradition that ranks among the most ancient in the world. The Lebanese are a people who invented the alphabet and who cannot be said to have no taste for reading and philosophy. They are a composite of races, religions, wisdom, unruliness, truths and errors. All of this in a people*

*barely exceeding one million souls in its motherland, and which has had an emigration, a 'diaspora', with few equals in the world.*

*It is natural that at the heart of such a people, conflicting ideas arise at every step, and that innovators are slightly less numerous than traditionalists. All the Lebanese of today bring their intellectual and social heritages to their fellow citizens, heritages of an ancient world with all its phenomenal diversity (and profound unity). And many Lebanese people have only been Lebanese for the past thirty or forty years. Layer upon layer, for centuries, during which people also emigrated in all directions.*

*No land anywhere assimilates people better than this Lebanese land, to which people attach themselves like vines and ivy—with all their flesh and soul.*

Young Lebanese brains purport to bring this extraordinary people 'new ideas'—as soon as universities deliver people with degrees, doctors, supposedly original political and social doctrines—which are generally little more than obscure old ideas or *foreign intellectual enterprises under a different name.*

The five or six thousand year old past of Lebanon calls for moderation and humility. *All too often we forget our spiritual climate of 'refuge', the nature of a meeting ground which still aspires to be a 'place of pilgrimage'.* The Druze, one of the oldest and most venerable Lebanese communities, for example, date back about nine hundred years here; the more ancient and venerable Maronites were refugees from the North fourteen or fifteen hundred years ago; Greeks of two persuasions with links to Byzantium; different branches of Islam that evolved with the spiritual development of Islam; the Armenians (whose presence in Lebanon for some families and institutions dates back more than two centuries), and most recently the Russians. *Human Lebanon can be broken down into a series of arrivals of the persecuted, who generally ended up in the mountains.* The mountains were once inaccessible; not any more, but their customs are less violent now and people more readily come down towards the gentle, sunny Mediterranean shore.

*The West, which through its moral and political sciences brought us all its experiences of the present and past, does not bring us anything that takes our particular situation into account—nothing that genuinely applies to the small ‘sui generis’ people that we are.*

*Here, everything must be moderation, balance, tolerance and reason, whether in sociology or faith. The very notion of refuge made the Lebanese mountains the place in the world where property is most fragmented, where the sun and the land are infinitely segregated. So much so that the most humble Lebanese person, for as few of his relatives have come to Lebanon in the past fifty years, is practically certain to have, along with his house, some olive trees, an acre of vines or some market gardening.*

As the old adage goes: *happy is he in Mount Lebanon who has the pasture to feed a goat.* That’s exactly it. But it’s these same Lebanese people who are being courted with excessive ideas which may apply to other nations and climates, but are absurd in our sunny corner of the world.

*In our schools, no one summarizes and teaches what I have just written here in my own handwriting. No school textbook explains to the Lebanese that freedom is their very nourishment, food for their soul, and that they have come a long way to find it in these luminous and lenient mountains. No book shows the theorists that the most scholarly theories ring empty for this sample of humanity, a true microcosm that by its very nature anticipates future consolidation.*

*There are, let us say, some Lebanese truths that should indefinitely lead to the calm and composure of this predestined country.*

*Basically, Lebanon is a beautiful and noble attempt at the peaceful cohabitation of traditions, religions and races. It is a natural attempt that history suggests as an even more conclusive testimony than Switzerland at the heart of Europe. It is not our dear neighbour Syria that should serve as an example. We should be an example for Syria; forces are moving its destiny more towards ours than the other way around.*

*Lebanese people who have not already prepared their passports for Mexico or Brazil should consider all this, and understand that no theory from the Sorbonne, Cambridge, Yale or Moscow can prevail over the unique political experiment that they have been carrying out since Phoenician times, FOR AS LONG AS THEY RECOGNISE WHAT THEY ARE.*

14 October 1952

### **For Lebanese 'Reformers'**

Let the reader not be frightened by words; but the following comments require your undivided attention. Lebanese politics is as much a question of psychology as physiology.

Psychology deals with the soul and its faculties.

Physiology deals with life and its organs. If the Lebanese soul is born to travel, then Lebanese people have mobility in their blood.

BOTH THEIR INTELLIGENCE AND THEIR BODIES KEEP THEM MOVING. Both their legs and minds detest permanence.

*This is linked to the place where they were born, which is a road, and to their heritage of long migrations.*

*This natural state, this sort of Lebanese motion-mania, should be balanced by social and political stability.* Both moral and political stability serve to resist fruitless changes and unrest.

All Lebanese people who participate in politics must know this, and leaders of parties before all others.

Lebanese émigrés have always been replaced by new arrivals. The general direction of Lebanese immigrants and emigrants is westwards.

This orientation leads Syrians to Beirut and the Lebanese to America. This shows how fluid Lebanon's people are. The historical notion of refuge, combined with local confessional anxiety, explains where this mobility comes from.

*This does not prevent the base of the population from remaining cohesive and the nation from affirming its existence, provided fallacious ideologies do not lead them astray.*

*Lebanon's entire past attests to the truth of what I'm saying. This is one reason why 'Lebanon is not a country of hasty actions and coups d'état'—the other critical reason being the necessary balance between the Lebanese communities, which have themselves branched out in every possible direction.*

*Thus, insofar as the Lebanese are mobile in flesh and in spirit, the country's institutions must remain stable—because our perpetual tendency is towards change. And this is expressed, in politics as in the economy, by the diversity of opinions which infinitely multiply the number of suggestions and systems.*

For my part, I have known this for quite some time—at least since the spring of 1926 when, over studious evening meetings just after the serious developments in Syria, I drafted the Lebanese Constitution.

In short, political and social stability—the sturdiness of traditions and institutions—must balance out the extreme intellectual and physical mobility of the Lebanese people. 'Reformers' who do not see this must themselves be reformed.

14 November 1952

#### **A Note on the Chief of State's Message**

The President of the Republic's<sup>61</sup> message, addressed to the Lebanese people on November 22<sup>nd</sup>, has a different tone to those that preceded it. Circumstances have something to do with it, but not everything can be blamed on circumstance.

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<sup>61</sup> The reference here is to President Camille Chamoun (*op. cit.* n°60).



*There is a pressing need to reassure a worried people. The Chief of State has certainly recognised this. It was urgent to declare that traditions and principles will know better days, that the confusion of ideas will be fought against just like confusion in the streets, and that material anarchy will not take over this country via the troubled route of intellectual anarchy.*

I acknowledge that the Chief of State has had pure intentions from the beginning. He has power at his disposal while I only have opinions at mine. The least we can do is exercise our opinions in the climate of freedom we all love. Our cherished legitimate freedoms start with the freedom to judge things fairly and passionately.

The Chief of State is driven by excellent intentions, and I know that he works a great deal. Intentions are not actions, however, and the result of hard work can never actually match the extent of the effort. We are all seeing what we wish to happen being confounded by obscure necessities and rules.

*In its overall approach, Lebanon is carrying out one experiment after another. I hope we will emerge from them wiser. Trust in the future is what interests our people—some of the most mobile on earth. This inborn mobility must not end in the permanence of death.*

*The Lebanese are born to travel, and Lebanon is made for travellers. Tradition must triumph here to prevent this motion from becoming an escape, and this welcome from becoming a dream.* Order must prevail and the foreigner, like the Lebanese from abroad whom the Chief of State addressed warmly, should not be deterred by the excessive language of demagogues.

*It doesn't take much for the springs to run dry and for good people to leave.*

*Affluence and wealth, the social harmony that comes from a happy medium of rights and duties, can only be conceived here when everything is in balance. The standard of living depends on our visible actions and invisible resources. It depends on many-sided and countless relationships with foreign countries, within and beyond Lebanon. Distant ventures, renowned education, transit commerce, and first-rate hospitals contribute equally to the balance of payments.*

*Our laws must still correspond to our nature, dried up theories have no place in our lived reality.*

The Lebanese do not live off of their capital and private incomes, but off of their intelligence and hard work. The state's unnecessary complications and pretensions should not curb this vital mechanism. Every obstacle and burden that slows Lebanese activity translates to a loss of substance.

*The secret of business in Lebanon is a combination of quick movement and intelligence.*

*We have known for thousands of years that intellectual life is a question of horizons. The President of the Republic spoke sensibly about a blooming of the sciences and the arts, as they alone can widen our horizons.*

*We will be a people of vast freedoms, with reasonable social and fiscal laws, or we will be defeated by destiny. We must be a welcoming and broad-minded country, or we will perish.*

25 November 1952

### **An Error to Redress**

It is totally clear now that reducing the number of deputies<sup>62</sup> was an error which, had we not rushed to correct it, would have led us into disorder and secret or avowed separatisms.

If I personally had the power and responsibility to change statutory orders, I would not be ruled by pride or fear of judgement. An error committed in good faith can be corrected without a scene, and it is over. It is nevertheless regrettable that in the impassioned haste of the first days, we did not listen to experience and common sense.

Institutions in Lebanon should only be changed with extreme caution. This rule is a wise one. They are dedicated to a delicate balance. *And the best way to govern Lebanon is to allow the fewest possible individual political forces outside the Assembly.*

<sup>62</sup> The cabinet presided over by Khalid Shehab, which obtained maximum powers and governed by statutory orders, reduced the number of deputies from 77 to 44 (*op. cit. n°50 and 51*).

What is fundamentally important in Lebanon is not the number of deputies, but peace—especially confessional peace. Certainly a more filled-out Chamber would allow us to govern ourselves better. *Reducing the number of deputies as we have has not led to fewer feudal lords. On the contrary, it's the new, most vibrant elements of our country that have been shut out of the Chamber.* With only forty-four deputies elected in a confessional framework (within the constraints of a structure which this country cannot escape without civil war), *you cannot expect a Chamber to function properly—that is to say with a government, a majority, an opposition, a dozen parliamentary committees and the rest.*

It is surprising that no one considered this.

*When the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg has 51 deputies for a population and territory a quarter the size of ours, we would have no problem in having 77 or even 88 deputies in Lebanon.* When you bear in mind confessional representation and the inevitable feudal lords, who are *always elected*, it becomes essential.

Also, however large or small the country, *a minimum number of deputies is required, as well as a maximum*, for the legislature to do its job. *Above or below certain numbers, no assembly in a parliamentary system can fulfil its function. According to the English model, there should be 12 deputies in Lebanon and 6,000 in China—two ridiculous figures.*

In terms of domestic politics, the unpleasant atmosphere we are currently living is attributable primarily to electoral laws. Those who are in touch with the profound realities of Lebanese are well aware of this.

Regarding a second assembly, particularly one with a confessional base, my thoughts have been well known for a long time. This might be understandable in a country where the Chamber constantly threatens the government, *but no Lebanese chamber has ever caused the fall of a government. Here in Lebanon, two chambers such as the ones suggested will be nothing but two burdens and two powerless entities.*

*The executive power can hold temporary or ill-formed laws in check. We have seen the executive power exercise this right only once or twice in twenty-five years.*

*To return to electoral laws, let me repeat that if we do not wish disorder to spread, we should change them. The sooner the better. And without shame.*

17 March 1953

### **The Preeminence of Spirituality**

The firm and peaceful tone of the unanimous declaration of the spiritual leaders who met in Bkerké<sup>63</sup> touched every Lebanese person interested in peace.

*Are we surprised to see spiritual leaders worried about the country's temporal future?* Increasingly, the spiritual cannot be separated from the worldly, just as you cannot separate the needs of the body from those of the soul. Because body and soul are inseparable travelling companions. Those who deny the soul make the journey more difficult and its final stages more bitter. It is faith that sustains the afflicted body and its declining strength through the vicissitudes of life. *The Christian spiritual leaders talked about Lebanese minorities without talking about confessions. Nothing could have been more welcome, and therein lies the truth.* Islam has minorities just as Christianity does; there is no need for anything serious to get caught up in the controversy. *Everyone, moreover, has the same need for sanctuary from stifled freedoms. This sanctuary is Lebanon.* It's on these foundations that spirituality, far from unaware of worldly things and its earthly home, bases its rights and duties.

We can always separate Church and State. But we cannot separate the State from God. The State doesn't only contain communities and their personal status codes; it also contains the vital presence of the Eternal.

By founding its political life on confessional representation, Lebanon gives more prominence to spirituality than anywhere else in the world. *It has shown, more than others, its desire for balance and justice. It has calmed anxious minorities.* Only the ignorant aren't aware

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<sup>63</sup> Following a statement published by the preliminary commission of the permanent Islamic congress, the leaders of Christian communities in Lebanon meet at the Patriarchal residence in Bkerké.

that spirituality lives in the politics of even the most advanced nations in countless ways; and is equally alive in those who fight against it.

Contrary to what certain simple-minded people may think, Lebanon should not be ashamed of this system. It is good so long as it is the very basis for the desire to live together in peace. The big issue is how we can prevent this becoming a sickness, an exaggeration of the confessionalism and administrative sophistry that invalidate it.

*'Lebanon has always been the land of all freedoms and all religions, and a home for minorities in the Near East,'* said the spiritual leaders. *'We would like the security and justice found here to be shared by all the countries of the East. Lebanon must remain as it is...'* they added. In which of Lebanon's neighbours are minorities treated as well as they are here? Where else do you see the proportional representation you see here? Where else can you see an interpenetration of groups that makes life so easy and pleasant?

In the region, meanwhile, one sector's desire for hegemony over others is all too obvious. *What can possibly be said about countries that hypocritically only suppress confessionalism in order to suppress minorities?*

*'Lebanon is a country of associated confessional minorities'. This is a just stance and the right formula.* It has been like this, tacitly or formally, since its most distant past. *This is Lebanon's providential appearance, owing to its geography and physical contours even before its history.* This is a natural phenomenon.

World peace would like to see this refuge of freedom exist at the meeting point of continents and civilizations, on the shores of the Mediterranean, at the door of a teeming Asia.

The spiritual leaders rightly say that: *'Lebanon has always had a countenance that is the very model of its existence and independence and that it must preserve and maintain. We will never accept any modifications to this character, which is based on our most solid traditions'.*

*There is really nothing more legitimate or humane. It is an illusion to think that you can build a political system on the ignorance of the individual and the collective needs of the soul.*

*Lebanon is most certainly protected and it always will be. I will be truly satisfied when some of our Sunni compatriots, more conscious of the need for this in our so-called enlightened century, and happy to be free citizens here, see Lebanon as one of the most noble places in the Arab world that, for the love and fear of God and in the gentlest spirit of brotherhood, we intend to serve at least as much as they do.*

22 March 1953

### **Tutelary Rules**

After the change of government in September 1952, people from all sides, even sometimes in ruling circles, began advocating the modification of fundamental rules of domestic and foreign politics in Lebanon. *For those who were acting as though ignorant of Lebanese realities, this article and those that follow attempt to remind them of those realities, as well as their significance nationally, and in terms of international relations.*

A basic law of Lebanese public life is: *Whatever political institutions in Lebanon lose, 'confessionalism' gains.* I have looked into and brought attention to this law for more than twenty-five years.

You weaken the House, the government, or both, and all of a sudden the idea of a confessional community is substituted for the idea of citizenship. You leave the Chamber only to enter a house of religion.

*This is inescapable. It means that all decline in Lebanese political life corresponds to a decline of civic life.* When political representation wanes or is no longer there, confessional representation replaces it. Spiritual hierarchies automatically take the place of the missing temporal hierarchy.

To approach political representation from a confessional basis in Lebanon is to give rise to confessional associations with a political basis. If we want Lebanon to fulfil its destiny, this must

be understood; we cannot build the future on prejudices and the textbook formulas of illusory constructs.

*Lebanon is a country of associated confessional minorities.* This definition has come a long way since I first submitted it for the consideration of my fellow citizens. On the condition that it is not abused, it perfectly legitimizes confessional labels. *Seeing that no legitimate freedom can be desecrated here statutorily, it illustrates the true human brotherhood that our country represents.*

*Freedom of conscience is naturally in the foreground. Other freedoms aim to respect people's dignity. What can be said against this? What would disturb a confessional label more than a fallacious political label? Incidentally, are the laws of Islam not religious? Both civic and political? How can you completely separate this from that?*

Lebanon is therefore a country of associated confessional minorities. Consequently, when you increase the numbers in the Chamber of Deputies, *you increase the likelihood of quality and ensure a more faithful representation of the minorities that make up this country.*

*A second tutelary law of our political system is that it is wise to grant the greatest possible number of individual political forces access to the Chamber.* THIS WILL FOSTER THE DESIRE TO LIVE TOGETHER AND BIND THE STATE TOGETHER.

*It is an error for us to try to reduce our number of deputies. It means deliberately aggravating political struggles and encouraging the spirit of dissidence.*

*We often remember that the Executive is strong enough to control all of this compared to the legislative branch. This is evident in the events around us and the time we live in.*

*The moment the number of deputies was reduced, an atmosphere of armed struggle started to develop, and the politicians most at risk revolted on a confessional pretext. And we saw the whole state conferring because the Executive dared to deprive some politicians of their opportunities by robbing them of their usual votes.*

*This is reason enough to maintain, and even slightly increase, the number of deputies. But there is another, equally critical reason—this country cannot accept a Chamber that is rendered incapable of fulfilling its mission by its very composition, by its insufficient numbers.*

15 April 1953

### **Domestic Policy and Political Doctrine**

Our domestic policy should be corrected. It errs because of a lack of doctrine, just as our foreign policy does. *Months of hesitation have obscured basic principles.*

*Lebanon is not a country seeking its way in the world. It discovered this long ago. It is different from its neighbours and is aware of its mission.*

*In physical terms, it is a country of mountains and the sea. In intellectual and spiritual terms, it is a refuge of freedoms, having become a country of associated minorities by force of circumstance. In economic terms, it is a country that, for the most part, earns its living abroad by dealings done the world over. In historical terms, it is a country that has shown and defended its personality for thousands of years.*

*No Lebanese President or Prime Minister, no government, Chamber, or administration, should ever forget this.*

*May the world become smaller and may it move towards unity, I think to myself daily.* It is precisely this that has restricted and invalidated regionalism. Do we not see Asia and Africa each arbitrarily claiming the spirit of continental unity today? Do we not see India being mixed in with Africa? In the hotchpotch of people, races and languages are we not seeing the emergence of the most bizarre political combinations? What, for instance, would a logician make of an 'Arabo-Asian bloc'?

Lebanon has the climate, atmosphere, fauna, vegetation, traditions, and natural tendencies of the Mediterranean basin to which it belongs. Here, whether you are Christian or Muslim, originally Aryan or Semitic, whether you speak only one language or three, *you are tied to the*



*destiny of this strip of land whose intellectual and economic sphere of activity has always, to varying degrees and in the most obvious and undeniable way, been the entire world.*

*Every serious economic hindrance that cuts us off from the rest of the world will be the beginning of asphyxiation for the predestined land that we occupy. Lebanon's economic life is based on sea, air, and land routes. IT'S ESSENCE LIES IN THE HUMAN PHENOMENON: invention, mobility, and the speed and execution of ideas.*

*If all of this is not enough to shore up a political doctrine, we must despair of common sense. The duty of every Lebanese government is to occasionally take all of these realities into account to escape the charms of fantasy.*

*At the heart of the Arab world, Lebanon is a creator of balance, a link. Like Europe, moreover, the Arab world is a diverse one. This diversity is not a flaw, but a blessing, one that attests to originality and vitality.*

*Our domestic policy cannot but be feeble and uncoordinated if it is not based on these (briefly summarized) propositions and knowledge.*

The turning point that we have reached demonstrates to the most perceptive people that our doctrines have weakened. *The trivial has replaced the essential*

*What is essential is to safeguard the balance established by the nature of things and the lessons of the past. The first of these lessons is that, here in Lebanon, we must infuse public life with as many human values as possible, because public life and the national representation which derives from it is the true cement of the state. The second lesson is that the multifaceted opportunities of the Lebanese people essentially lie in the wide-ranging exercise of legitimate freedoms.*

THE CONFESSIONAL POSITION OF LEBANON IS A STRUCTURAL PHENOMENON; *no act of violence will change anything here; time alone will alter it, or not alter it.*

3 May 1953

### On A Lebanese Political System

As important as domestic policy is during this electoral period, foreign policy concerns prevail.

This country's general orientation towards the horizons that beckon is more serious than the election of its representatives. It is also vital, however, that national representation be conscious and sufficient, and that the Lebanese are able to make their laws in a state of order, govern themselves with discipline, and live in peace and harmony.

The electoral law under which the elections in July will be held is, for now, a law that cannot be appealed. No force can modify it even one iota. Let us take it as it is and take the best we can from it. 'Hardship is good for some things'.

This law was not modified in time by the Authority that created it for considerations that are no stranger to pride. We must deplore this as we would any weakness. Even if the elections are run perfectly, even if they don't cause any serious trouble (and I desire this more than anyone), they will still have grave consequences, because too few Lebanese will have taken an interest in public life; and because the forces of concord and harmony will have been deliberately ignored in favour of purely theoretical considerations with no future.

Lebanon is not quite the same as other countries. It is a country of associated confessional minorities. The inter-confessional relationships that are vital here assume the largest possible number of presences and contacts. It is surprising that the Legislature, in its final term, did not recognise this. It is surprising that it felt no concern when confronted with eye-opening evidence.

The forces of concord and conciliation in Lebanon are found, above all, in the Chamber. As the old saying goes: 'Power corrupts.' Outside the Chamber, deception, rancour and dissidence are growing. This is a lesson to us all. Parliamentary life must still remain possible in the spirit of the constitution. The numerous acts of the Executive show how recklessly it despises it.

Having said all of this, I repeat that Lebanon's foreign policy should be the major concern of Lebanese people and it should direct the elections themselves. This includes a knowledge of the Near East; Lebanon's eternal mission; the Arab League countries' attitudes toward one another; their attitude toward Israel; their attitude towards mutual defence and the guarantees this represents for the near and distant future; and the security of the Mediterranean, native sea of Arabs and Westerners and the shared home of their civilizations. (Did not Mr. Foster Dulles just define the Near East as a place between Africa, Asia and Europe?)

I would like to see the government show that it is aware of all of this, and that it isn't limited by prejudice and narrow-mindedness. This nation has a right to hear reassuring words rather than be fed on secretly-planned dealings. These words should be said by the government, and adhered to during the elections themselves.

This country is hungry for a sensible sequence of ideas, logic and reason.

3 June 1953

#### **Views on Lebanon and the World**

I have just come back to Lebanon<sup>64</sup> to discover the series of events that have unfolded here, and to once again attempt to grasp life and its fleeting images as profoundly as I can.

*Where does Lebanon stand? Where does the world stand?* Here, minor considerations have supplanted major ones. Men and women went to the polls so that a certain number of people would succeed or not succeed, *but not enough went for the future of the nation.*

The cardinal sin of politics today is that *it has no perspective.* It has become the narrow job of specialists more concerned with constituencies and electoral clienteles than with general ideas and formulas for progress. As we shall soon see, this is very petty politics—dangerous, vain and surely short-lived.

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<sup>64</sup> At the beginning of the summer in 1953, Michel Chiha went to France where the University of Lyon had just awarded him an honorary doctorate. During his absence, legislative elections took place in Lebanon to designate 44 deputies.

*Lebanon can only be built up on the laws of its destiny. Accidents that provoke ambitions and passions cannot take the place of rules.*

Here we are, once again, surrounded by futility: repeated petty actions and grave omissions; and once again we are uncertain.

I dare not predict what will happen tomorrow. *Fortunately, the nature of things defends the freedom and the functioning of our country, but as it stands now the equilibrium in Lebanon is not enough.* The mountains will show only one side of themselves in the Assembly. In North Lebanon they are moving towards a split. Paradoxically, it is in South Lebanon where representation will be the most genuine and the strongest.

To sum up: in the Chamber that has been formed, mighty ideologies will confront each other without one majority worth the name following the dictates of a well thought-out doctrine and a tutelary tradition. Simultaneously, the Executive power seems to dream of strengthening itself through the natural frailty of the Assembly. *This is a miscalculation.* In this Chamber, dangerous individual initiatives, which will have less impact in Parliament than on the streets, are looming.

*At the same time, the international situation remains vague. The forces that fight over power have just as good reason to turn to violence, as they do to wait in instability. The Cold War has been so corrosive that we have begun to prefer anything—sometimes even the worst—to actual needs.*

*Whether the internal discord in the USSR is reduced or increased, it holds the same threat for world peace. This is because a war with foreigners stems from the fear of a civil war, just as a civil war can stem from the fear of a war with foreigners.*

*The world is full of the unknown and explosive commotions.*

*It is time for Lebanese people to unite, love each other and only act to improve the opportunities and security of eternal Lebanon.*

21 July 1953

### Some Rules and Principles

If a number of rules and principles were followed, Lebanon could almost be governed with its eyes closed, like landing an aeroplane in a storm with radar. The Lebanese people, so mobile by nature, would be given the stability that makes for the relative happiness of individuals and nations in peace.

These rules and principles come from a profound knowledge of this country and a less superficial study of its history and institutions.

In Lebanon, however, the younger generation is unaware of almost all contemporary Lebanese history, and the much-discussed constitution of this country is, for the most part, as little-read as Hammurabi's law.

The first thing to know and announce is that Lebanon is a unique country without equal on earth, but that resembles certain nations of yesterday and today: the maritime Mediterranean nations of the past, for example, or Switzerland, a mountainous country where races, religions and languages find higher reasons for a shared political and civic life.

I have often encouraged my fellow citizens to look closely into our Lebanese problems, to escape textbook appearances and information and get to the bottom of things.

*This is what shows Lebanon to be a country of confessions and freedoms, both by nature and structure. The minorities that live together here arrived over many centuries, and still come here today in search of religious and political freedom.*

*This is what proves that consequently, this country of associated confessional minorities cannot live on reasonably 'without an Assembly which is a place of meeting and unity for all communities given their shared control over political and national life...'. When the Assembly is suppressed and discredited, 'the debate is inevitably moved into the domain of religion or its shadows'.*

*This is what makes the Lebanese Assembly not simply the result of a democratic conception of national life, but a condition of our 'desire to live together'. The more this Assembly is filled*

*out, and the more QUALIFIED representatives of communities are proportionally numerous, the better our chances of living in peace.*

Among other rules for a reasonable and permanent political system, here are two or three: *Lebanon is a country that has very diverse social strata ranging from the extremely archaic to the extremely civilized. Laws must thus be modified so that they can be applied to everyone without violence or injustice.*

*We must see to it that our fiscal and general laws contain advantages, bonuses, and tolerance compared to others, so that rebellious elements are kept in check and neighbouring attractions are rejected.*

*Finally, this country built on a crossroads, which is to some extent a public place, must use laws to strengthen the framework of its traditions, by then strengthening the Lebanese family using any means necessary, and by teaching its children to subordinate temporal things to spirituality, well-being and freedom*

These rules, these guidelines, do not seem to be the basis for the government's rulings. On the contrary, it is losing its way in anarchic inventions.

The lack of political doctrine from which we suffer is blatant to everyone. It seems that, to improve its lot, Lebanon follows the teachings of professors of public law and political economy from distant lands.

To govern ourselves better, let's start by knowing ourselves better.

5 August 1953

### **The Sound of Church Bells and the Muezzin's Call to Prayer**

I would like to see the Great Feast of Islam be an occasion for brotherly *rapprochement* between fellow citizens, like our Easter. I would like it to celebrate shared rejoicing. It is in this spirit that I offer my best wishes for happiness to my Muslim countrymen by assuring them that my prayers for them will also ascend to heaven.

This is the time to love God together by remembering what unites us, not what divides us.

Who doubts for a moment that Christians and Muslims of good faith will find grace before God, whatever their confessional labels?

Who would think that the Creator could not love any creation of His that loves and serves Him?

*Such a large part of true faith is a love that, wherever you encounter it, is sure to reveal God the merciful.*

When Islam speaks to God, Christianity is naturally attentive. It entreats the Lord in its turn to put more brotherly love in the hearts of its children.

*We do not yet recognise the extent to which the confusion of this world no longer comes from those who have pitched Islam against Christianity for so long, but from the negation of God. Tragedy lies above all in the philosophy of emptiness that aims to abolish our shared hope by any means possible.*

When we pray for our brother Muslims, we expect that they do not forget us in their prayers.

Whatever happens, can we not always address, as one, our invocation to 'Our Father' who is in heaven?

*These religious comments are appropriate. We must make it known that you can separate Church from State but you cannot separate the State of the Creator from anything. Our country, whose very constitution was established by a unanimous vote and a spirit of extreme tolerance, calls on the spirit of the Almighty to justify these words.*

22 August 1953

### **Measuring up to Our Destiny**

Would people like to hear me say that today's political Lebanon does not measure up to the destiny of our country? I believe so. My comment is aimed at neither the government nor at any one person: I say it in the absolute.

*It is aimed at the ensemble of political factors that accord a big or small country its opportunities and its place in the world.*

Our country's past and our future deserve better than what the present is giving us.

*The general view is that the State lacks density. This word captures my meaning well. Density comes from clarity of thought, profundity of doctrine, maturity in decision-making, and courage in actions.*

Apparently the Lebanese do not practice the philosophy of '*Know thyself*' enough in public life. They are not sufficiently aware of the originality of this country and its people. They do not go deeply enough into the reasons that Lebanon is *a providential country with a universal character* located in the heart of the Near East. Their approach, founded in a narrow electoral college and superficial knowledge, lacks perspective.

*As small as Lebanon is, its geography and history gives it the calling of a great country.* This must be said more clearly and frequently to those who would understand it.

The gap in our political system (as in our educational system) *is the subordination of the general to the specific, of the whole to the minutiae.* In human and intellectual terms, *Lebanon is a voice that deserves a global audience*, but its political habits are little more than petty politics.

For a very long time, I have wished that qualified Lebanese politicians, *whoever they may be, would speak more frequently to people* at the higher levels of any forum; that *discourses of some substance would teach these people what they need to know about their destiny; that this would raise their hearts and minds.*

The political messages that the Lebanese people hear, already quite rare, are also deceptively weak.



Lebanon will rediscover its best form if it resists attempts to cure imaginary illnesses. *This will also happen if people address Lebanon as they would an adult, rather than acting like children.*

2 October 1953

### **Professions in Lebanon**

Desiring the strict regulation of commercial professions in Lebanon (imports, transit trade, banks and so on) means creating uniformity out of something that is essentially and naturally diverse. It means, by definition, casting disparate and constantly changing forms in the same mould.

Lebanon's whole uniqueness lies in this diversity which, for example, allows twenty banks to differentiate themselves from each other by their methods, geographical regions, and types of business, even if their clientele is often the same. *This is because Lebanon is characterised by the ability of one person or business to carry out a surprising variety of dealings, with surprising speed.*

*It takes a certain mindset (and is a grave error) to imagine yourself able to impose a single set of regulations on something that is multiple and changeable by nature.* Material life in Lebanon and its prosperity are subordinate to the Lebanese people's ability to invent and adapt.

I wrote, not long ago, that *each Lebanese person is a republic*. Each enterprise has its unique side that allows it to live. *Diversity, multiplicity and contrast are features of this country while regulations, by definition, mean control and uniformity.*

There is an obvious contradiction between Lebanese business acumen and the State's aspiration (under the influence of academic Western influences) to constrain commerce within rigid rules. IT SEEMS ESSENTIAL THAT THIS BE MADE CLEAR.

It would be foolish to tell the Lebanese: you can or cannot buy this or that; you will invest your money in no other way but this one; you will force yourself to follow these strict rules, and

you will not stray from these narrow limits. *This would be absurd and go against the nature of both this people and its structure.*

The army, the constabulary, the police and the like require strict rules. Doctors and lawyers and related professionals must have them as well. For all the forms and types of Lebanese commerce, however, rigid rules are exactly the opposite of what is needed. Aside from some exceptions (surely very rare ones), a freedom that allows for flexible, original, ingenious, subtle and, for a time, secret methods is vital for enriching the community and raising its standard of living.

The very essence of trade, in the broadest meaning of a commercial code, here assumes a multitude of little, infinitely-evolving business secrets, occasional discoveries, and cause and effect relationships. And this is precisely what the taste for regulations, which has become unhealthy, impedes and rejects.

In no country in the world does business involve imagination and psychology more than in Lebanon. This is the opposite of routines and rules: IT IS DAILY INNOVATION.

Let the government begin by distributing uniforms (and hygiene) to porters, stevedores and dockers at ports and railway stations, and leave all kinds of merchants who are skilfully doing their jobs and making a living in peace!

21 November 1953

### **If the Youth Knew...**

*The most dangerous thing that could happen here in Lebanon is that the taste for novelty supplants tradition.*

I am as open to invention and creation as anyone else is. I pay attention to the world today. I do my best to stay up to date with everything important that happens. I know the importance of speed and its impact on the evolution of everything, acknowledge the immense importance of mechanical discoveries, and keep an emotional eye on human labour while watching machines

render it unrewarding and useless. *None of this should stop us from being tied to tradition, just as we are to experience, certainty, truth, and their benefits.*

*All Lebanese people should remember that tradition is king here in Lebanon, because it bears witness to a balance obtained by a great deal of patience.*

In Lebanon, everything is composure, moderation, and knowledge of the relative importance of theories and institutions. We are truly at the centre of the world and hold, both instinctively and mentally, the catalogue of the rise and fall of kingdoms and empires, the triumph and decay of philosophies and laws, and the wearing away of ideas and things.

*There are countless inventors here, however. Every one of them wants to win widespread acceptance and shift the basis of everything.* For some, Lebanon's political balance needs attacking, for others it is the social or economic balance. Some lose sight of the fact that *Lebanon has always been a refuge for people who were persecuted by sectarianism.* They lose sight of the wisdom of our fathers, who at the time provided a way of refuting an extraordinary number of disturbances and extravagances.

In Lebanon tradition must dominate and control everything. I would say simply that this intelligence, five or six thousand years in the making, knows that the pains of this world are fleeting and *that revolutions are often wrong. Mussolini and Hitler were not right.* As powerful as these huge personalities of yesteryear were, they are nothing but dust now, while the most humble truths remain.

The Lebanese youth are obviously troubled by the education they are receiving, the news they are hearing, the spectacle their political system is making of itself and what they are reading. The most enlightened will quickly hear their calling as prophets, and thus in good faith start to demolish what their ancestors built.

*The result can be nothing but what it is—a cacophony that confines us to intellectual anarchy.*

Even so, we have everything here that it takes to be happy. We will be happy if we understand our own political reality better and if we have the courage to defend it better.

But governments are the followers of crowds; rather than enlightening them (in the literal as well as metaphorical sense), they end up leaving them in the dark.

*The luminous school of the past is repeatedly replaced by the harsh and destructive lessons of experience.*

Surely it is logic, more than commerce, that is threatened by failure in Lebanon. I write this as a log is burning in my chimney and as I evoke a past to which all Lebanese, deep down, associate with priceless happiness.

*If the youth only knew.*

27 November 1953

### **The Three Powers in Lebanon and Their Responsibilities**

Here in Lebanon the executive and legislative powers obviously need to rehabilitate themselves since the new legislation and after so few months of existence. Do they unleash their venom on the Judiciary to forget their own inadequacy?

The Chamber flaunts its helplessness. It is obviously beneath its duties and this phenomenon is in-bred. *You don't just invent laws and control the state with impunity through such a powerless Assembly, reduced to so little by its prospects.*

What is happening had to happen (despite some 'pacifying' presences). There are some people whose merit and good intentions are not questioned in the government as in the Chamber, *but the majority? The group as a whole?*

The three branches of power in Lebanon must definitely rediscover their prestige, *but all things considered it is the judiciary branch that suffers the least.* If the Judiciary has known, and continues to know, weakness, who could honestly deny that the fault comes from the Executive and Legislature? *Who could argue that the Judiciary, because of moral and material constraints, is not at the mercy of the two others in human terms?* And this just adds insult to injury!

We demand a level of virtue and moral fibre from our judges that we do not dare demand of ministers and representatives of the people. This is one of the peculiarities of our political spectrum. Our moral history is that of the pot calling the kettle black, our justice that of hypocritical Pharisees.

No private or public anger can jolt the government out its incompetence. Deputies do as they please, *but declare war judges at the risk of undermining the Palace. They call this distributive justice.*

The state lacks seriousness and competence. Administrative law is still treated the worst of all the branches of law. These people are governed as a republic or children would be if supervisors were prohibited.

WHERE WE ARE WELL, THEY SAY WE ARE ILL. WHERE THEY ARE ILL, THEY SAY WE ARE WELL. In such delicate matters, anyone can make a rash diagnosis that forces you to exhaust yourself arguing the contrary.

This will not be solved until deputies stop offending judges, and politicians lacking in electoral clientele stop judging, for instance, the costs of great public services. This will not be solved until we start believing the words of experienced people, rather than repeating, at the expense of the people, so many foolish experiments.

*In Lebanon we must honestly evaluate the power and powerlessness of the three branches—executive, legislative and judiciary. And not just by taking an inventory, but by returning to principles and responsibilities.*

*After ten, twenty, thirty years of diverse lessons and accidents, unless we are totally devoid of intelligence, psychology, memory and imagination, we do not need to immerse ourselves in Montesquieu in order to reform the Lebanese state. The author of the Spirit of Laws would advise to do nothing more than have ears and eyes, to hear and to see.*

17 December 1953

### Schools in Limbo, or the Great Pity of Education

Charles H elou's important article on education, which appeared in this newspaper yesterday, deserves further attention.

*It would be better to have no educational system in Lebanon than one that it is not qualitative. If both teacher and pupil are ignorant and mediocre, there's no point having the school. It would be better to let life itself teach, and nurture autodidacts whose natural aptitudes would have room to shine.*

It is a grave illusion to believe that schools—made only of buildings and functionaries—are blessings in and of themselves. What counts is what is taught there, the culture and education that is passed on.

School with a capital 's' is nothing if it imparts false or fragile knowledge. Relative ignorance, which still has room for common sense, is better than the lessons of feeble teachers with bitter souls who are worn away by disappointment and envy.

There is nothing worse for teaching than a failure; except perhaps a schoolteacher who cannot read, like a traveller with no bags.

*For too long in Lebanon, quantity has been preferred to quality. At all levels of teaching, ventures are born which can be called, at the very least, reckless.*

*Do you think that Lebanon would be able to preserve its raison d' tre and its status if our diplomas were scorned or discredited,?*

Those who dare to teach what they do not know (or only what they do know) *deserve to be severely punished.* It is a sin against the country, a sin against its spirit to promote unhealthy competition *in a scholarly and academic life already disoriented by prejudice and excessively commercialised.*

IN ALL THINGS, LEBANON'S HEALTH AND PRESERVATION ARE INEXTRICABLY LINKED TO QUALITY. It is only through quality that a small country like ours can justify its presence and its future. Nowhere in the world is this more clear and certain than in Lebanon.

*Education here in Lebanon has already weakened us. Year after year, exam results are falling. The most representative of Lebanese people have expressed their fears and worries. Things cannot continue on like this without ending badly.*

*We must choose definitively between quality and quantity, between genuine teachers and fortune-tellers. It is truly disappointing that people who aspire to professorships should start by throwing minds into confusion.*

*We beseech the government to conserve or return to Lebanon that which it is currently losing—its reputation as an enlightened country.*

22 December 1953

### **The Point of a Journey**

The Chief of State will be gone for a month. He is going to America, as the Lebanese have for a hundred years.

The Lebanese presence in the new world is the reason for his journey. Hundreds of thousands of Lebanese live in the friendly countries that the President will visit.

*Lebanon's orientation and its calling, its past and future, are illustrated by this voyage.* The Lebanese Chief of State is not starting in Europe. His first official visits outside the Arab world will be in South America. He could just as viably visit Lebanese people in the United States, Canada, the French Union, South Africa and Australia—because the Lebanese are everywhere, which is what makes Lebanon unique, even within the Arab world.

Iraqis, Egyptians, Saudis and Yemenis do not travel. If they do travel it is, as it is with Syrians and Jordanians, only *insofar as they resemble the Lebanese.*

For Lebanese people space is a need, changes of scenery a necessity. We are like birds who migrate from one continent to another each season. We have an urge to navigate, whether by boat or aeroplane. And now it seems as though there isn't enough oxygen on earth for our lungs.

Those who wish to enclose Lebanon within a Great Wall of China, within rigid rules and narrow discipline, should remember this. In *a world chained by tyranny and excessive laws, we remain the very symbol of freedom.*

Why else would the President of the Lebanese Republic be going to Brazil, Uruguay and Argentina? If he's going, it's perhaps it's because as many Lebanese people dwell abroad as in the Lebanese mountains and on the venerable shores of ancient Phoenicia.

Six months ago, at a meeting of the Cénacle Libanais, I recalled that: *'The sources of Tyr's fortunes were at the ends of the earth'*. The ends of the earth are also the sources of all of Lebanon's fortunes.

It is thus natural that the President of Lebanon travel; that he head to the sources that nourish the people whose leader he is.

*But the policies of the State must also correspond closely to the point of the Chief of State's voyage. For such a voyage to be neither a paradox nor a fantasy, Lebanon must remain the country of freedom. Otherwise, as in the time of Padishah and the Sublime Porte, it would be Lebanese fugitives, Lebanese exiles, Lebanese people fleeing misery that the Chief of State would be visiting.*

8 May 1954

### **The 'Presidential System of Government' in America**

The President's voyage to America is a chance to say a few words about what is known as the American 'presidential system'.

Despite more widespread education about constitutional law in the Near East, and in Lebanon particularly, *confusion persists even among highly-educated people about the difference in meaning between 'presidential system' and 'personal power'; between 'presidential system' and 'dictatorship'.*



When General Shishakli<sup>65</sup>, for instance, promulgated his last constitution in Syria, he announced that a 'presidential system' had been established along with it, when in reality it was little more than 'personal power' in disguise. No doubt things are always clearer with hindsight, but, sending my article from Paris to *Le Jour*, I was alone in calling the Shishakli regime by its name.

The so-called 'presidential' system of government in America is first of all necessary in a federated state, as opposed to a unitarian state; *that is to say, in a country made up of federated and united states (hence the name United States).*

*An American President is by definition the leader of a federal government.*

The first article of our constitution states that Lebanon is a 'unitarian' state. This is the case of all the countries of the Near East and the Arab League. To make federal governments in these countries, we would have to first dismember them and then recreate them: in Syria, for example, the states of Aleppo, Damascus, the Alawis, Homs, Jazirah, Jabal Druze and the Hauran would have to be recreated, and then each given equal representation in the Senate.

*The American presidential system only sees itself as a country of 'federated states', where the federal government stands above local governments.* In the United States, as in Brazil and Argentina, each state has a 'governor' as its president, but one with local and restricted powers. To avoid confusion, he is called a governor and not a president.

The Swiss Constitution, which was inspired by and closely resembles that of United States, planned for just two houses, which equate to the Senate and the House of Representatives in the United States. This is the Council of States, composed of two representatives per canton, whatever the canton's numerical or territorial importance, and the National Council. Switzerland, a democracy par excellence, does not have a presidential system of government because *power there is not individual, but 'collegial'.*

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<sup>65</sup> President of the Syrian Republic in July 1953; he had participated in several coups in Syria.

The Swiss federal council exercises collective power (as has Uruguay, President Chamoun's next port of call after Argentina, ever since the promulgation of its new constitution). The annually-elected president of the Swiss confederation holds more of an honorary position and is not, in fact, first among his peers.

We would do well to remember such things here in Lebanon, where everyone talks about the constitution without having read it, and about the 'presidential system' without knowing what it is.

The fact is, the presidential system—a genuinely democratic system of government in the United States and one of the most democratic in the world—*has nothing to do with personal power and dictatorship*. As great as they may be, the powers of the President of the United States are strictly limited by the two other state bodies.

*But most importantly, the American presidential system is by definition that of a federal country. This can be no question of applying it to a unitarian State.*

22 May 1954

### **For Failing Memories**

In putting an end to the holiday on the First of September, did our amnesiac government, without the slightest regard for history, really think it could abolish this great memory?

I should hope not, for the sake of its reputation and honour, because the First of September 1920 was a day of destiny for Lebanon.

We have developed a bad habit of underestimating the past. It's a naughty pupil's habit; but for government employees and men of state, such historical forgetfulness is more serious. *On the First of September 1920, Lebanon knew both a birth and rebirth*. We cannot ignore this. I, for my part, will strongly remind some failing and unreliable official Lebanese memories of this.

This is not about knowing who first proclaimed the Lebanon of the time. *It is about remembering that our Lebanon was proclaimed in its current geographical form*, and that we

finally escaped the depths of Ottoman subordination. If after a world war, because of the presence of a new international order, it was a French representative who proclaimed it, *it was also the result of a long period of stubborn resistance by the Lebanese people*. If King Faisal, then the king of Syria, had accepted the Mandate, Lebanon would find it hard to escape his rule. He agreed to be satisfied with Lebanese compensation. This was before Maysaloun<sup>66</sup>. I lived through all of this.

*The First of September 1920 remains the day when Lebanon first took the place it now has among nations. For us this was a source of true happiness for generations, one that still resonates today.*

*Of course the day in November 1943<sup>67</sup> on which we gained our total independence was also a great day. But it was the result of the other. In 1920, we acquired the territory and potential for independence. 1943 saw the natural development of an unstoppable reality after the Second World War.*

I deplore the suppression of the official commemoration of the First of September. I would like nothing more than to reduce the obscene amount of holidays here. *But first we must consider the raisons-d'être of our nation. The savings being imposed on us stem from a paltry and narrow view of general politics.* (Reductions in the number of deputies are a similar phenomenon.)

*Calls of the soul and psychological realities are in daily decline here. We diminish, rather than develop, our sense of spiritual and political wonder, and our sense of the global community.*

*Whether it pleases the authorities or not, the First of September will never cease to be an essential day for all Lebanese people.*

1 September 1954

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<sup>66</sup> Battle between the troops of Emir Faysal, King of Syria, and the French army (July 24, 1920) which put a stop to Syrian attempts at independence for a quarter of a century.

<sup>67</sup> *Op. cit.* n°17.

### A Philosophy of Confessionalism in Lebanon

Confessionalism is a 'strict attachment to a religious confession'. This is the dictionary definition, and it clearly applies to us here in Lebanon. *But in Lebanon confessionalism also means something else. It is the guarantee of an equitable social and political representation for associated confessional minorities.*

Whether we like it or not, a confession in the broadest sense of the word is a form of civilization. Hence the phrases 'Christian civilization' and 'Islamic civilization'. Beyond their common bases, personal status codes are what make the major and subtle differences between them. Civilisations in Lebanon coexist in a particularly happy spirit of brotherhood and tolerance. Personally, I never miss a chance to prove this tolerance a necessary complement to virtue and faith, accompanied by hope and charity. I would do anything in my power to bring all those who recognize and adore one God closer together. And I wish God's reign and justice on all people in this country, as well as all of humanity.

That said, the confessional situation in Lebanon seems natural and legitimate. If a political doctrine can create intellectual and moral bonds within a party, then it makes even more sense that metaphysics, which dictates a large part of temporal legislation, should create even stronger ones.

I am less surprised than others, who naively affect profound knowledge and shock at the confessional situation in Lebanon—which is *something that above all creates peace and order.*

It is time that politics becomes more flexible and alive, so that it can adapt itself to national realities and necessities everywhere. It is time for harsh, dry theories to bow before stirring spirits and throbbing flesh. *Lebanon is made up of associated confessional minorities. These minorities wear confessional labels because Lebanon has always been a refuge for freedom of conscience. This was made possible by Lebanon's geographic location: a mountainous country that enabled self-defence, and a maritime country where it has always been easy to take to sea.*

Why would we want to brutally modify something that was shaped by the centuries? What bizarre mentality would put secular prejudice before more general and humane intelligence? *Despite many errors and much abuse, confessionalism has taught Lebanon tolerance. It's the immediate neighbourhood of religions and liturgies, it's the long custom of coexistence, it's reciprocal contacts, respect and friendships, and thorough knowledge of each other that have led to our current equilibrium.* For my part, in political terms, I see a much greater difference between a communist and a non-communist citizen, than I see between a Maronite and a Shi'i, for example, or between a Greek Orthodox and a Sunni: and *many advanced European countries have representatives in their parliaments and governments who wear their confessional labels politically.*

*Lebanon's case is not at all that of a backward country; it is a unique case, that's all. No country in the world is, from a confessional point of view and to such a degree, in Lebanon's position.* On the other hand, countries believed to be the most modern sometimes display extreme intolerance.

I am not confusing religion with politics, and I know how to give Caesar his due, but the very primacy of spiritual things in a sense justifies and explains the Lebanese situation. *The fundamentally confessional Lebanese balance is not arbitrary. It wasn't prejudice that shaped it, but the necessity of recognizing idiosyncrasies that are as important as political parties. With time, these differences will subside and slowly disappear. But today, Lebanon's raison d'être truly lies in its characteristic confessional balance which is immediately apparent in the Legislature. To reform ourselves, let us begin by favouring merit over confession within the administration. This step would seem much more natural.*

### **What Needs to Be Fixed**

We need to fix our political practices.

It is not enough to raise the standard of living to make our country viable. Wherever political practices and morals are lax, all life in society weakens. We are not asking Lebanon to imitate Sparta. This would be too much for a people who love the good things in life. But even the mountains, so strong and austere not so long ago, are weakening. They grew too fond of a life of clientelism, of backhanders, of bowing and scraping, of undeserved favours, of generous gifts and perks. They no longer defend their dignity and stature enough.

It is of course important to us that Lebanon equip itself well, that attractive buildings are built, that roads and streets become wide and straight, that tastes are developed and that all types of material progress are accessible to us. *Far more important, however, is that we develop good people here, and that the Lebanese people, flattened by servility, pick themselves up and pull themselves together.* Above all, we need good people, people of character and spirit, citizens who refuse to sacrifice their opinions to their interests and who are not beggars, flatterers and sycophants paid by the week. This is the mob we are up against, and we must combat it with extreme vigour.

It is truly pitiful that no deputy dares to speak out on behalf the public good, that no deputy dares develop a reasoned critique and debate it with a government that only rewards its faithful. When a journalist becomes mute, because silence is more appreciated than an honest column, it's even worse.

In politics, this country needs to relearn the dignity and nobility of man, and start respecting and encouraging unselfish manifestations of freedom once again.

### **Lost Comments**

Themistocles's words to Eurybates—'*Strike me, but listen too*'—should be said to anyone who gets angry when you try to save them from their mistakes. There is no more foolish anger than that which attacks reason. We must pity those who remain stubborn when faced with the facts.

Themistocles' sang-froid is a paragon of calm: 'Strike me, but listen too'. Let the savage in you act, if you must, but do not abandon your intelligence.

No ruse will ever defeat clear, illuminating intelligence.

Themistocles' and Eurybates' dialogue is played out daily by all sorts of people. You collide with stubbornness like you collide with a wall, as though there were something in this world more precious, noble, commendable, worthy, generous, human and fraternal than selfless advice.

We are blinded when the light shines too brightly and shy away when the argument gets critical. If non one is giving you selfless advice, take nature's counsel, and remember its profound laws: *all excess is bad; there is a just middle ground; man's moderation is wise; ambitions have limits; the sun rises and sets; there are seasons of darkness and light*; and there is always an arrival and a departure, a beginning *and an end*.

With such thoughts in mind, you can fill your heart with calm, and stop succumbing to temptations, and abusing the truth.

It's the secret desire to live on, to survive, which unbalances existence. The truth, meanwhile, lies in nature taking its course. The worst enemy of both politics and faith is sinning against the spirit. This was Eurybates' sin, before the term was coined. But because Eurybates was moved in the end and admitted defeat, Salamis happened instead of disaster.

I'm considering all this in front of a large bay window that looks out onto the widest possible horizon of mountains and sea, through the tall branches of a green oak and flowering oleanders. How difficult it is, when destiny is good to us, to master both it and our passions.

### **Lebanon's Originality**

Because there is no country like it, we can rest assured that Lebanon will remain similar only to itself.

You do not establish such a unique personality (without the least bit of artifice), only to change your appearance.

In the Near East, in the entire Middle East, it's in the interest of any statesmen worthy of the name to keep Lebanon as it is indefinitely. Any attempt to conquer us would no doubt harm us, but in the end it would fatally wound the aggressor.

The Lebanese are much too diverse a people for another country, worried about peace and order, to wish to take on its turbulence and troubles. It will always be wisest to leave us alone. The peace of mind of others rests on our independence.

There is no similar meeting place in the world where the rule, *on life's most elevated level, is freedom and more freedom.*

A quick assessment of our diversity would be conclusive, but what good what it do to create a catalogue of this admirable diversity, so often labelled a misfortune, which symbolises the respect that we have for the rights of faith and intelligence?

We have nothing to learn from any other country on this issue: the ancient world, and even America, still have intolerant and quarrelsome attitudes to race and religion.

This is the house of God, at its most ancient point of contact with heaven. Christianity and its multiple branches, Islam and its diverse conceptions of faith, Jewish law with its venerable past and its nuances, and still other confessions live and breathe together here in Lebanon without feeling the need to force anyone's beliefs. In truth, this is the best civilisation has to offer.

The striking human manifestation of Lebanon's approach to belief is visible in its hospitality to all those who do not threaten it.

In war as in peace, over the course of the century, Lebanon has seen two worlds pass through its lands. It greeted all glories, welcomed all distresses, and opened its doors to all manifestations of faith, intelligence, and bravery. It is surrounded by friendships all around the world. It will always know how to prove worth of this, and see to it that its future be a natural development of its past.