

Journal of Asian and African Studies XXIV, 1-2 (1989)

Bureaucracy and Development in Syria: *The Case of Agriculture*

RAYMOND A. HINNEBUSCH

College of St. Catherine, St. Paul, MN, U.S.A.

ABSTRACT

This article examines the Syrian bureaucracy through a case study of its role in agricultural development. It analyses the degree of technocratic rationality imparted to agrarian policy, the effectiveness of the bureaucracy in carrying out agricultural policy, the beneficial role of the bureaucracy for the agrarian economy and the peasantry, and the political consequences of the Syrian bureaucracy's role in agriculture. It also indicates that while senior public officials play a role in shaping agrarian policy, this role is in turn shaped by Ba'thist ideology and a political structure that vests control over high policy in the Presidency and the ruling party and not in the ministerial bureaucracy. This arrangement influences agricultural planning, administrative leadership, and patronage politics. This paper concludes that despite the flaws that afflict the agrarian apparatus, the Syrian bureaucracy has put in place development programs of great benefit to agriculture.

THE SYRIAN BUREAUCRACY OPERATES in a special political environment which shapes its role in agrarian development. In its radical phase (1963-70), the Ba'th Party tried to make the bureaucracy an instrument of socialist revolution from above. The radical phase initiated an etatist strategy of development which translated into steady expansion in the functions and size of the agrarian bureaucracy. It was charged with carrying out land reform, forging peasant cooperatives, and replacing landlord and merchant in the agrarian economy. Under Asad, as power and stability displaced radical change in elite priorities, the bureaucracy retained a central role in agriculture: it plans crop rotations, introduces technical innovations, delivers credit and services, markets crops, and manages land reclamation, irrigation, and agro-industry. It has assumed a more technocratic orientation, but it has also become an instrument of cooptation and a font of patronage, to the detriment of rational task performance. Total state employment has grown from 22,000 in the late fifties to 250,000 in the seventies to 473,285 in 1984 when one in every five persons was so employed, including 153,000 government officials, 92,000 teachers, and 130,500 public sector workers (SAR 1984: 88, 94); the agrarian bureaucracy has proliferated at a similar rate.

This essay will examine Syrian bureaucracy through a case study of its role in agricultural development. Do technocrats impart rationality to agrarian

policy? How effective is the bureaucracy in carrying out policy? Is it a burden or a benefit for the agrarian economy and the peasantry? What are the political consequences of its role?

II. Ideology, Technocracy, and Agrarian Policy-Making

The technocrats of the senior bureaucracy play a role in the shaping of agrarian policy, but it takes place within a milieu shaped by Ba'th ideology and a political structure which centers power over "high policy" not in the ministerial bureaucracy, per se, but in the Presidency and the ruling party. The collegial Ba'th party leadership, the Regional Command, proposes, under presidential guidance, broad policies which are ratified by periodic party congresses. These policies are formulated by the command's array of specialized offices with responsibility for different policy sectors; the *Maktab Fallahin*—Peasant Office—is most directly responsible for policy on agriculture. The policies of the offices are, in turn, not made in a vacuum but coordinate, under a senior party apparatchik, the work of the various ministerial officials and interest group leaders—the Peasant Union in the case of agriculture—in their policy fields.

Party agrarian policy is most immediately shaped less by technical or economic rationality than by a mix between the persistence of statist-populist ideological preferences and the requisites of power. While the embourgeoisement of the power elite has been accompanied by a retreat of ideological motivation from elite circles, a residue of ideology is institutionalized in the Ba'th party and defended by party apparatchiki. Its imprint is unmistakable in the constancy with which the regime has pursued socialist-like solutions in agriculture, particularly cooperatization, and in its abiding distrust for private sector "feudalists" and merchants. The calculus of power generally reinforces étatist and populist policies: the state has a vital interest in state control over agricultural decisions and resources and in keeping the bourgeoisie—where political opposition is concentrated—from recovering its influence over the sector. And Ba'thist legitimacy is seen to rest on a state development effort exemplified by hydraulic projects and agro-industrialization. The subordination of economic rationality to the calculus of power is evident in policies such as the use of the bureaucracy to maximise employment and in the sacrifice of profitability in agro-industry to patronage and low-priced output.

The state bureaucracy, in which the development orientation of the technocracy and the rational-legal traditions of career officialdom mix with patronage politics, does have an input into party decisions and their concrete application. There is plenty of evidence of the technocratic mentality in the policy process: debates over the matching of ends—self-sufficiency, greater productivity—and appropriate means, statist or market, the stress on planning of the agrarian sector, the drive to manage the environment through hydraulic projects or protection of the *badiya* (range or steppe), the deployment of new bureaucratic instruments meant to control and stimulate agriculture—all bear

the imprint of this orientation. Technocrats arguing for economically rational adjustments in policy carry growing weight, their arguments being most effective when they promote a state interest in improved resource mobilization. But technocratic rationality by no means coincides with the promotion of market strategies at the expense of statism. Most technocrats accept the rationality of a major role for the state. The limits and abuses of development under the bourgeoisie before 1963 generated attitudinal support for expansion of the state sector. Once this began, investment by the alienated agrarian bourgeoisie largely ceased and, given the lack of resources and initiative among peasants, only state intervention could prevent stagnation and spur development. The strategy of the regime was at heart bureaucratic: if there was a problem or a need, create a new ministry or "general organization" to deal with it and, once created, vested interests became attached to these organizations. Where technocrats are divided, it is over the relative extent and purposes of the state's role. Those educated in the Eastern bloc view it positively as an instrument of both economic growth and socialist ideals. Other technocrats, especially those who are not the products of Ba'thist politicization, have diminished faith in the efficacy of the state's role and more in the market and private enterprise and they are strengthened to the extent "socialist" schemes, like state farms, have failed. The need to choose appropriate tenure forms in the reclaimed areas of the Euphrates is illustrative of the current balance of opinion within the elite: the alliance between party elites and Eastern-educated state bureaucrats in favor of production cooperatives and state farms reflects an enduring ideological bias in the regime; but its growing pragmatic willingness to experiment with other forms, such as service cooperatives and joint venture investment companies, indicates a technocratic flexibility likely to increase as resource constraints give ever greater weight to immediate-term economic arguments over ideological ones. But up to now, ideology and technocracy have worked in tandem giving a powerful étatist thrust to agrarian policy-making.

III. Planning in Practice: Technocracy in Action or Empire Building?

Étatism depends on the effectiveness of state planning and although Syria still lacks sophisticated planning mechanisms, planning is the main instrument through which agrarian strategy is translated into operational targets and implemented.

The Higher Planning Council, an inter-ministerial body headed by the Prime Minister, is the supreme decision-making body in the planning process. It formulates the general targets of the plan and is the arena in which ministries and agencies fight for their share of the investment budget. The planners, *per se*, are in the State Planning Commission (SPC) which provides the long-range studies and designs the macro-economic framework behind production targets and investment decisions, but it has lacked the means—sufficient data and expertise—to effectively play this role and the design of the plan results as

much from the conflict of personal opinions and bureaucratic interests as from rational cost-benefit argument based on fact. Thus Syrian plans typically end up being a collection of goals without a rigorous specification of their interconnections and of mechanisms of implementation.

An elaborate agricultural production plan is designed which sets crop-targets and rotations tailored to various regions and the levels of inputs and credit needed to reach these targets. The plan is enforced through price policy, linkage of state credit to crop delivery, and by licensing of farmers. To cultivators, planning is an unwelcome constraint and "input" from below into plan formation usually insufficient to satisfy their wishes; they argue that they know best what to plant and that planning deprives them of the freedom to efficiently manage their farms. The "needs" of the country as projected by planners or imposed by party strategy rather than the wishes of the cultivators is often the decisive factor in the design of the production plan. Planners have tried to impose targets even against peasant resistance, e.g. sugar beet production, though they have to be flexible in enforcement since they cannot afford to alienate peasants for political reasons and peasants can always find ways of evading the plan. Government planning has had some success in reducing unnecessary fallow, stabilizing wheat output by concentrating it in good rainfall areas, diversifying crops, and getting farmers to grow and deliver crops needed for industry or export-crops they might otherwise not plant.

A state investment plan designed to support the production plan by channeling state resources into development projects and agrarian infrastructure is also formulated. Project identification and budget allocation emerge from a process of bureaucratic politics in which each agency is out to defend or expand its programs and the planning commission, lacking the authority to impose a coherent macro view on rival ministries, acts chiefly as a "recorder" or mediator of rival demands. The party apparatus has repeatedly imposed unrealistic land reclamation targets for the Euphrates Basin, expressive of its ideological stake in this showpiece of Ba'athism. Other projects are proposed by a ministry on the grounds that they fill a gap in plan implementation. But projects have been added by a powerful minister or party politician without benefit of any feasibility study by planners or even concern for the availability of financing—especially in the mid-seventies when the rival arms of the state apparatus were scrambling to claim a chunk of the Arab oil wealth pouring in. Perhaps the most infamous example of such a project is the paper pulp factory in Deir ez-Zor which was imposed by the Ministry of Industry against the opposition of the Planning Minister and which threatens to be an expensive white elephant. The belief that such project decisions have often been made as a result of commissions paid to high party and government officials is widespread.

Although the plan is legally binding in theory, in practice ministries regularly fall well short of their targets. This is partly because of unrealistic goals and partly due to uncontrollable environmental factors, such as technical problems with gypsum in the Euphrates project or shortfalls in Arab financial

assistance caused by political conflicts. But much of the problem is due to bureaucratic and contractor mismanagement or inertia. Each ministry often goes its own way when the success of a project requires the cooperation of several. Monitoring of performance is weak. Problems are left to reach the crisis stage before any effort is made to cope with them; the result is bottlenecks—the need to stop projects because of scarcities of materials or imported equipment or unsynchronized completion of different project components. In the absence of sufficient data and expert analysis, follow-up sessions of the Higher Planning Council typically fail to pinpoint responsibility and degenerate into efforts by officials to justify their errors or defend their ministries. As bureaucrats get used to plan failure, the plan's value as a serious guide to action is eroded. Because planning doesn't work well, it does not follow that it is unimportant. It remains the basic arena for dividing up resources between competing priorities and interests. It is a way of periodically measuring performance and the major mechanism, feeble as it may be, for coordinating the multitude of government agencies. And it is developing, little by little, into an instrument for the control of resources which has strengthened the grip of the state over the economy.

IV. Administrative Leadership

The institutionalization of goal-setting in the party has given a certain consistency to the main lines of agrarian policy. But the regime has fallen down in translating goals into coherent enforced plans and in providing adequate resources to implement them. Indeed, the implementation of policy has often been characterized by incoherence and discontinuity.

The prime minister is the chief executive responsible for day-to-day policy implementation and through his council of ministers he formally presides over the vast ministerial bureaucracy. But he has insufficient authority over many of his own ministers and the council of ministers, its composition reflective of the intra-regime factional balance, is not a cohesive team devoted to getting a job done. "Each ministry acts as if it were an independent interest in conflict with the others" (Hilan 1973:113) and high officials often see only the interests of their own agency. The result is an enervating lack of coordination in policy implementation. Cabinets also undergo a fairly rapid turnover so that few ministers become masters of their policy domains. A major source of bureaucratic ills is, thus, the failure of political leadership to provide proper direction to the bureaucracy.

The weakness of the council of ministers is especially damaging for agriculture because responsibility for it is so widely dispersed across the bureaucracy. While the Ministry of Agriculture and Agrarian Reform has chief responsibility for implementation of agricultural policy, it lacks direct authority over many other agencies crucial to its mission. The Agricultural Bank, crop export agencies such as the cotton marketing agency, and the foreign trade bodies which import agricultural inputs are subordinated to the

Ministry of Economy and Foreign Trade. The Ministry of Internal Trade regulates market prices for agricultural goods and controls the General Organization for Cereals Marketing and Processing which buys much of the grain harvest. The Ministry of Industry controls the food, textile, and sugar firms which buy and process crops and the industries which produce farming inputs such as fertilizers and tractors. Coordination is supposed to be achieved by the Higher Agricultural Council (HAC), a body chaired by the Prime Minister and including the heads of these agencies, which translates the Five Year Plan into yearly implementation plans. The Minister of Agriculture also presides over an implementation sub-committee of the HAC, which is supposed to have authority over other ministries in their agriculturally relevant operations down to the village level. But the HAC lacks sufficient authority to overcome fragmentation and, indeed, at times lapses into inactivity and the Agricultural Ministry lacks sufficient weight in inter-ministerial arenas to supervise implementation effectively, although much depends on the political stature of the minister and whether he enjoys the backing of the head of the *Maktab al-Fallahin* and hence of party power.

Indeed, in a political system where authority is highly centralized and personalized, the quality of leadership is especially decisive for administrative performance. Unfortunately, the Agricultural Ministry has suffered from a lack of strong, consistent, and appropriate leadership. Only two ministers have had extended tenure; one, Muhammed Haidar, was a corrupt politico lacking even an agronomy degree and the other, Ahmad Qabalan, had an agronomy degree and power, too, but did not have a reputation for putting the interests of development first. Other ministers have had short tenures or lacked agricultural expertise. Rapid turnover in ministers has been a continuing obstacle to continuity in decision-making. The lack of strong leadership means the agrarian sector comes out shortchanged in the struggle over resources and suffers from a lack of coordination, which translates into endless bottlenecks.

V. Patronage Politics

Between policymaking and outcomes exists a shadowy particularistic politics run along informal clientalist channels, carried on by *shillas* colonizing the legal institutional structures, aiming at private gain through public office. Such practices include official extortion of commissions on state contracts; according to insiders, agriculture ministers and their deputies have headed clientalist networks which take cuts on all such transactions. A number of high officials have personal or family businesses on the side to which they channel state contracts. Outright embezzlement of public funds or theft of goods happens. Indicative of the growing scope of corrupt practices is the fact that the major recent factional conflicts inside the agrarian bureaucracy have taken the form of rivalries between opposing coalitions of high officials and supplier agents over control of the contract tendering process and the commissions at stake in it. Indeed, the Ministry of Agriculture was rocked in the mid-eighties

by a struggle over contracts between the Minister, Mahmoud Kurdi, and his Alawi deputy which ended in the fall of both. The pernicious effects of these practices is obvious. A leadership engrossed in struggles over spoils is hardly well equipped to lead a development effort. They drain the public treasury, at the expense of tax-payers, of development funds. When patronage considerations displace rational analysis in the planning process and commissions dictate the choice of projects, cost-benefit rationality goes by the board.

The securing of special privileges, exemptions to the law, or use of public offices as sinecures for clients and kin are other typical practices. Licenses to export livestock to the lucrative markets in the Gulf or to import agricultural machinery and the right to rent extensive state lands in the East at low prices are prized plums which agricultural authorities can distribute to clients. When exceptions and exemptions from the law proliferate, planning and regulation are subverted. One Minister of Agriculture was accused of illegally running a large farm on marginal areas officially reserved for grazing; if the minister himself encroaches on the *badiya*, how can his ministry protect its fragile ecology? State cattle farms have been overstaffed several times to provide sinecures for regime loyalists, subverting their mission to integrate cattle into the agricultural cycle and, in ruining the farms economically, discrediting collective social forms.

On a yet more petty level, many local officials take bribes from peasants to overlook regulations or insist on them as the price of the official approvals or services peasants are formally entitled to or for prior consideration cutting through red tape. The growing bureaucratic penetration and regulation of agriculture has raised the costs of such practices for peasants. On the other hand, well-placed persons can also use their position to help out kin in the village: the case of a strategically-placed aide in the presidency who got the agricultural ministry to drill wells and plant trees in his village is typical, not exceptional.

VI. The Ministry of Agriculture and Agrarian Reform: Structure, Personnel, Pathologies

The transformation of high policy into practice requires all the skills of rational-legal bureaucracy. The Ba'th's drive to enhance state capabilities translated into a burst of organization-building and inexorable growth in the functions, size, penetration, and real impact of state structures on agriculture over the past decades. The agrarian bureaucracy was responsible for a long series of reform and rationalizing innovations. The regime made major breakthroughs in development of political-administrative technology needed to bring policy to the village: land reform broke down traditional forces resistant to state penetration, cooperitization institutionalized state linkages to peasants, and an array of specialized bureaucratic organizations were deployed to carry out policy tasks. But the efficiency of the state apparatus has failed to keep pace

with its structural expansion and it is thus riddled with “pathologies” which enervate its performance.

The structure of the Ministry of Agriculture illustrates both the range of tasks and the multitude of pathologies typical of the bureaucracy. The ministry is run with far too little delegation of power, overburdening the minister and the 29 department heads reporting directly to him is an excessive span of control. As a result, decisionmaking is sluggish and initiative by subordinated discouraged. There is a complex but haphazard division of labor at ministry headquarters. The minister and his three deputies preside over an array of specialized *mudirat*—directorates. Directly under the minister is the strategic Administrative Affairs Directorate which controls budgeting, accounting, contracts, personnel matters, and inspection. Under the First Deputy Minister are key directorates such as Planning & Statistics which prepares and supervises plan implementation and collects data on its outcome; and the Directorate of Agricultural Affairs which determines input needs and supervises their delivery. Also within his responsibility are sectoral directorates in charge of plant protection, forest management, soils (surveys, classification land use planning), and three autonomous offices, the Cotton, Olive and Citrus bureaus, which perform research, quality control, and marketing functions for these crops. Also under his supervision are functional directorates for agrarian reform and state property management, extension, and supervision of agricultural secondary schools. A second deputy minister responsible for research supervises the agricultural research stations. A third deputy minister supervises sectoral directorates chiefly responsible for livestock—animal husbandry (breeding, fodder supply), animal health, *badiya*, range and sheep management, and rural building and machinery. Finally, several autonomous state production or commercial enterprises, including state farms, the Ghab administration, and the General Organizations for Cattle, for Poultry, for Fish, for Fodder, for Seeds and for Agricultural Machinery report directly to the minister. This structure, which developed piecemeal, lacks a consistent basis for the division of functions and suffers from an overlap of responsibilities among directorates. The operation of the central ministry is also hampered by a tendency to set general goals without a proper design for implementation and evaluation, for delimiting jurisdictions, and for setting standards and measures of job performance. Officials often identify solely with their directorate instead of with the ministry mission. According to a critique of the agronomists’ syndicate, there is a failure to “give those with responsibility appropriate power, especially in cases where they must co-ordinate several functions which have to be done simultaneously since delay in the performance of one leads to a chain of bottlenecks in the performance of others”. Too many administrators are mere “protectors of the rules” rather than expeditors of task performance. There is an excessive stress on hierarchy and the chain of line command, expressive of too much concern for power prerogatives and not enough for the kind of interaction and communication needed to get a job done.

At the *muhafazat* (governorship) level is a *mudir al-zira'i* (agricultural direc-

tor) on the staff of the governor who coordinates field offices corresponding to the central level directorates; his staff agronomists are supposed to be specialists consulted by lower level field workers. At the *mantiqa* (district) level is an "agricultural head of service" in charge of several agronomists and "agricultural assistants". At the lower *nahia* (sub-district) and cooperative levels, agronomists and cooperative supervisors are supposed to preside directly over field services and regulation. One major defect in this structure is the weak communications between levels. Specialists do not communicate directly with other specialists at higher levels but must go through the line executive at the higher level; thus plant protection specialists in the governorate communicate with their directorate in Damascus through the minister's administrative office. Since line executives are overburdened, the result is damaging delay. The ministry has also failed to establish a sufficient field presence: as late as 1976, 66% of government agronomists were located in province capitals, 16% in the districts, and only 8% in the *nahias*. While this has since improved, the lack of housing and of the transport needed to keep local officials mobile continue to afflict the bureaucracy. Moreover, technical experts have to devote much of their time to administrative tasks such as licensing, crop reporting, and enforcing regulations. Both the motivation and opportunity to get agricultural officials out of their offices and into the fields with farmers have been lacking.

The bureaucracy also suffers from acute personnel problems. There has been a severe scarcity of technically competent personnel. No College of Agriculture even existed until 1960. In 1965, Syria had 400-500 agronomists (*muhandis zira'i*), the basic technical cadre, and by 1977, there were 3,000, but the country needed at least double that. While the numbers of technical cadres (*kadr al-fanni*) have grown rapidly, as new specialized government services expand, the demand for specialists has run ahead of availability, in good part because the university agronomy course is devoid of specialized training. In 1968-69, only 58 agronomists in Syria had advanced degrees (e.g. in livestock or olives); ten years later the state employed only 225 cadres with such degrees. Worst of all, the quality of agronomists and other technical cadres is often mediocre. The agronomy faculty does not attract the very brightest students, faculties and facilities are inadequate, and training is too academic, providing little practical experience; farmers often discover they know more than the recent graduates sent to instruct them. New appointees to the agrarian bureaucracy begin work in their own districts, and a bonus is paid for work outside Damascus; but agronomists of urban background find it hard to adjust to field work and resist assignment in the countryside. Many personnel practices also produce low levels of motivation. Only too frequently, the right man is not put in the right post. Advancement by seniority may contain favoritism, but in not rewarding achievement, promotion is forfeited as a spur to performance. Salaries, especially in senior positions, are low compared to those in the private sector and outside Syria. The four to one range in basic salaries between the lowest and highest grades in the bureaucracy is commendably

egalitarian, but it leads to a brain drain from senior positions. Low salaries generate an obsession with bonuses and allowances but because these often depend on individual pull or the power of an agency, they are often arbitrarily distributed. Generally, agricultural agencies and especially the ministry have been disadvantaged in the race for such extras; the resulting sense of discrimination is very damaging to motivation in the bureaucracy. Inflation is, however, the most corrupting and enervating threat to the integrity of the public service; it reduced the real salaries of senior officials in the agricultural ministry by 64% from 1974 to 1979 and in the mid-eighties had worsened significantly. This obviously encourages corruption among those in a position to trade decisions or services for money. The irony is that government's own deficit financing has contributed to the inflation which debilitates its own capabilities.

VII. Outcomes: The Developmental Consequences of Bureaucratic Intervention in Agriculture

The multitude of flaws and pathologies which afflict the agrarian apparatus translate into a great amount of waste and inefficiency. Yet, an analysis of actual policy outcomes suggests that, given enough time, the bureaucracy has put in place and carried on programs of great benefit to agriculture.

The first major undertaking of the Ba'thist regime was land reform. Syrian agriculture had reached an impasse, caught between semi-servile labor on low productivity estates and capitalist proletarianization. Land reform demolished the latifundia, checked the proletarianization of the peasantry and effected a major leveling in the agrarian structure. It broadened and consolidated the small holding sector, creating a mixed small peasant and medium capitalist agrarian structure at the cost of only temporary declines in production. Indeed, the post-reform agrarian economy, in enhancing peasant independence and initiative, increasing the incorporation of the peasant into the market, and forcing greater investment by landlords on their reduced holdings, is more dynamic than the old latifundia. Yet, in eschewing a more thorough equalization of land holdings and permitting the preservation of medium sized estates, the regime failed to make enough land available to wipe out landlessness and consolidate a secure middle peasantry.

The cooperatives were the crucial linkages between the peasantry and the agrarian bureaucracy needed to make land reform viable. The regime has indeed succeeded in organizing a large portion of the small peasantry into a cooperative framework which channels resources, services, and innovation to the small holding sector, deters land reconcentration, and excludes landlords and merchants from major channels of sectoral interchange. Far from being economic failures, cooperatives have upgraded the small peasant sector which would otherwise be fatally vulnerable. But they have generally failed in their more ambitious mission as building blocks of agrarian socialism: they organize

little collective investment and few of the common production processes needed to overcome land fragmentation. As instruments of government control, often putting state interests first—as in compulsory planning and the practice of collective responsibility for debts—the cooperatives have not won peasant confidence and as village institutions they have failed to overcome the mutual mistrust of an individualistic or familistic peasantry. In providing no “socialist” alternative, they leave the road open to a return to agrarian capitalism. Indeed, cooperatives, in fostering individual peasant development, may be generators of a rich or middle peasant capitalism.

The state’s planning, credit, and input system has advanced the regime’s control over production decisions, while providing peasants with relatively cheap access to the credit and inputs needed to stimulate productivity and intensification and to break the control of usurers over the village. The bureaucracy has initiated a score of useful innovations, from orchard development, seed and animal improvement to mechanization, but the dismal performance of the research and extension apparatus is an obstacle to their proper design and delivery to peasant producers. In constantly allowing planning and coordination to lag behind its initiatives, it generates ever new kinds of bottlenecks. When one seems on its way to solution—e.g. delivery of fertilizer—another one emerges as the economy becomes more complex—e.g. fodder delivery. State marketing has given the regime reasonably effective control over strategic crops, such as cotton and wheat, essential for export earnings and food security, while also guaranteeing producers stable, if not exactly lucrative markets, but it has yet to effectively organize the delivery of raw materials to produce processing factories.

More direct government interventions in agricultural development and production have a mixed but poorer record. The apparent failure of state grain farms seems to mean the decline of an alternative to the resurgence of “merchant-tractorist” agrarian capitalism on the great eastern plains. The state hydraulic record is only a little better. The Ghab irrigation project, long “sick” from incompetent state management, is finally operative and has transformed an area of desolation and urban dominance into a viable peasant community with a certain prosperity. The much more ambitious Euphrates project is, in an arid country which has reached the limits of extensive expansion, a natural next step in agricultural development. It could reproduce the Ghab outcome but has so far been a costly drain on the state’s limited resources and a strain on its modest management capacities. Generally speaking, massive investment in irrigation and reclamation has done little more than prevent a backsliding in the amount of irrigated surface instead of advancing Syrian agriculture beyond its crippling dependence on unreliable rainfall.

The overall economic outcome of state intervention in agriculture is mixed. The state has fostered intensification and mechanization with considerable success. There has been a continuous increase in agricultural production. A growth in agricultural per capita output, despite a decline in the agricultural workforce, indicates that agriculture is being brought to support a

growing non-agricultural population—a symptom of advance toward structural transformation of the economy—but it has not overcome the deficit in the agricultural balance of trade. This record is certainly not compatible with any generalized claim that the state is an obstacle to development. But, for better or worse, the agrarian bureaucracy has not become an effective engine of capital accumulation. Not only has it failed to extract much of a surplus, generally subordinating the profit motive to the servicing of agriculture, but it dissipates resources on salaries for an oversized officialdom and through corruption and inefficiency.

The public sector has developed some of the crucial sectoral interchanges which stimulate development. Industry provides inputs, markets, and employment opportunities which have helped stimulate agriculture, while the construction sector provides hydraulic public works and the transport infrastructure needed to integrate village and market. But agro-industry, the very nexus of the sectoral interchange, embodies a fatal flaw in the state's development effort. Agro-industries are victims of all the pathologies of the regime: politicized, incompetent, underpaid and undermotivated management, an undisciplined work force, a turning of factories into patronage fiefdoms, and the subordination of profit to social-political objectives—maximization of employment, consumer price stability, self-sufficiency. Agro-industry has thus failed to mobilize the capital for its own reproduction and has been unable to meet consumer demand and sustain development without costly dependence on outside capital.

VIII. Bureaucracy and Peasant: The Social Consequences of State Intervention

Has state intervention in agriculture burdened and exploited or benefited the peasant? A "bureaucratic state bourgeoisie" has certainly emerged at the top of the bureaucracy enriching itself at the expense of the public treasury. The proliferation of bureaucratic personnel and corrupt official extractions from peasants, are, moreover, symptoms of parasitism. But most of the bureaucratic middle class, far from enriching itself, suffers from low salaries. Nor has the bureaucracy become an instrument for the exploitation of the peasantry. Even the state marketing system, a potential instrument of extraction, has not been systematically so used. Indeed, a stable state market and subsidized credit relieve peasants of the old threat of debt and expropriation and the ruinous fall in crop prices typical of the free market, providing a basic security which would be rapidly missed if the state withdrew from this role. The state—in the form of services, credit, and investments in irrigation and land reclamation—is probably putting more *into* agriculture than it extracts. There are conflicts of interest between the bureaucratic elite and the peasant: the former seeks control—e.g. in the imposition of crop rotations too often indifferent to the interests of the peasants—while the latter seek to maximize their independence. But the alliance between agriculture ministry bureaucrats

and peasant union leaders in pursuit of higher producer prices does not square with the notion of a basic state—peasant cleavage.

At the local level, the bureaucracy constitutes one of the main structures linking state and village. Although the potential for arbitrariness is diluted by the plurality of local authorities—party, peasant union, ministry officials—who take decisions in committees, peasants are sometimes the victims of arbitrary power exercised in the absence of strong legal or customary checks on officials. The recruitment of most officials from the village itself gives some of them sympathy for village problems, but others are more interested in escaping from their background and dislike having to work in the field. There is a gap between the self-interest of the local bureaucrat and that of the peasant: “the peasant is dependent on production; (the bureaucrat’s) salary is fixed. He has no need of the people, is not responsible to them, so the quality of his work declines, he lacks a sense of duty and works mechanically (Tal).” But the typical local bureaucrat is not part of a new class standing against the peasant or the instrument of the local landlord, and peasants are no longer passive victims. Many find ways to evade, even manipulate the state: a son will join the local party, a bribe will sway an official. Patronage is “democratized” at the local level as public goods are diverted and laws bent to favor locals. Thus, the intervention of the state has brought opportunities and resources, not just constraints and extractions.

The cumulative social impact of state intervention in the agrarian economy is three-fold. For the most part, it has favored producers, consumers, and the bureaucracy at the expense of the landlords and merchants who have been cut out of a lucrative source of wealth on which their prosperity was historically raised. Second, the formerly rigid class structure which kept the village encapsulated has been broken, superseded by a much more permeable one. The state has stimulated enough development to permit peasants to diversify their resources, e.g. by taking advantage of new opportunities for off-farm income and of state-provided credit and inputs to intensify production. Rural life has become more viable, and the cultural and opportunity gaps between city and village have narrowed. Petty peasant accumulation seems to be growing out of an increased prosperity. Third, state intervention has pluralized power at the village level, breaking the former fusion of wealth and power in the hands of the local landed élite. The lines between rich and poor peasants have also probably been blurred by state intervention since, in diversifying peasant opportunities, it gives less favored peasants chances to remedy their resource scarcity. The result seems to be a less, not more rigid agrarian structure. In practice, the activity of the state seems to have two faces: it burdens and constrains agriculture but overall it has done more to serve, stimulate, and protect the peasant. This is not, of course, necessarily the final outcome and, faced with a resource crunch, the regime might yet turn on the peasantry.

IX. Conclusions: The Political-Economic Consequences of Ba'thist Agrarian Development

The primary political consequence of the agrarian development launched under the radical Ba'th was the incorporation of the peasantry into the regime by state penetration of the village, the wider dispersion of property and services the regime brought to it, and the growing access to education, state employment, and patronage made available for rural youth. The Ba'th regime displayed a greater ability to foster change in the village than most authoritarian regimes and the consequences for agriculture and the viability of the village were generally positive.

But the Ba'th seems to have reached the limits of its social engineering capacity. It exhausted its rural mobilization capacity without having created viable institutions which could substitute for capitalism. The growing limits of statist development must inevitably start to reshape agrarian policy, most likely bending it in a more overtly capitalist direction. The embourgeoisement of the top power elite could create the conditions for a capitalist transformation of elite ideology, while growing peasant entrepreneurship and the accumulation of private capital in the village as well as the city could provide the objective conditions. Persistent populist ideology, entrenched statist interests, and the growing corrupt and arbitrary use of official power at the expense of legal-rationality constitute major obstacles to capitalist development. But the costs of state intervention in an era of growing patrimonialization are likely to exceed benefits and a contraction of the state in favor of markets and private enterprise to be forced on it by tightening economic constraints and new social forces.

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