

unstable. In February 1958, at the urging of the military and with the Ba'ath's strong endorsement, independent Syria was dissolved and the United Arab Republic established, bringing Syria's twelve-year experience of parliamentary rule to an end. Only with the breakdown of the United Arab Republic in 1961 would a liberal (though not democratic) vision of Syria's social and economic order again become a central element in Syrian political debates.

The experience of postindependence Syria during these years thus underscores the more general instability of populist political dynamics in a transitional political economy. The rise and decline of the idea of a social pact establishes the critical role of structural constraints in shaping the political strategies of Syrian capitalists. Such constraints raised the short-term political and economic costs of capitalists' long-term project to build an inclusionary social pact beyond a threshold that they were willing to accept. Yet in focusing on the relationship between structures and strategies, I have set aside (temporarily) a crucial dimension of Syrian political dynamics: the effects of institutions and of institutional change on the organization of social conflict and on the strategies of capitalists, landowners, and reformers. The idea of a social pact did not float disembodied over Syrian politics but took a concrete institutional form, with long-term and often unintended consequences. Similarly, notions of how to construct and manage a national economy in Syria, ideas that drew heavily on the regulatory regimes introduced by Allied forces during the Second World War, also had powerful influences on Syria's institutional environment and thus on the strategic repertoires of actors.³⁷ One set of institutions stands out in this regard: the Syrian state. It is to this set of institutions, along with the reciprocal influence of state institutional change on the transformation of political strategies, that I now turn.

37. Robert Vitalis and Steven Heydemann, "War, Keynesianism, and Colonialism: Explaining State-Market Relations in the Post-War Middle East," in *War, Institutions, and Social Change in the Middle East*, ed. Steven Heydemann (Berkeley: University of California Press, forthcoming).

3

State, Capital, and the Organization of Social Conflict

The construction of state institutions was a critical flash point in struggles to define the future of postindependence Syria. Military officers who ruled the country from 1949 to 1954 strengthened the state bureaucracy to reinforce their control over Syrian society and politics. Other political actors, from businessmen, landowners, and bureaucrats to politicians, students, workers, and peasants, developed patterns of political mobilization organized around their competition to shape the form of state institutions and bring state policies into alignment with their interests. Through their interactions and confrontations, the character and substance of what constituted Syria's political arena itself underwent profound change. As state institutions became a more powerful presence in Syrian political and economic life, as the pre-independence politics of national liberation gave way to the postcolonial politics of state and economy building, what it meant to become mobilized or incorporated was itself thrown open to debate and struggle in new ways.

Capitalists and reformers alike viewed the state as a solution to the dilemmas of mobilization, but they held sharply divergent views about the boundaries and purposes of state intervention. After independence, capitalists used state regulation to begin constructing an industrializing social pact, to create the institutional framework for a market economy, and to integrate peasants into the market. They articulated a view of political incorporation as a process through which workers and peasants would become embedded within and constrained by state-directed associational frameworks. Despite the considerable influence of Syria's capitalists, reformist parties and movements were able to advance a more transformational view of state interven-

tion. State expansion created new opportunities to expand the boundaries of popular participation, and populist reformers exploited these possibilities to deepen and radicalize processes of social and economic change. Syria's landed elite, on the other hand, struggled to contain, if not roll back, the social gains of workers and peasants, to constrain the use of state institutions as mechanisms of social change, and to resist efforts to reorganize rural property rights.

Yet state institutions were not simply arenas within which social conflicts were played out. How state institutions became organized after independence had critical consequences in shaping the strategic environment in which the struggle for Syria took place. State regulatory activity was a crucial factor in defining the strategic possibilities available to workers and peasants, the capacity of reformers to advance their agendas, the ability of capitalists to secure their interests, and of landed elites to forestall the reorganization of rural property rights and preserve their grip over the rural economy.¹

One of the most important consequences for the argument I advance here is how the transformation of state institutions and the expansion of state regulatory capacity altered the relationship between capitalists and the state. Two critical shifts stand out in this regard: first, the postindependence expansion of state control over Syrian society and the rise of the state as an agent of popular mobilization and social reform and, second, the dramatic expansion of state control over the Syrian economy. Both changes posed significant challenges to the ability of business elites and their political supporters to maintain control over the dynamics of Syrian state formation and to define how the national economy would be organized.

As the task of constructing a social pact became embedded within state institutions, capitalists came to be just one of many social groups struggling to negotiate its terms. Government agencies began to manage and control the incorporation of workers and peasants, and their interventions helped consolidate an increasingly reformist vision of the Syrian state. Over time, the institutionalization of reformist norms within the bureaucracy eroded the influence of business interests in debates over economic and social policy, a shift that contributed to the disillusion of business interests with the idea of an industrializing social pact. This dynamic reinforced their willingness to step back from the political commitments they brought with them into independence and to work instead to slow the pace of social and economic change in the period after 1954.

1. As March and Olsen emphasize, institutions not only "respond to their environments but create those environments at the same time" (James G. March and Johan P. Olsen, *Rediscovering Institutions: The Organizational Basis of Politics* [New York: Free Press, 1989], p. 162).

The increasing scope and intensity of state intervention in the economy were no less important in reshaping the relationship between capitalists and the state. Throughout the postindependence period private business interests enjoyed a distinctly privileged position in the institutions and processes of economic policymaking. But as state intervention moved from arm's-length regulation to direct forms of economic management, conflicts over the control and direction of economic policymaking infused state-private sector relations with a highly competitive character. As the deepening of capitalism became a state project and state institutions emerged as the arenas within which development decisions were made, these relations became increasingly adversarial.

Throughout the 1950s, both Syrian economists and their Western counterparts from institutions such as the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development viewed Syria's private sector as too weak to move the economy forward.² Development planners argued strenuously that the role of the Syrian state in the economy had to be strengthened to provide a sound basis for economic growth. As one pointed out: "To maintain the present rate of growth, a larger share of national income must be invested. Syrian private enterprise is unlikely to respond adequately to the new challenge and the government has to expand its role."³ Indeed, over the subsequent decades, the ideas of private sector weakness and the necessity of state intervention became core elements of a research literature that explained state expansion in Syria as a natural reaction to the limits of the private sector—ideas that deserve to be more controversial than they are.⁴ This literature tended to depict state-private sector relations in terms of collaboration—of a state acting in the interests of capital as a surrogate entrepreneur to support industrialization, overcome bottlenecks, and reduce risk.⁵

In the Syrian case, however, the expansion of state institutions and the deepening of state control over the economy produced a different outcome, for both institutional and structural reasons. Essentially, the only source of capital that might permit state elites to play the role of surrogate entrepreneur was the private sector itself. The state's growing capital requirements

2. International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, *The Economic Development of Syria* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1955).

3. Samir Makdisi, "Syria: The Public Sector and Economic Growth, 1945-1957," Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 1981, p. 2.

4. See, for example, Ziad Kilany, "Socialism and Economic Change in Syria," *Middle Eastern Studies* 9 (January 1973), pp. 61-72, and Yabya Sadowski, "Political Power and Economic Organization in Syria: The Course of State Intervention, 1946-1958," Ph.D. diss., University of California at Los Angeles, 1984.

5. For states as surrogate entrepreneurs, see Peter Evans, *Embedded Autonomy: States and Industrial Transformation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995).

confronted Syrian businessmen with a powerful competitor for scarce economic resources.⁶ Its growing regulatory capacity challenged their privileged position in processes of economic policymaking. The Syrian state, in other words, did not take shape as either a surrogate or an entrepreneur but as an *alternate and competing* manager of the national economy.

Not surprisingly, Syrian businessmen viewed this development with considerable concern. Despite the assertions of development experts, the Syrian economy had not reached a clear threshold that made obvious what the appropriate division of labor should be between the state and the private sector. As data presented earlier make clear, the Syrian private sector was the dominant source of investment capital throughout the entire period from 1946 to 1958, showing few outward signs of exhaustion. Its resources had underwritten a sustained period of rapid economic growth. Nor had Syrian bureaucrats yet achieved a level of economic expertise that would establish a compelling basis for their role as managers of the national economy. Little was said, in fact, by those advocating an increased role for the state about where or how it would acquire the resources to play its assigned role, what the costs to the private sector would be in transferring this role to the state, or why bureaucrats—once they had assumed responsibility for economic development—would continue to respect the autonomy and priorities of the private sector. Given these uncertainties, Syrian capitalists might understandably have resisted the argument that their collective interest and the demands of capitalist development required the subordination of their individual economic interests to the state.

Stressing the potential for social conflict associated with new patterns of state intervention, one economist raised the question of whether “the alignments and pressures of the various power-groups in the country will allow peaceful changes in the distribution of income, arising from such measures as the recent land distribution and agrarian reforms, or from future tax reforms . . . which are necessary if the demand for local services and products, particularly manufactures, is to be expanded.”⁷ In fact, Syria’s power groups did not allow peaceful changes in the distribution of income, and by the late 1950s, prospects for conflict had become particularly high. The rate of growth of per capita income had declined, state agencies were more aggressively intervening in private sector affairs, and private sector

6. This competition is evident in the deliberations of the “economic parliament” convened in November 1952 by Adib al-Shishakli, in which government officials made clear that they would consider only private sector demands for tax reform that did not negatively affect state revenue. See Chapter 2, p. 46.

7. Edmund Y. Asfour, *Syria: Development and Monetary Policy* (Cambridge: Center for Middle Eastern Studies, Harvard University, 1959), p. 71.

profits were increasingly viewed by bureaucrats as a public resource. As state expansion became increasingly associated with efforts to accomplish “necessary” changes in the distribution of income, capitalists sought to curtail the scope of state intervention and constrain the use of state regulation to support social reform and to reallocate national wealth.

In tracing the process through which the construction of a capitalist economy became a state project, as well as how this transition altered the balance of political and social power, I add a second dimension—the effects of state institutional change—to the previous, structural focus on how and why Syrian politics became so deeply polarized in the course of post-independence conflicts over the shape of the political economy. I highlight the incorporation of labor and subsequent struggles to expand workers’ rights to illustrate how the construction of corporatist and interventionist institutions affected the organization of social conflict and eroded the position of capitalists within Syria’s political arena during the course of the 1950s.

State Expansion and the Transformation of Syria’s Political Arena

Following independence, Syria, like most postcolonial states, experienced tremendous growth in the scope and reach of state institutions.⁸ New ministries proliferated. Economic regulatory agencies established by French or British administrators during World War II were integrated into the Syrian state, and a broad range of new institutions were established. The size of the armed forces increased, and public schools were built at a rapid pace. Accelerating a trend that had been under way since the war, the size of the civil service grew dramatically during these years, from forty-seven hundred in 1939 to twenty-one thousand in 1952, with most of this growth taking place after 1946.

Accompanying state expansion was a new emphasis on the professionalization of the state bureaucracy. Politicians showed at least a rhetorical interest in introducing meritocratic norms into the state apparatus, taking steps to ensure the insulation of senior civil servants from political interference. During the first years of independence, parliament passed the Basic Personnel Law, drawing heavily on French precedents and formalizing such ideas as political neutrality, recruitment by merit, and separation of office from officeholder.⁹

8. Raymond A. Hinnebusch, *Authoritarian Power and State Formation in Ba’thist Syria: Army, Party, and Peasant* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1990), pp. 49–52.

9. Ralph E. Crow, “The Civil Service of Independent Syria: 1945–1958,” Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, 1964.

Table 8. Expansion of state employment in Syria by department, 1939–1952

Department	1939	1945	1952
Presidency of the Republic	7	16	20
Parliament	—	—	40
State Audit Department	16	25	49
High Court of Justice	—	—	18
Prime Minister's Office	15	22	35
Muslim Fatwa and Religious Schools	94	107	157
State Inspection Office	—	—	19
Advisory or Shura Council	3	22	—
Information Directorate	—	—	50
Civil Servants Disciplinary Board	—	—	12
Ministry of Foreign Affairs	22	184	216
Ministry of Finance	719	834	2,472
Ministry of Interior	259	408	508
Tribal Directorate	—	288	20
Police and Public Security	1,564	2,509	2,676
Health Ministry	363	560	1,234
Justice Ministry	677	902	1,184
Reformatory Schools	—	—	49
Land Department	184	215	299
Ministry of National Economy	—	—	255
Agriculture Ministry	207	317	698
Public Works Ministry	98	169	613
Education Ministry	2,554	3,466	10,056
Agricultural Schools	—	—	182
Total	6,782	10,044	20,862

Source: Syrian Arab Republic, *Syria*, vol. 2, *Economy and Finance* (Damascus: n.p., 1955), pp. 159–60.

Note: Includes only departments whose budgets were funded from the general budget, not from special or auxiliary budgets; the table therefore excludes large categories of state employees, such as those working on state-funded public works projects and in the military. Inaccurate totals for the 1939 and 1945 columns that appeared in the original have been corrected.

Even after its passage, bureaucratic practices remained far removed from the principles set out in the Basic Personnel Law, yet in some areas the law had significant effects, increasing the autonomy of senior bureaucrats and rendering them less vulnerable to political intervention. Civil servants themselves exhibited a higher degree of corporate consciousness, organizing unions and syndicates to pursue their occupational interests, lobbying parliament, and occasionally resorting to strikes or other protest actions to force parliamentary support for their demands. And Syrian bureaucrats certainly shared the broadly held view at the time concerning the legitimate role of the state in shaping Syrian society and defining the social and economic arrangements necessary for Syria's development. Among other

things, this shift in the perceived roles and authority of civil servants helped to consolidate norms of "conscious interventionism" within the state apparatus, contributing to the deepening of corporatist approaches to the mobilization and incorporation of various social groups.¹⁰

Corporatist practices were hardly new to postindependence Syria, but they made their greatest advances under Adib al-Shishakli, the longest-lasting of Syria's several military rulers, whose regime engaged in broad efforts to strengthen state control during his years in power (1949–54).¹¹ Shishakli's corporatizing practices were felt throughout Syrian society. In addition to such innovations as employers syndicates and a general trend toward the centralized management of organized interests, even groups such as the boy scouts were required to reorganize in response to state guidelines. Students at Syrian University (later the University of Damascus) were encouraged to join a new government-sponsored association ostensibly formed to improve the conditions of the rural poor but explicitly intended to divert students from antigovernment activities during their time out of the classroom. On the other hand, Islamist groups such as the Muslim Brotherhood were suppressed, and forms of religious expression fell under tighter state control. Shishakli also introduced regulations to restrict the right to dress in a visibly religious fashion and to make religious education in public schools voluntary where it had previously been required.¹² In 1953, in perhaps the most visible expression of his commitment to a state-guided society, Shishakli abrogated the relatively liberal constitution of 1950 and promulgated a new constitution that was more explicitly interventionist.¹³ While the new document retained earlier populist language on the social functions of land and capital and on the state's commitment to social justice, it also gave the state the constitutional right to intervene in and regulate all forms of associational life.

10. Peter Evans, *Dependent Development: The Alliance of Multinational, State, and Local Capital in Brazil* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), p. 86.

11. Syrian Arab Republic, *First Statement on Achievements of Syria's Government of the New Regime*, Addressed by H. E. General Fawzi Selo, Chief of State, Prime Minister to the Syrian People (Damascus: Directorate General of Information, March 1952), and Syrian Arab Republic, *Second Statement on the Achievements of Syria's Government of the New Regime during the Last Three Months, March–June 1952*, Addressed by H. E. General Fawzi Selo, Chief of State, Prime Minister to the Syrian People (Damascus: Directorate General of Information, June 1952).

12. Albion Ross, "Syrian Regime Due to Face Key Issue," *New York Times*, January 31, 1952; Ross, "Syria to Harness Student Energies," *New York Times*, February 27, 1952; and Ross, "Control of Youth Imposed by Syria," *New York Times*, April 11, 1952.

13. Mary Louise Manley, "Document: The Syrian Constitution of 1953," *Middle East Journal* 7 (Autumn 1953), pp. 520–30.

Managing Labor

Few areas better illustrate the dynamics of state institutional change in the postindependence period than the mobilization and incorporation of organized labor into Syria's political arena and the changes this produced in perceptions about the role of the state as an agent of social control and political mediation. Trade unions were among the first beneficiaries of efforts to use state regulation to establish an inclusive social pact. In June 1946, in response to considerable pressure from the General Federation of Trade Unions, legislators in Syria's parliament approved a comprehensive labor code granting unions legal recognition, thus providing statutory support for workers' efforts to obtain an eight-hour workday, overtime pay, health benefits, workers' compensation, and pension benefits.¹⁴ Significantly, the law approved the right to strike under limited conditions, although it prohibited involvement in political activities without indicating how such activities were to be defined. It also established a new agency, the Directorate of Labor and Social Welfare, thus institutionalizing the new "partnership" of workers, industrialists, and the state.¹⁵ By the late 1950s, twenty-six national labor federations represented over forty-five thousand workers, half organized by profession and half by province.

These gains were by no means trivial, providing a springboard for more militant forms of labor mobilization. Yet one should not overlook the fact that support for workers' rights was premised on a deeply corporatist model of labor organization which left state institutions considerable scope for intervention and control. As one Syrian writer noted, labor syndicates were "obligated to cooperate with the authorities in every activity."¹⁶ Official U.S. observers of Syrian labor were even more blunt. As one wrote in mid-1953:

The Syrian labor movement . . . is virtually a government monopoly. In effect, the Federation of Labor Unions, a national organization, is an extension of government used by it to control activities of industrial workers and as a sounding board for testing the vagaries of laboring people. . . . [T]he officers of the

14. Law no. 279, June 11, 1946. An outline of the text is presented in Badr al-Din al-Siba'i, *Al-Marhala al-intiqaliya fi Suriya: 'Abd al-wihda, 1958-1961* (The transitional stage in Syria: The union period, 1958-1961) (Beirut: Dar Ibn Khaldun, 1975), pp. 88-94. A brief history of the pressure exerted by labor federations to secure the bill's passage is provided in 'Abd Allah Hanna, *Al-Haraka al-'ummaliya fi Suriya wa-Lubnan, 1900-1945* (The labor movement in Syria and Lebanon, 1900-1945) (Damascus: Dar Dimashq, 1973), pp. 486-91. Additional details are provided in Tabitha Petran, *Syria* (New York: Praeger, 1972), p. 86.

15. Sadowski, "Political Power and Economic Organization," p. 137.

16. Rafiq Qattan, "Tatawwur al-nizam al-'umali fi Suriya" (Development of the labor movement in Syria), *Dirasat 'Arabiya* 2 (1965), p. 85.

Table 9. Growth of Syrian trade unions, 1952-1958

	1951	1952	1953	1954	1955	1956	1957	1958
Damascus Syndicates	58	63	67	76	—	81	85	92
Members	10,500	9,876	9,928	11,850	—	11,986	—	14,675
Aleppo Syndicates	41	42	42	45	—	56	61	63
Members	10,037	9,518	9,529	8,160	—	10,259	—	17,348
Homs Syndicates	29	30	32	37	—	40	47	54
Members	3,279	3,389	3,413	3,850	—	4,059	—	5,531
Hama Syndicates	25	25	25	27	—	34	37	40
Members	1,491	1,429	1,439	1,650	—	2,053	—	2,383
Latakia Syndicates	17	18	20	21	—	24	25	26
Members	978	1,895	1,997	2,892	—	2,969	—	3,373
Euphrates Syndicates	4	4	4	4	—	8	9	13
Members	638	514	514	610	—	720	—	1,228
Hauran Syndicates	6	6	6	6	—	7	7	7
Members	742	732	742	731	—	758	—	659
Jezira Syndicates	2	2	3	3	—	6	9	9
Members	39	38	50	68	—	139	—	395
Total Syndicates	182	190	199	219	—	256	280	304
Total Members	27,703	27,391	27,612	29,811	—	32,943	—	45,602

Source: Maktab al-Dirasat al-'Arabiya, *Etudes sur la Syrie économique* (Damascus: Bureau des Documentations Syriennes et Arabes, 1953-61).

Syrian Federation and its member unions carry out the rather rigid policies of the Government and its Ministry of National Economy. The Government literally owns the labor unions through giving them financial support in the form of an annual subsidy for administration and operating expenses.¹⁷

17. "U.S. Embassy Damascus to Department of State, 'Analysis of the Labor Movement in Syria,' June 15, 1953," in *Confidential U.S. State Department Central Files: Syria, 1950-1954* (Frederick, Md.: University Publications of America, 1987), pp. 821-24.

In keeping with corporatist forms of labor organization, establishment of a syndicate required official permission. Such requests followed a long and circuitous path through the bureaucracy, from provincial governor to the Ministry of the Interior, and finally to the Ministry of National Economy. Once approved, union directors were legally accountable to the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs, union elections could not be held until state officials had approved the candidates, and state authorities could overturn election results that were not to their liking. If union members rejected state intervention in internal elections, the union could be dissolved.¹⁸ Nor were officials reluctant to use this power. Elections were nullified several times by decree of the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs, including an election to the board of directors of the General Federation of Trade Unions in February 1953.¹⁹ Union finances were similarly subject to state inspection and control. The Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs had the right to dispatch an inspector at any time to review union accounts and registers and to examine union debts.²⁰ In addition, prohibitions against workers' participation in political activities were broadly interpreted during the Shishakli period to forbid union members from joining political organizations or demonstrating for "political reasons," a phrase the Labor Code left vague.

If the 1946 labor law established a highly regulated form of mobilization for workers, significantly restricting their institutional autonomy, peasants fared even worse. Despite the growing interest in agrarian reform as necessary for Syria's industrialization, the 1946 law ignored agricultural labor and denied even the rudiments of a legal associational life to peasants. Thus, although the law did represent a step forward for labor compared with its position during the French Mandate, it clearly and powerfully expressed the intent of agrarian and business elites to prevent labor from transforming organizational gains into political gains and to forestall the possible emergence of a peasant-worker coalition.²¹ No provisions were made in the 1946

18. Elisabeth Longuenesse, "La classe ouvrière en Syrie: Une classe en formation," thèse de 3^{ème} cycle, Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales, Paris, 1977, p. 78. See also Aziz A. Allouni, "The Labor Movement in Syria," *Middle East Journal* 13 (Winter 1959), pp. 64-76.

19. Maktab al-Dirasat al-'Arabiya (Center for Arab Studies), *Etudes sur la Syrie économique, 1957* (Damascus: Bureau des Documentations Syriennes et Arabes, 1958) [henceforth cited as *ESE, year of data*], p. 2.

20. Qattan, "Tatawwur al-nizam al-'umali," p. 89.

21. In 1951, the head of the Syrian Communist Party, Khalid Bakdash, explicitly advocated the formation of a worker-peasant coalition and the need for Syrian Communists to focus their efforts on peasant mobilization. See Khalid Bakdash, "For the Successful Struggle for Peace, National Independence, and Democracy We Must Resolutely Turn toward the Workers and the Peasants," *Middle East Journal* 8 (Winter 1954), p. 89. See also Nathir Jazmati, *Al-hizb al-shuyufi al-Suri: Musahama fi naql al-harakat al-siyasiya fi Suriya wa-Lubnan, 1924-1958* (The Syrian Communist Party: Participation in a critique of political movements in Syria and Lebanon, 1924-1958) (Damascus: Matba'a Ibn Hiyan, 1990), p. 275.

labor law extending to peasants the right to organize, form unions, strike, or otherwise engage in collective action.²² Although peasants were granted freedom of association when Syria's constitution was revised by Shishakli in 1953, they were still excluded from the official list of occupations authorized to form unions.²³ In any event, the 1953 constitution was so closely associated with Shishakli's dictatorship that it was abrogated following his downfall in February 1954.²⁴ The reinstated 1950 constitution (discussed in Chapter 2) made no mention of the associational rights of peasants, who remained vulnerable to violent and arbitrary repression at the hands of landlords or the local gendarmerie.

In spite of these restrictions, neither workers nor peasants were simply the passive subjects of state regulation but actively participated in struggles to define the substance and scope of state intervention. Unionized workers, for example, engaged in collective action aimed not only at employers but also at broadening their political rights, strengthening state recognition of unions, and seeking legislative sanction for economic demands.²⁵ In the early 1950s, workers from a range of professions pressured the government to form the independent Progressive Federation of Labor Unions. Shishakli approved their request in December 1953, in the hope the new federation would become a source of support.²⁶ In 1954, union officers in Latakia and Hauran refused the government's demand that they refrain from political activity, and their federations were suspended as a result.²⁷ Workers also looked to the state for relief from unfair employment practices, which continued to thrive despite the Labor Code, and sought representation on state-created labor arbitration boards.²⁸

Peasants were similarly active in support of rural reform. During the early

22. The unwillingness of parliament to consider the issue of peasant rights, in contrast to its limited recognition of workers' rights, is addressed in 'Abd Allah Haruna, *Al-Harakat al-'ummiya fi Suriya wa-Lubnan, 1900-1945* (The labor movement in Syria and Lebanon, 1900-1945) (Damascus: Dar Dimashq, 1973), 2:430-31.

23. Willard A. Beling, *Pan-Arabism and Labor*, Harvard Middle East Monographs, no. 4 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1960), p. 39.

24. Shishakli seized power in 1949 in the last of three military coups that year. He governed as military ruler until 1952, when he transformed himself into Syria's president. Parliament was suspended several times during Shishakli's tenure, the longest episode following his ascension to the presidency. For long periods during his tenure, however, parliament continued to play an important political role, resuming its central position immediately following his overthrow.

25. Longuenesse, "Classe ouvrière," pp. 80-83.

26. "U.S. Embassy Damascus to Department of State, 'Annual Labor Report—Syria 1953,' March 26, 1954," in *Confidential*, pp. 829-47.

27. *Ibid.*

28. Thomas B. Stauffer, "Labor Unions in the Arab States," *Middle East Journal* 6 (1952), pp. 83-88.

1950s, Syria experienced a near insurrection in the area between Homs and Aleppo as peasants mobilized to bring about changes in their living conditions. In these densely populated villages, landlord-tenant relations were among the most oppressive in Syria. Four families—the Barazi, Tayfour, 'Azam, and Kaylani—owned all or part of 110 villages around Homs alone, exercising near total authority over the inhabitants.²⁹ With the encouragement of such activists as Akram al-Hawrani, peasants entered Homs, attacked members of the Barazi family, and set fire to the family manor before police intervened. Outside Homs, peasants refused to turn over their crops to landlords and drove landlords and their agents from the fields.³⁰ The scope of the unrest, its evolution into a collective movement, and the nature of the landlords' response are described by Tabitha Petran: "Peasants refused to render feudal services and dues and effectively abolished these practices in most areas. In the Ghab, when reclamation work started, peasants fought landlords who arrived to lay claim to the land. Landlords expelled peasants from their villages, killed their livestock, and harassed them in every possible way. But other villages gave ousted peasants refuge; peasants remained united and stood together against the landlords."³¹

During the summer and early fall of 1951, as violence in the countryside escalated, both landlords and peasant advocates organized congresses to mobilize supporters and pressure the government. Meeting in Aleppo in August 1951, landlords called for urgent government intervention to prevent the redistribution of land. In a telegram to the cabinet, landlords described land reform as "source of economic paralysis," calling on the government to "halt the work of . . . [destructive elements] and protect the nation from despotism and restore peace and order."³² The next month, in a direct response to these gatherings, Hawrani's Arab Socialist Party chose Aleppo, "the lion's den of feudalism," as the site for a massive peasant congress. This congress was attended by thousands of participants from across the country and was marked by large-scale demonstrations, with marchers carrying banners demanding agricultural reform and state regulation of peasant-landlord relations.³³ This was the first mass peasant meeting of its

29. According to Philip S. Khoury: "Nearly 55 percent of the privately-owned land of this district [Homs] belonged to a small group of landlords, among them the Atasi, Farkhuh, Suwaydan and Dandashi families. Most were urban absentee landlords resident in Homs" (*Syria and the French Mandate: The Politics of Arab Nationalism, 1920-1945* [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987], p. 424).

30. "Clashes in Syria over Land Rising: Reform Blows against Feudal Ways and Landed Families Are Reported Spreading," *New York Times*, August 16, 1951.

31. Petran, *Syria*, p. 101.

32. "Syrian Landlords Fight Farm Reforms," *New York Times*, August 14, 1951.

33. *Ibid.* See also accounts in 'Abd Allah Hanna, *Al-Qadiya al-zira'iya wal-harakat al-falahiya fi Suriya wa Lubnan*, 2 vols. (The agricultural problem and peasant movements in Syria and

kind in the Arab world, and following months of unrest, it became a major catalyst for the long-delayed passage of a modest agrarian reform bill in January 1952 (Decree no. 96 for the Distribution of State Lands). The decree set unprecedented, though still generous, limits on the private use of state lands. It also "declared null and void all possession by feudal lords and other influential persons over unregistered state land, no matter how vast and extensive such land may be."³⁴

Despite support for these measures from such pro-reform politicians as Khalid al-'Azam, some members of the People's Party, and Ba'athists, this early attempt at land reform in Syria ultimately was defeated. Under heavy pressure from landlords, Adib al-Shishakli deployed troops to suppress peasant protests. And just months after enacting Decree 96, parliament reversed itself and issued a new bill that set such high limits on landownership that virtually no landowners were affected by it.³⁵ While these efforts successfully delayed the implementation of land reform, they also had the effect of inserting the state even more centrally into disputes over rural property rights, as well as elevating the authority of the state to mediate landlord-peasant relations. Peasants and landlords, no less than workers and industrialists, increasingly sought to use state intervention as a mechanism for securing their particular vision of how Syrian society and its economy should be organized.

The Private Sector and Economic Policymaking

As the regulatory role of state institutions increased, the state arena emerged as a principal location of conflicts over the management of Syria's political economy for virtually every organized interest in the country. Changing patterns of state intervention established new mechanisms of social control and incorporation, valorizing the state as an object of political and economic claims, whether originating with workers, peasants, capitalists, or landowners. Not surprisingly, the competition to influence state policy was highly unequal. Landlords and capitalists benefited from a degree of access and authority that few other groups could match. From the earliest days of independence, government officials actively solicited the advice and

Lebanon) (Beirut: Dar al-Farabi, 1975-78), 2:434; Najah Muhammad, *Al-Haraka al-qawmiya al-'Arabiya fi Suriya* (The Arab nationalist movement in Syria) (Damascus: Dar al-Ba'ath, 1987), p. 338; and Patrick Seale, *The Struggle for Syria: A Study of Post-War Arab Politics, 1945-58* (London: Oxford University Press, 1965), pp. 120-21.

34. Text of the bill cited in Doreen Warriner, *Land Reform and Development in the Middle East* (London: Oxford University Press, 1962), p. 102.

35. "Documents: Land Reform Legislation of Syria, Egypt, and Iran," *Middle East Journal* 7 (Winter 1953), pp. 69-74.

policy recommendations of prominent businessmen on the broadest possible range of economic issues. Their privileged position became increasingly institutionalized as the state bureaucracy expanded its management of fiscal and monetary affairs during the late 1940s and early 1950s.

Among the most important of the bureaucratic mechanisms through which the private sector exercised its influence was the Currency and Credit Council (CCC), established in March 1953 as part of the Basic Monetary Law. Described by Finance Minister George Shahin as a "decisive step in the economic and monetary liberation of the country," the law authorized the CCC to oversee Syria's monetary policy and serve as the oversight body for a newly proposed central bank.³⁶ Illustrating the extent of private sector input into economic policymaking, the CCC consisted of eight representatives from various public sector agencies and four representatives from the private sector, including the Chambers of Commerce, Industry, and Agriculture, and a representative of the private banking sector. Private sector delegates were full voting members of the CCC, but no cabinet officer or legislator was eligible to serve.³⁷

Because there were no fully developed state financial institutions during the first years of independence, the desire of state administrators to draw on the expertise of business leaders is, perhaps, understandable. Yet these connections and the extraordinary authority over economic policymaking that accompanied them underscore the privileged position of capitalists in shaping the Syrian economy. Even at the time, the degree of private influence over public policy was a source of some controversy. A Syrian economist singled out as highly questionable the practice whereby "one-third of the voting members of the [CCC], a policy-making body on the highest level, represent sectional private interests, including those of private banks, which may not always coincide with the national interest in questions of monetary policy."³⁸

Informal channels of influence, lobbying, and representation further augmented the power of landed and business interests, enhanced by a milieu in which the upper classes expected and received deference and service from bureaucrats.³⁹ More directly, cabinet ministers built patron-client

36. For details on the formation and functions of the Currency and Credit Council, see Jean Dueruet, *Les capitaux européens au proche-orient* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1964), pp. 379-84. Syria's Central Bank opened in August 1956.

37. See Astour, *Syria: Development and Monetary Policy*, p. 56, and ESE, 1953, pp. 13-14.

38. Astour, *Syria: Development and Monetary Policy*, p. 56.

39. Crow, "Civil Service," p. 276, describes how this milieu functioned. The upper classes, "or members of their families, were in important political positions and often in important administrative posts. Their names alone demanded a certain respect, which they expected and received at all levels of the Civil Service. A citizen of this stature ignored lower Civil Servants, expected deference from the middle ranks and cooperation from the highest Officials."

networks within the bureaucracy to secure appointments for family members, coreligionists, and residents of a particular region or city quarter or to provide higher salaries and more rapid promotion for loyalists. These networks gave parliamentary deputies and their business allies significant, though not always decisive, influence over decision making.

Exploiting their influence to the fullest, capitalists and landowners not only played a role in managing the Syrian economy but also used their access to bureaucrats and politicians to lobby aggressively for specific regulatory measures. Manufacturers sought and achieved the implementation of import substitution policies that provided tariff protection against imported finished goods, lowered or eliminated customs duties on imported industrial machine tools and raw materials, and provided a wide range of tax and investment incentives encouraging industrial expansion.⁴⁰ Landlords avoided the imposition of a tax on agricultural income, despite the interest of bureaucrats in maximizing the flow of revenues from agriculture to the state. Moreover, agricultural exports were taxed at a rate of only 7 percent.⁴¹ And tariffs were implemented that gradually extended the range of imported agricultural goods denied entry to Syrian markets. In addition, numerous state institutions were established to increase agricultural revenues, ranging from an agricultural bank to veterinary schools.

Regulating the Private Sector

By the mid-1950s these changes had transformed the role of state institutions and altered the nature of Syria's political arena. State agencies were beginning to play a much more significant role in the regulation of private sector economic activity. Import substitution policies were supplemented by a growing number of decrees setting production standards and licensing requirements for local industry.⁴² "Temporary" institutions created during

40. Most of these measures were put into effect in the late 1940s and early 1950s. Legislative Decree no. 139 (1949) authorized the government to grant loans to private industrial enterprises. Legislative Decree no. 103 (1952) provided for wide-ranging tax concessions to newly established industries. See Syrian Arab Republic, *Syria: Economy and Finance* (Damascus: Government Press, 1955), pp. 83-84. See also Makdisi, "Syria."

41. See Bu 'Ali Yasin, *Al-Qum wa-zahirat al-intaj al-ahadi fi al-iqtisad al-Suri* (Cotton and the rise of monoculture in the Syrian economy) (Beirut: Dar al-Tali'a, 1974).

42. These included Legislative Decree no. 47 (1952), requiring licenses for all new industrial firms to be granted "only after a proper economic study as to the country's real needs." This information was required "so that the government may enforce a policy of industrialization conforming to the real needs of Syria's national economy." Similarly, Legislative Decree no. 138 (1953) established standards for items of "national production," which included textiles, clothing, confectioneries, shoes, building materials, and so forth (Syrian Arab Republic, *Syria: Economy and Finance*, pp. 83-84). The latter was apparently the result of collaboration between private industrialists and government officials to manage competition.

World War II to regulate Syrian agriculture were formally integrated into the structure of the Syrian state. The establishment in 1950 of a Cereals Office to enforce agricultural regulations and improve yields was followed by the creation of a Wheat Office and a Cotton Office in 1952.⁴³ New regulations now required farmers to plant state-approved strains of cotton and wheat and to operate within a commodities market that was subject to increasing state control and supervision. In part these laws aimed to standardize and improve production, and in part, to control speculation and ensure appropriate cultivation of a crop that accounted for the majority of Syria's foreign exchange earnings and a large share of state revenue.

Legislative decrees issued by President Shishakli in late 1952 and early 1953 moved beyond the regulation of agricultural production to the reorganization of rural property rights governing the use of state-owned lands. New laws gave the state the authority to undertake a census of public lands, redistribute state land to peasants, and set limits on the amount of state land that any individual could own.⁴⁴ Although these measures affected public rather than private property, their impact on private landowners was nonetheless significant. The expansion of state regulation over public lands provided a new basis both for determining property ownership more precisely and for more rigorous enforcement of existing property rights.⁴⁵ Throughout modern Syrian history, ambiguity over property rights and over the right of property owners to acquire title to state lands had been major factors in the creation of large landed estates and the perpetuation of the landed oligarchy.⁴⁶ Legislative efforts to clarify and enforce property rights represented a serious threat to oligarchic control over agricultural property and production and thus to the very foundations of the agrarian elite's economic power and political autonomy.

Foreign trade was also subject to new regulations as a result of indus-

43. Asfour, *Syria: Development and Monetary Policy*, pp. 18–25; Makdisi, "Syria," pp. 104, 111, 127, 165–73; and Safouh al-Akhrass, *Revolutionary Change and Modernization: A Case from Syria* (Damascus: n.p., 1972), pp. 69–88.

44. Bu 'Ali Yasin, *Hikayat al-ard wa-al-fallah al-Suri, 1858–1979* [Story of the land and the Syrian peasant, 1858–1979] (Beirut: Dar al-Haqaiq, 1979), p. 23.

45. Adnan Mahhouk, "Recent Agricultural Development and Bedouin Settlement in Syria," *Middle East Journal* 10 (Spring 1956), p. 173.

46. On the history of land, property rights, and the consolidation of Syria's landed oligarchy, see Yasin, *Hikayat al-ard*; Abraham Granot, *The Land System in Palestine: History and Structure* (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1952); Paul M. Klat, "The Origins of Land Ownership in Syria," *Middle East Economic Papers*, 1958, pp. 51–66; Warriner, *Land Reform and Development*; and Albert Khuri, "Land Tenure," in *Economic Organization of Syria*, ed. Sa'id B. Himadeh (Beirut: American University Press, 1936), pp. 51–72.

47. These regulations are reviewed in Yahya 'Arudki, *Al-Iqtisad al-Suri al-hadith (The modern Syrian economy)* (Damascus: Wizarat al-Thaqafa wal-Ishad al-Qawmi, 1972), 2:97–100.

trialists' demands for protection from foreign competition.⁴⁷ After independence, merchants faced an expanding list of products that they were prohibited from importing, including everything from artificial flowers to corsets and beer.⁴⁸ Yet manufacturing was hardly exempt from the attention of state regulators. Industrialists had to contend with a wide range of new licensing, reporting, and production requirements.⁴⁹ These protectionist measures, which favored particular capitalist interests over others, led to more aggressive forms of rent seeking and intracapitalist competition for political influence. Merchants who relied on open borders and manufacturers who demanded protection vied to influence various state agencies and secure legislation favoring their particular area of economic activity.⁵⁰

Private investment decisions likewise came under the purview of the state. Permission from the Ministry of National Economy was needed to expand a factory or business and increase its capital. State inspectors could audit the accounts of a private corporation at any time without notice.⁵¹ Together with the enormous expansion of regulatory constraints in general, these requirements reflect the growing extent to which the corporatist inclinations of Syria's leaders were extended to encompass the organization, control, and surveillance of private sector activities.

Underscoring these shifts was a gradual transition in the role of the state from regulator of private economic activity to direct manager of economic production. In August 1955, the Syrian government took its first tentative steps toward central planning when parliament approved a seven-year development budget. Although such plans were commonplace among developing states in this era and varied widely in the extent to which they corresponded with economic reality, the process of central planning elevated the position of the bureaucracy in establishing national economic priorities.

48. See *ESE*, 1953.

49. These are summarized in Muhammad Challah, *L'évolution de la situation économique en Syrie de 1935 jusqu'à nos jours*, Collection de l'école des sciences économiques, Université Catholique de Louvain, no. 67 (Damascus: Government Press, 1960), pp. 218–22.

50. As policymaking became concentrated in the Ministry of National Economy, which often favored industrial over commercial interests, this kind of intracapitalist conflict became commonplace. For example, in January 1953 Decree Law 60 was passed, giving the ministry control over import and export policy. The ministry subsequently used this authority to expand the scope of protectionist measures. Merchants protested, arguing that the regulations favored certain groups of industrialists and capitalists over others and had failed either to augment customs income or to prevent smuggling of contraband goods. As a result, Decree Law 100 was passed a few months later, giving the cabinet, where commercial interests were better represented, control over the initiatives of the Ministry of National Economy (*ESE*, 1953, p. 4).

51. *Ta'sis ma'mal wa-sharikat, Wizarat al-Iqtisad, Watha'iq al-Dawla, Markaz al-Watha'iq al-Tarkhiya* [henceforth cited as MWT], Damascus (Factory and company formation, Ministry of Economy, state documents, Historical Documents Center, Damascus).

broadening the authority of state elites to define the boundaries of private sector activities.

In addition, as state institutions became directly engaged in economic production, Syria began to acquire more than a rudimentary public sector. Initially, the public sector developed through the nationalization of foreign-owned concessions, including electric and water utilities, railroads, and the French-owned Régie de Tabac. Later, state agencies also began to assume responsibility for badly needed improvements in the country's infrastructure, through such efforts as a joint private-public sector corporation for the expansion and modernization of the country's major port in the city of Latakia. Other projects on a similar scale in which the state took the lead included plans to expand irrigation to over four hundred thousand hectares of land, efforts to improve transportation networks, and a program to build schools.⁵²

Business responses to the expansion of state intervention varied widely from case to case. Political coalitions shifted and fluctuated depending on the consequences of the decision, law, or decree. Some new regulations were greeted by the unified opposition of capitalists and landlords, such as plans to introduce a progressive income tax in early 1952. Other measures received a warmer response from local capitalists, including a decree prohibiting foreign investors from direct control of local businesses, forcing them to work through Syrian agents.⁵³ In contrast, the nationalization of foreign-owned utilities between January and March 1951 generated sharp divisions among business and landed interests. It garnered the support of economic nationalists in parliament, including many pro-business politicians, but was harshly attacked by the conservative National Party on the grounds that it would make Syria an unattractive site for foreign investment.⁵⁴

Parliamentary Rule and the Polarization of Political Life

Businessmen and landed elites continued to dominate Syria's political economy, and they were not slow to recognize the double-edged quality of

52. Makdisi, "Syria," pp. 53-56. Almost £527 million were budgeted for the project.

53. Legislative Decree no. 151 of March 1952 is described in the *Bulletin économique de la chambre de commerce d'Alep*, 34^{ème} année, pp. 138-42. See also Ross, "Control of Youth."

54. According to the Damascus paper *Al-Qabas*, which defined the newly nationalized Régie de Tabac as "among the largest nests of imperialism in Syria," the National Party attacked the nationalizations, even though they were undertaken through negotiations with foreign owners, because "they will lead to the flight of foreign capital and its [refusal] to enter Syria after today." See *Al-Qabas*, January 4, January 19, February 1, and February 27, 1951, cited in Muhammad, *Al-Harakat al-qawmiya*, pp. 239-40.

the changes under way in the country. Increasing state intervention, the growth of popular pressure for social reform, and the declining position of business interests within Syria's parliament were threatening both individually to capitalists directly affected by state action and in a more general, ideological sense to a business elite deeply committed to the primacy of the private sector and to a limited economic role for the state. Syria's historical reliance on trade, the need to recognize the limits of state intervention, and the importance of preserving the role of the private sector were common themes in writings on the Syrian economy from the 1950s and early 1960s, by economists as well as industrial and commercial capitalists.⁵⁵

Businessmen and landlords accepted, even welcomed, state intervention so long as it reinforced their economic position and did not require political concessions on their part. Throughout the 1946-54 period, landed elites and capitalists alike saw the state as a set of institutions that could serve their interests directly while insulating them from the economic consequences of social change. The appropriate role for the state, in their view, was to support the private sector and to mediate the incorporation of popular forces in ways that shielded them from direct sacrifices.⁵⁶

Increasingly, however, the state institutions that Syria's elites thought could shelter them from popular demands became instead a means for organizing and legitimating such demands. The institutions they expected to be responsive to their interests developed into mechanisms that constrained or directly contradicted those interests. In part this shift in the orientation of state institutions reflected the increasing power of bureaucrats and the growing autonomy they exercised in managing social and economic policy. But this outcome was also a response to the structure of capital distribution in the country. Both industrialization and the social reforms needed to support it required reorganizing domestic capital to make it more accessible to taxation and reallocation by the state. Initially, in the immediate postindependence period, capitalists believed this could be accomplished through rural reform, which landed interests were able to pre-

55. These themes are reflected in Makdisi, "Syria," pp. 164-65. He writes, "While the public sector can indirectly help in inducing private elements to engage in desirable economic activities, it may be advisable to confine outright public ownership to social overhead capital where private entrepreneurs have failed and are likely to fail." See also M. N. Azhari, "Du rôle et des limites du secteur public dans l'économie Syrienne" (Damascus: Bureau des Documentations Syriennes et Arabes, n.d.).

56. Sadowski, "Political Power and Economic Organization," pp. 264-5, argues that state programs focused on issues that were politically safe, that is, where the costs of involvement were low or the state did not have to take sides between contending parties. Yet as I have shown, the cumulative effects of increasing state management of the economy were far from politically neutral with regard to capitalists and landlords.

vent. Given the absence of foreign capital, a condition that Syrian capitalists collaborated in producing, the costs of industrialization and social reform fell more heavily on the shoulders of Syria's capitalists. As a result, state responses to popular demands came to require exactly the kind of direct sacrifices both capitalists and landed elites had sought to avoid. Despite the policy influence enjoyed by private sector interests, the transformation of state economic institutions and their growing power to regulate the Syrian economy nonetheless became a fundamental source of tension in state-private sector relations. In contrast to the notion that state institutional transformation in Syria can be understood in terms of a smooth transition to state capitalism or the emergence of the state as surrogate entrepreneur, state expansion coincided with—indeed fostered—a dramatic increase in the level of conflict between state actors and capitalists.

After 1954, shifts in the composition of parliament challenged the capacity of capitalists and landlords to defend their economic interests—whether through control over the electoral process, over state institutions, or, equally important, over the agenda of state action. New voices competed for the attention and resources of the state and were being heard. These developments were reinforced by the institutional changes that had defined Syria's postcolonial state formation. At the same time, they were facilitated by events outside Syria's borders. The prominence of President Nasser in Egypt, the spread of the nonaligned movement, and the appeal of anti-imperialist ideologies created a setting in which the radical populist and nationalist sentiments of the Ba'ath and the Syrian Communist Party could thrive. Nationalist discourses were recast in terms of radical nonalignment. Anti-imperialism in foreign policy meshed neatly with antireactionary, anti-capitalist discourses in domestic politics, adding to the ideological appeal of transformational movements.

Shishakli's removal from office in February 1954 was accompanied by the full restoration of parliamentary rule, with elections scheduled to be held in late summer and early fall. Seizing the moment of openness, Ba'ath leader and peasant advocate Akram al-Hawrani resumed his efforts to mobilize peasants in northern areas of the country in support of the Ba'ath Party. In the months before the elections, "Hawrani made tremendous efforts to rouse the peasants and workers against their traditional masters," organizing village rallies and demonstrations and once again promoting peasant resistance against landlords.⁵⁷ Workers also took advantage of the open political environment to push for improved wages and working conditions. The summer of 1954 was marked by numerous strikes and organizational efforts by unions in the textile industry, the communications industry,

57. Scale, *Struggle*, p. 177.

Latakia Port workers, as well as bus and taxi drivers. Civil servants too were mobilizing around wage and job security demands. Not only did judges and lawyers go on strike in late July over unresolved pay and job classification issues, but police and internal security officers also were reported to be agitating for wage increases to bring their salaries into line with those of the army and the gendarmerie.⁵⁸

Candidates campaigning in Damascus and other urban centers responded to labor militancy by committing themselves to support workers' and peasants' rights, as well as the broadening of state welfare programs and social security. The Syrian Communist Party was also highly active during the campaign, especially among workers, and engaged the Ba'ath in an increasingly aggressive competition over which party could claim to represent the interests of popular sectors. In the first free and open elections to be held in Syria since 1947, the Ba'ath Party dramatically increased its representation, taking 19 of 142 seats in a deeply divided legislature. Voters in Damascus also returned a single Communist deputy, Khalid Bakdash, the first Party member to be elected to parliament in the Arab world.

Reflecting the radicalization of labor in the post-Shishakli period, union and federation leaders took immediate action after the election to compel newly elected officials to deliver on promises made during the campaign. In late October, the National Federation of Labor Unions sent a memorandum to parliament and to executive authorities demanding government action on a wide range of labor demands, from "a quick and practical policy to reduce food prices" to the construction of workers housing, measures to reduce unemployment, passage of social security legislation, stronger protection for local industry, increased government control over domestic production, and many others. In advancing these demands, federation leaders pointedly emphasized the role of labor in "restoring democratic life to the country," reminding the officials that among "the prominent aspects of the recent parliamentary elections were the promises made by all candidates to work for justice to workers and farmers and to protect them from the social tyranny under which they now live and to replace these conditions with social justice in order that the weakest spot in the country may be eliminated."⁵⁹

Other evidence of new labor militancy was visible in institutional changes within labor associations after the fall of Shishakli. The breakaway Progressive Federation of Trade Unions (PFTU) continued to challenge the old-

58. "U.S. Embassy Damascus to Department of State, 'Labor Developments: Strike Situation in Syria,' August 4, 1954," in *Confidential*, pp. 922-24.

59. "U.S. Embassy Damascus to Department of State, 'Labor Developments: National Federation of Labor Unions Memorandum on Workers' Demands,' November 18, 1954," *ibid.*, pp. 855-59.

guard leadership of the General Federation of Trade Unions (GFTU) and succeeded in establishing a second branch in Homs. After Syria's merger with Egypt in February 1958, the Progressive Federations of Damascus and Homs united under the direction of Tal'at Taghlabi, who had recently been elected president of the Damascus branch of the PFTU. Even within the more established GFTU, however, progressive leaders replaced less militant union officers. In elections held in early 1957 the long-serving Executive Committee of the General Federation, on which the right-wing Cooperative Socialist Party had strong representation, was replaced by a slate headed by Mustafa Buchi, a Communist union leader, and dominated by Communists and Socialists.⁶⁰

Resisting Reform

The new electoral strength of reformist movements, the radicalization of trade unions, new levels of peasant mobilization, and escalating popular demands for social change led business leaders to devote more and more of their attention and organizational resources to opposing the forces they perceived as a threat to their economic interests. Their role as advocates of social reform diminished as its costs became clearer.⁶¹ This transformation was manifest in a number of contexts but was particularly prominent in the relations between organized labor and industrialists. Strikes and demonstrations proliferated in the relatively open political environment of the time. In early September, employees of the Ministry of Finance struck over wage and job security issues; in mid-October some five thousand textile workers went on strike in Aleppo for higher wages and secure employment contracts; and in mid-November eleven hundred bank employees walked off the job, closing all but two of Syria's sixteen major banks.⁶²

More important, after 1954, when reformist tendencies were much stronger in the bureaucracy and the legislature, industrialists found them-

60. François Chevallier, "Forces en présence dans la Syrie d'aujourd'hui," *Orient* 4 (1957), p. 181. See also Longuenesse, "Classe ouvrière," pp. 87-88; Beling, *Pan-Arabism and Labor*, p. 114; and U.S. Department of Labor, Office of International Labor Affairs, *Directory of Labor Organizations: Asia and Australia* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1958), pp. 47.1-47.8.

61. 'Abd Allah Hanna, *Al-Itijahat al-fikriya fi Suriya wa-Lubnan, 1920-1945* (Intellectual trends in Syria and Lebanon, 1920-1945) (Damascus: Dar al-Taqqaddum al-'Arabi, 1973), p. 17.

62. "U.S. Embassy Damascus to Department of State, 'Labor Developments: Strike Situation in Syria,' September 24, 1954," in *Confidential*, pp. 931-32; "U.S. Embassy Damascus to Department of State, 'Labor Developments: Textile Strike in Aleppo,' October 25, 1954," *ibid.*, pp. 933-35; and "U.S. Embassy Damascus to Department of State, 'Labor Developments: Syrian Bank Employee Strike,' December 3, 1954," pp. 941-46, *ibid.*

selves not only facing a renewed and reinvigorated labor movement but, at the same time, also confronting state officials and senior politicians who were more sympathetic to labor's concerns. At a number of key junctures during the period of intense labor unrest in the summer and fall of 1954, employers were compelled to give in to labor demands as a result of state intervention. Industrialists continued to push for stronger state regulation of labor, and they certainly had supporters within the bureaucracy, but the compromises imposed on workers by state officials produced an increasingly antagonistic relationship between capitalists and the agencies responsible for managing labor affairs.

New patterns of business mobilization and the increasing responsiveness of state officials to workers' demands were especially visible in the heavily unionized textile sector. In June 1954, in the most serious of the labor actions that preceded the fall 1954 elections, textile workers in Damascus went on strike, seeking increases in salary. By mid-July, a group of factory owners threatened to close their plants, turn them over to the government, or move them out of the country altogether if the strike was not brought to a rapid end. One day after this pronouncement, textile workers organized demonstrations in the streets of the capital, focusing their actions on government offices. On July 18 workers returned to the streets. The cabinet met in special session and issued a decree stating that the government would seize control of textile mills if owners refused to accept the recommendations of government mediators to resolve the strike.

To keep pressure on the government, the General Federation of Labor Syndicates announced on July 20 that a general strike would take place in Damascus and then extend to other provinces. This action was postponed, however, to permit the government to pass new labor legislation expanding the right to strike—giving workers legal cover—and providing for the government to pay workers' salaries if factory owners refused to reopen their plants. On August 5, the Council of Ministers, which had just been granted new authority to intervene in labor disputes, issued a decree stating that a strike would not be considered an interruption of employment contracts, thus denying owners the possibility of firing striking workers or docking their pay for the period of the strike. Recognizing that they had lost any chance of using the government to intervene on their behalf, factory owners backed down. But they challenged the constitutionality of the new legislation in an appeal to the Syrian Supreme Court on August 8 and threatened to boycott the upcoming Damascus International Fair.⁶³

63. *Middle East Journal* 8 (Autumn 1954), pp. 457-58, and "U.S. Embassy to Department of State, 'Labor Developments: Strike Situation in Syria,' August 12, 1954," in *Confidential*, pp. 925-27.

Later that year, this general pattern was repeated during a major textile workers strike in Aleppo. On October 19, some five thousand textile workers went on strike to protest the arbitrary use of temporary employment contracts. Once again, under the direct instruction of the minister of the interior, pressure was placed on employers to end the use of temporary employment contracts, bringing the strike to a rapid close.⁶⁴

These episodes were typical of the pattern of interactions between labor, the state, and management in the 1954–58 period. Civil servants and even some cabinet members showed increasing sympathy to labor in matters of wages and working conditions and were prepared to support a more radical process of labor mobilization. At the same time, however, industrialists were also becoming more militant in their opposition to labor demands; they were increasingly disturbed about the direction of state intervention in support of workers. As the balance of political power shifted away from them after 1954, merchants and factory owners became much more vocal in their concerns over the radicalization of opposition movements and labor. They publicly criticized the rise of “socialism” in Syria, lamenting the threat of a communist takeover, even while engaging in employment practices that could only encourage labor’s radicalization.

Labor relations thus stand as a critical marker of the shifting organization of social conflict in Syria during the 1950s. Changing patterns of state intervention and labor mobilization dramatically restructured the political resources available to both workers and factory owners, altering the political calculus that shaped their interactions. Less than a decade after the passage of the 1946 Labor Code, which was envisioned as a mechanism for controlling labor’s incorporation into the political arena, labor mobilization was instead transforming state policy. Capitalists used such tactics as judicial appeals to try and restore an earlier vision of the state as manager rather than advocate of labor, but their efforts were often unsuccessful.

As state institutions became less reliable mediators of business interests, capitalists struggled to find strategies for containing the increasing radicalization of Syrian politics. They moved to position themselves politically as the senior partners in a conservative coalition with landed elites. In the process, pro-business politicians who had previously advocated a reformist vision of Syrian society now worked to slow the pace of social change and to contain popular mobilization among both workers and peasants.⁶⁵

64. “U.S. Embassy to Department of State, ‘Labor Developments: Textile Strike in Aleppo.’”

65. This dynamic is in no way unique to Syria. Similar conflicts were evident in the shift to import substitution industrialization in Latin America. This move “implied a new framework of tense interdependence between industrial and agro-exporting sectors; a growing power for state elites within this framework; and an increasing use of the state’s regulatory apparatus to

Thus, following the elections, in 1955, deputies representing landed interests joined with pro-business parliamentarians to overturn limits on land ownership which had been introduced under Shishakli and to defeat a proposed law protecting peasants’ rights.

Although this coalition of parliamentarians representing landed and business interests sometimes prevailed, it could not be assured of controlling the legislative agenda in the political environment of post-1954 Syria.⁶⁶ Progressive deputies continued to push for rural reform, and with growing popular support for more radical social change, they were occasionally able to defeat the conservative majority. In one notable incident in March 1957, ten reformist deputies opened a debate over the eviction of peasants from their homes, a widespread practice in the areas around Damascus, Latakia, Homs, Hama, and Aleppo, where peasant dwellings were owned by landlords. The deputies presented a motion prohibiting eviction until a broader peasant protection law compatible with the constitution could be drafted. Parliament voted on March 16, and as described by historian ‘Abd Allah Hanna, “general political conditions did not permit the feudalist deputies to oppose [the motion]. They were forced, along with a number of bourgeois representatives, to withdraw from the session. Only 38 deputies remained in the hall, out of 144 [who had been present]. Thirty six [of the remaining deputies] voted for the motion.”⁶⁷

With business and landed representatives boycotting the vote, reformist deputies prevailed, and the Protection of Peasants Bill was enacted into law.⁶⁸ Reformers followed this successful initiative with an even bolder move to advance the political incorporation of peasants into the political arena. Only a few months before the union with Egypt, Ba’thist legislators introduced a bill calling for the extension to peasants of the rights granted to industrial workers by the labor law of 1946, including the rights to unionize, to engage in political activity, and to strike. In a reflection of the intense opposition of landlords to the proposed law, the Syrian Chambers of Agriculture convened their annual meeting in Damascus on the eve of the U.A.R.’s

protect organized interests” (Robert Kaufman, “How Societies Change Developmental Models or Keep Them: Reflections on the Latin American Experience in the 1930s and the Postwar World,” in *Manufacturing Miracles: Paths of Industrialization in Latin America and East Asia*, ed. Gary Gereffi and Donald L. Wyman [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990], p. 112).

66. For example, senior People’s Party leader Nazim al-Qudsi, who had been a principal drafter of Syria’s 1950 constitution, held the position of president of the chamber in the government formed in October 1954. In general, however, the parliament elected in 1954 was more evenly divided between reformers and center-right parties than any of its predecessors.

67. Hanna, *Al-Qadiya*, pp. 434–35.

68. Salah M. Dabbagh, “Agrarian Reform in Syria,” *Middle East Economic Papers*, 1962, pp. 1–15.

founding, January 7, 1958, with debate on the proposed peasant protection bill heading the agenda.⁶⁹

Opposition from landowners and businessmen limited the practical effects of progressive legislation. Nonetheless, these episodes illustrate the extent to which business and landed interests within parliament had begun to act in concert to oppose the deepening of social reform. They also underscore a new pattern of relations within Syria's political arena marked by higher levels of labor and peasant mobilization, the escalation of demands for reform among organized interests, and a growing capacity on the part of progressive deputies to confront their conservative opponents within parliament. These relations crystallized in the formation of progressive, anti-Western, and deeply pro-unionist alliances within Syria's parliament in the course of 1955–56 which dramatically increased the political power of the Ba'th, Khalid al-'Azam, and Communist Party leader Khalid Bakdash.

By June 1956, rising popular support for reformist political parties and elite conflicts over Syrian foreign policy led to the creation of a national unity government in which Ba'th Party cofounder Salah al-Din Bitar was appointed foreign minister and a second senior party figure, Khalil Kallas, served as minister of economy.⁷⁰ That fall, the failure of a coup attempt orchestrated by former military strongman Adib al-Shishakli, in which a number of prominent conservatives and members of the People's Party were implicated, further enhanced the position of progressives and pro-Egyptian unionists within the government and the bureaucracy.⁷¹ Although progressive deputies came together largely in reaction to a series of foreign policy crises—Shishakli's failed coup, the recent Suez invasion, and Western intervention in Syrian politics—the resulting "progressive front" nonetheless prided itself on its reformist views concerning domestic political and economic affairs.

Almost from its inception, however, the progressive front was plagued by tensions over which political grouping would become the leading progressive force in the country. The Ba'thist leadership worried that growing popular support for the Communist Party would undermine the position of the Ba'th. Akram al-Hawrani, in particular, was concerned about how

69. *ESE*, 1958, 2:1.

70. Bitar represented the Ba'thist wing of the party, and Kallas represented al-Hawrani's Arab Socialist wing. John Devlin, *The Ba'th Party: A History from Its Origins to 1966* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1976), p. 74.

71. According to Seale, Ba'th Party cofounder Michel Aflaq attributed the coup attempt to "a social class driven to treachery in defense of its interests" (*Struggle*, pp. 281–82). The "progressive front" is described in Seale, *Struggle*, pp. 315–17, and in Petran, *Syria*, pp. 114–15. See also Khalid al-'Azam, *Mudhakkirat Khalid al-'Azam* [Memoirs of Khalid al-'Azam], 3 vols. (Beirut: Dar al-Muttaḥida lil-Nashr, 1972), 2:487–89.

the West would react to the upsurge in popular support for the Communists. He feared that an electoral victory or even a Communist-supported coup d'état, could provoke a Western backlash that would erase recent progressive gains. The tenor of Western rhetoric at the time, the intervention of American intelligence agencies in Syria, and the precedent of the Suez invasion gave some credibility to Hawrani's apprehensions.⁷²

In some measure, the Ba'th's defensive reaction to the rise of the Communist Party reflected its own ambivalence about how far to push the radical reorganization of Syria's political economy. Despite its self-proclaimed status as a revolutionary party and its support for socialism, the Ba'th, especially the founding generation of Michel Aflaq, Salah al-Din Bitar, and Akram al-Hawrani, had never developed a full-fledged economic program, nor had it advocated the elimination of private property or total state control over the means of production.⁷³ Though the Ba'th's founders were harsh in their condemnation of capitalism and feudalism, they also indicated that the party would not imitate the ideas of Marx or Lenin and consistently criticized the internationalism of the Communist Party as proof that it was not sufficiently supportive of Arab nationalism.⁷⁴ Periods of tactical cooperation between the Ba'th and the Syrian Communist Party had never resolved these differences, which now broke into the open.⁷⁵ Tensions were exacerbated by the widespread, if exaggerated, perception that upcoming elections would reveal the growing popular strength of the Communists and by a sense that the Communist Party was making inroads into Ba'thist support among workers, peasants, and students. The advance of progressive forces in Syria had reached the point by mid-1957 at which they engaged not only in efforts to defeat conservative politicians but also in bitterly divisive conflicts among themselves about how to divide the spoils they were sure would soon be theirs. These conflicts led to a break between the Ba'th and the Communist Party and ultimately to union with Egypt.

72. Andrew Rathmell, *The Secret War in the Middle East: The Covert Struggle for Syria, 1949–1961* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1995). For a contemporary expression of America's concern with "losing" Syria, see Hanson W. Baldwin, "Syria: Middle East Proving Ground," *New York Times Magazine*, February 3, 1957, pp. 52–54.

73. See Jacques Rastier, "A la recherche du socialisme Syrien," *Orient* 4 (1957), pp. 169–77.

74. Devlin, *Ba'th Party*, p. 35. For Aflaq's ideas on communism, see Michel Aflaq, *Fi sabil al-Ba'th* (Toward the resurrection) (Beirut: Dar al-Tali'a, 1963). Hawrani's opposition to communism was not simply a matter of political tactics. He advocated a vague form of socialism, but he was also a radical nationalist who regarded Syrian communists as committed first to the Soviet Union and only second to Syria. See "Akram al-Hawrani fi Beirut yatahadath 'an mawadi' al-sa'a: . . . nuqawam al-shuyuiya la nadua'aha tabt al-raiya al-bamra'" (Akram al-Hawrani in Beirut speaks on the issues of the hour: . . . We will fight communism, not rally around it under the red flag), *Alif Ba'*, October 9, 1954, pp. 1, 4.

75. Al-'Azam, *Mudhakkirat*, 3:40–44.

To forestall the possibility of electoral defeat, the Ba'th chose to boycott municipal elections in November 1957. To prevent a Communist-supported seizure of power, the party moved unilaterally to engineer unity with Egypt, despite Egyptian president 'Abd al-Nasser's reluctance to undertake such a project and the strong opposition of many Syrian political factions. Syrian-Egyptian unity was hardly a new idea: a wide range of treaties and pacts, including a number of economic agreements and a joint Syrian-Egyptian military command under the control of Egyptian commander in chief 'Abd al-Hakim Amr, already bound the two countries. Moreover, Arab unity was the Ba'th's central organizing principle, placed first in its familiar slogan, "Unity, Freedom, Socialism" (*Wihda, Huriya, Ishitirakiya*). According to Michel Aflaq and Salah al-Din Bitar, Arab unity was also a necessary prerequisite for the defeat of feudalism from within and imperialism from without. And union with Egypt had been an explicit element of Ba'thist policy since 1956, when the defeat of the Suez invasion, Nasser's open defiance of the West in the purchase of Czech weapons, and his role in the nonaligned movement gave him unparalleled stature as a progressive Arab leader.⁷⁶

Ideological motives, however, were probably of secondary importance in the rush to union. Many Syrian officers supported union in the belief that Nasser would suppress civilian political conflicts and rule through a military-led revolutionary council along Egyptian lines. Ba'thists believed that a union would enhance their position in Syria and undermine their communist rivals. Communist leaders viewed the rush to union with alarm, given that Nasser was actively repressing communists in Egypt at the time, but felt compelled to respond to the dramatic rise of popular support for such a move.

At the urging of the Ba'th, a delegation of officers led by Chief of Staff 'Afif al-Bizri traveled to Cairo to reaffirm Syrian support for union and to request Nasser's help in restoring stability in Syria. On January 16, 1958, Bitar followed the officers to Cairo, where, without authority from his government, he and Chief of Staff Bizri negotiated a Syrian-Egyptian union with President Nasser. When Bitar returned to Damascus he was widely criticized for the agreement, especially by al-'Azim's Democratic Bloc and the SCP. After several weeks of further debate within Syria over Nasser's terms—terms that included the dissolution of Syrian political parties and sweep-

ing Egyptian authority over the affairs of the Northern Region—the cabinet capitulated and flew to Cairo; there, on February 1, 1958, Egypt and Syria were proclaimed to be the United Arab Republic. Syria's first experience of independence ended with the voluntary dissolution of Syrian sovereignty after little more than a decade. Aside from the eighteen months between the breakup of the union in September 1961 and the Ba'thist coup in March 1963, pluralist, multiparty parliamentary politics ceased to exist in Syria.

76. A review of Ba'thist ideology is beyond the scope of this chapter. See Devlin, *Ba'th Party*; Kamel S. Abu Jaber, *The Arab Ba'th Socialist Party: History, Ideology, and Organization* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1966); Gordon H. Torrey, "The Ba'th: Ideology and Practice," *Middle East Journal* 23 (Autumn 1969), pp. 445–70; and Hizb al-Ba'th al-'Arabi al-Ishitiraki (The Arab Ba'th Socialist Party), *Nidal hizb al-ba'th al-'arabi al-ishitiraki, 1943–1980* (Struggle of the Arab Ba'th Socialist Party, 1943–1980) (Damascus: Al-Qiyada al-Qawmiya, 1981).

4

Building the Institutions of
Populist Authoritarian Rule

Leaders of the Ba'ath Party perceived unification with Egypt as a response to the institutional failures and structural constraints that undermined the consolidation of a reformist political agenda—represented by the opposition of a business-landlord coalition, on the one hand, and by competition with the Communist Party for control of mass politics, on the other. Neither popular mobilization nor the transformation of Syria's political arena proved sufficient to bring about an inclusionary development strategy during the immediate postindependence years of 1946–58. Neither an expanding state elite nor the increasingly powerful reformist parties were able, in Stepan's phrase, "to clear away the obstacles" to the emergence of an industrializing social pact. Processes of state expansion and the mobilization of workers and peasants drove the incorporation project in directions that increasingly conflicted with the interests of a capitalist class still deeply embedded in the structures of an agrarian economy. The result was the polarization of Syria's political arena, leading to the "explosive disintegration" of Syria's oligarchic order—its collapse into unification with Egypt.¹

Unification was thus seen by the leaders of the Ba'ath as a solution for two kinds of problems, both of which can be described in terms of the dilemma of countermobilization. One problem was the embedded power and autonomy of landowners and capitalists. In this regard, the union was expected to complete the transformation of Syria's political arena that Ba'athist activists had proven unable to accomplish through legislative and electoral means—

to break the dominant coalition of landowners and capitalists, bring about the consolidation of a reformist political agenda, and ensure Syria's transition to a populist-industrializing political economy. The second problem was how to respond to the growing appeal of the Syrian Communist Party and the challenge this posed to the political standing of the Ba'ath. In this regard as well, the Ba'ath's expectations were that the union would redirect the flow of an increasingly radicalized popular politics and consolidate the authority of the Ba'ath Party over its rivals. These intentions reflect the dual character of the union with Egypt. The United Arab Republic took shape in Syria as a countermobilizational project designed to overcome political polarization, repress social conflict, and deepen the regulatory capacity and reach of state institutions. Yet it was also understood as a transformational project intended to remake Syria's development strategy and political arena along populist lines; to challenge the social power and autonomy of landed elites and, later, of business groups; and to advance a reformist social agenda.

The union accomplished these aims unevenly. Few of the Ba'ath's political ambitions were fulfilled, least of all the consolidation of its own authority. Nonetheless, the union represented a critical period in the construction of a durable populist authoritarian system of rule. Most important, it established a repertoire of repressive and corporatist countermobilizational strategies, a legacy of powerful state institutions, and a commitment to state management of the economy that would all reappear as elements of the Ba'ath's ruling strategy after 1963. In giving new prominence to mass-based, populist ideologies, the union also promoted a move toward single-party politics and a reliance on the discourses of class conflict, anti-Westernism, and socialist revolution which would later characterize Syria under Ba'athist rule.

At the same time, in sharpening capitalist and landed opposition to the Nasserist project of populist state building, the union provided a crucial opportunity for political learning on the part of the younger generation of political activists who were advancing within and alongside the ranks of the Ba'ath Party and who would become increasingly influential after 1963. The union educated this generation of radical reformers about the resilience of the private sector, the intensity of business opposition to social reform, and the strategies capitalists could employ to undermine the radical restructuring of Syria's political economy. Once the Ba'ath seized power following the coup of March 8, 1963, the union experience became both its touchstone and its antimodel, the crucible within which many elements of the Ba'ath's political repertoire took shape.

For these reasons, the short experiment of the United Arab Republic stands out as a critical juncture in the formation of a populist authoritarian

1. Alfred Stepan, *The State and Society Peru in Comparative Perspective* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), p. 126.

system of rule in Syria. In this chapter I carry forward the general argument linking the trajectory of authoritarian state formation to changes in the pattern of state intervention and shifts in the organization of state institutions. I explore the effects of such changes on the strategic choices of key political actors and on the organization of social conflicts, focusing on three effects of Nasserist policies during the period from February 1958 to September 1961: the populist restructuring of the Syrian political economy, the ongoing transformation of the political arena, and the deepening of a repressive, state-corporatist strategy of social control.

Deepening State Intervention

On February 1, 1958, Syria's President Shukri al-Quwatli and Egypt's President Gamal 'Abd al-Nasser stood before massive crowds on the balcony of 'Abadin Palace in Cairo to announce the merger of their two countries. The formation of the United Arab Republic was also enthusiastically received in Syria, where large demonstrations broke out to applaud the arrival of Arab unity. Nasser's post-Suez popularity as the "first Arab nationalist," the sense that a strong leader was needed to overcome Syria's political divisions, and the conviction that Syria and Egypt had taken a decisive step toward pan-Arab unification contributed to the U.A.R.'s appeal. Within a month Quwatli had resigned his post to become "first citizen" of the new republic. Parliaments in Cairo and Damascus unanimously endorsed the union.² Plebiscites in both countries—never the most credible of electoral instruments in the Middle East—recorded nearly unanimous popular support for the union and for the election of Nasser as its president.³

Accompanying this public enthusiasm, however, was a general concern among Syrian elites about how the union would affect the balance of political, social, and economic power in Syria, now the Northern Region of the U.A.R. This concern was well founded. Nasser's intention to centralize authority in his own hands and in the state apparatus explicitly ruled out a meaningful role for local political parties, including the Ba'th, which regarded itself as the architect of the union and its ideological inspiration. Nasser insisted that the Ba'th and other parties be disbanded as a condition of unification. To bring about Syrian-Egyptian integration, Egyptian-

2. In Syria, however, the pro-unionist officers threatened reprisals if parliament failed to support the union.

3. In Egypt, 6,104,259 votes were cast, representing over 98 percent of registered voters, and 6,102,000 voted in favor of the union and for Nasser as its president. In Syria, 1,313,070 people voted (92 percent), with 1,312,070 supporting the union and Nasser's presidency.

style bureaucracy (and Egyptian bureaucrats) were exported to Syria, whose state apparatus Nasser dismissed as "scarcely worthy of a grocery shop."⁴ Economic and social reforms alienated Syria's large landowners, while merchants and businessmen chafed under newly imposed commercial regulations. Egyptian officers were placed in control of Syrian military units. Communists were purged from the army and from trade unions. Cairo became the center of political, economic, foreign, and defense policymaking for the entire union.

Within months, Syrians of every political orientation had concluded that Nasser's goal was the "Egyptianization" (*tamsir*) of Syria, rather than a union based on Syrian-Egyptian equality.⁵ Public enthusiasm was replaced by the perception that Egyptian authorities were domineering, arrogant, and repressive, though Nasser himself remained popular, notably among peasants, who benefited from his reforms, and urban workers. Economic integration was seen as a thin cover for Egypt's exploitation of Syrian resources and markets.⁶ New regulations were seen to suffocate the dynamism of Syria's merchants, stifling trade and agriculture.⁷

Egyptian policies and Syrian perceptions determined that economic issues would be a leading source of tension throughout the union and would ultimately cause Syria's secession.⁸ Indeed, the first decree Nasser issued as

4. Cited in Malcolm Kerr, *The Arab Cold War: Gamal 'Abd al-Nasir and His Rivals, 1958-1970*, 3d ed. (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), pp. 23-24. In contemporary Egyptian accounts, one of the reasons given for Nasser's first visit to the Syrian "province," in February-March 1959, was to "endow" Syria "with an administrative structure." Institut d'études Islamique de l'université de Paris, *Cahiers de l'Orient Contemporain* (henceforth cited as *COC*) 37 (1958), p. 173.

5. Najah Muhammad, *al-Haraka al-qawmiyya al-'Arabiyya fi Suriya* (The Arab nationalist movement in Syria) (Damascus: Dar al-Ba'th, 1987), pp. 359-407. Nor was this view limited to Syrians. See Anouar Abdel-Malek, *Egypt: Military Society* (New York: Random House, 1968), p. 123.

6. Khalil al-Kallas, a senior Ba'thist and minister of the economy in the first half of the U.A.R., wrote several essays criticizing Egypt's handling of the union, among which is *Aradnaha walha wa aradaha mazra'a* [We wanted unity and they wanted a plantation] (Damascus: Matba'at al-Jumhuriyya, 1962). Abdel-Malek, *Egypt*, notes that Egyptian businessmen pressured Nasser to accept unification, over his objections, both to gain access to Syria's markets and resources and as a source of employment for Egyptian university graduates. He later implies that Syria was a prize offered to the Egyptian bourgeoisie by the regime for their cooperation at home.

7. See, for example, Foster Hailey, "Syrians Souring on Egyptian Curbs: Business Men, Farmers, and Others Protest against Loss of Freedom," *New York Times*, May 1, 1958.

8. According to 'Awad Barakat, former minister of economy and director of the *Société des Banques Réunies*, "Those responsible for the economy during the union have, with regrets, committed colossal errors which have provoked economic catastrophe, have wrecked our economy, and have, finally, brought about the break-up of the union itself" (Barakat, "Opinions sur la politique économique en Syrie," *L'économie et les finances de la Syrie et des pays arabes* [henceforth cited as *EFSPA*], no. 50 [February 1962], p. 33).

president of the U.A.R. related not to military or security matters but to the mundane issue of unifying Egyptian and Syrian tariffs. One of the first major rifts in the union occurred when Syrian authorities resisted the process of economic unification and unilaterally imposed import duties that would have affected goods entering Syria from Egypt.⁹ And the chief catalyst for Syria's secession from the union in September 1961 was the proliferation of increasingly statist economic policies, which culminated in the nationalization of large segments of Syria's industry with the so-called socialist decrees of July 1961.

Underlying Syrian complaints about Egyptian behavior and Egyptian policies was more than just the conflict between Syrian autonomy and Egyptian control.¹⁰ Opposition to the union from various sectors of Syrian society stemmed not simply from Egyptianization or bureaucratic meddling but also from the efforts of Egyptian authorities to impose a distinctive developmental model that was populist, industrializing, and authoritarian in character and organized along rigidly corporatist lines.¹¹ Despite the union's collapse, its consequences were crucial in expanding the boundaries of state intervention in Syria, reorganizing relations between state and society, and thus in laying the foundations for the more radical populist authoritarianism of the Ba'th.

In moving to reorganize Syria's political economy in this fashion, Nasserist strategy had three basic elements. First, economic policies imposed during the union shifted primary responsibility for accumulation and industrialization from the private sector to the state. Industrialization in particular became the focus of development efforts and was supported by deepening and accelerating the process of state institutional growth that had characterized the postindependence period. Second, legislation introduced during the union dramatically strengthened efforts to reorganize the agrarian sector, regulate property rights, and restructure agricultural relations of production. Third, the union established the foundations for a much more rigorous and restrictive form of corporatist mobilization (or demobilization) among business, peasants, and labor than hitherto known in Syria.

9. Osgood Caruthers, "Syrian Challenge Fought by Nasser: Arab Leader Moves to Bar a Tariff Increase Imposed by Damascus Officials," *New York Times*, June 10, 1958.

10. Tabitha Petran, *Syria* (New York: Praeger, 1972), pp. 128-48. See also Khalid al-'Azmi, *Mudhakkirat Khalid al-'Azmi* (Memoirs of Khalid al-'Azmi) (Beirut: Dar al-Muttahidat lil-Nashr, 1972), 3:88-190.

11. Badr al-Din al-Siba'i, *Al-Marhala al-intiqaliya fi Suriya: Ahd al-wihda, 1958-1961* (The transitional stage in Syria: The union period, 1958-1961) (Beirut: Dar Ibn Khaldun, 1975). The authoritarian and individualistic character of Nasser's rule figures prominently in Syrian historiography. See Muhammad, *Al-Haraka al-qawmiya*.

In adopting this strategy of economic development, Nasser was not merely imposing Egyptian policies on Syria, though he certainly gave Egyptian interests higher priority than local Syrian concerns. He was also motivated by an explicit concern to resolve the social conflicts of preunion Syria which had caused the breakdown of its political system and which could, if left unchecked, threaten the stability of the U.A.R., undermine his personal authority, and weaken his reputation as the Arab world's leading statesman. Ironically, it was precisely the hope that Nasser would reorder Syrian politics and society that drove the Ba'th toward union and led Ba'thist leaders to conclude that they would occupy a privileged ideological and political position within it.¹² Yet Nasser's ideas about the economy differed significantly from those of the Ba'th. Nor did he accept the primacy of the private sector, the prevailing view among Syrian capitalists and landowners. Nasser's vision of the role of the state was much more encompassing, and of politics, considerably more restrictive.

At the outset of the union, therefore, Egyptian authorities sought to impose a more clearly articulated division of labor between the public and private sectors in Syria, with the latter occupying a subordinate position. The public sector would control strategic industries (petroleum, shipping, textiles, mining, banking, insurance), and the private sector would be directed toward lighter industry and manufacturing. Setting economic priorities and allocating resources among sectors were tasks reserved for the state. Such decisions were to be based not only on the requirements of the Syrian economy but also on the populist notions of distributive justice that Nasser espoused, as well as consideration of Egyptian economic interests. Nasser's initial public position was that this division would be accomplished in a cooperative spirit, with each sector accepting its assigned position in the economy without conflict. In a July 1959 speech, for example, he predicted that "[t]he five year plan we will begin to carry out in January 1960 will employ 600,000 workers; 60% of the necessary capital will be furnished by the Economic Organization and 40% will be left to private capital. The problem of the nationalization of industry does not arise. It is a matter of cooperation between public and private capital. Industry must be integrated into our society."¹³

Nasser's expectation of private sector participation in a state-run economy created a mix of incentives and constraints for both sides. The important, though subordinate, role that Nasser assigned to the private sector helps explain the less rigid style of corporatism that was imposed on capitalist inter-

12. Simon Jargy, "Le déclin d'un parti," *Orient* 11 (1959), pp. 21-39.

13. *COC* 40 (1959), p. 232.

est groups relative to labor, why Egyptian officials were relatively tolerant of the complaints of Syrian businessmen about the union, and why they persisted in their efforts to secure business support.¹⁴ Yet Nasserist conceptions of the private sector's boundaries also help to explain the dissatisfaction of Syrian capitalists who adopted the rhetoric of economic nationalism as a means to maximize their autonomy from Egyptian intervention—which they defined largely in terms of Egyptianization—even while they continued to invest, and relied on Egyptian capital and the Egyptian state to support the Syrian economy.¹⁵ It was in part this resistance by Syrian capitalists to his populist and state capitalist project, in Egypt as well as Syria, that led Nasser to abandon the notion of cooperation between the public and private sectors, adopt a sharper class-oriented politics, and “raise the issue of nationalization” in a decisive way with the socialist decrees of July 1961, bringing broad sectors of the economy under direct state ownership.¹⁶

Nasser's emphasis on public-private sector cooperation and his explicit promise to respect private property rights were not intended to enhance the power of the private sector or place authority over economic policymaking in its hands. Egyptian authorities offered these guarantees in the context of overarching state supervision, if not control. His purpose was to integrate Syrian business into a process of industrialization guided by state institutions, not by the priorities of the private sector. More generally, the intended outcome of Nasser's strategy was to subordinate not only the bourgeoisie but also labor, peasants, and other “popular forces” within a comprehensive “organic” network of corporatist relations, binding each sector in direct vertical ties to the state while preventing the formation of horizontal links across sectors. Nasserist strategy sought, in other words, to constrain the development of powerful, autonomous capacities on the part of any particular Syrian social class and to fragment potential coalitions capable

14. Throughout the course of the union, even while preparing the socialist decrees of 1961, regime officials reassured capitalists, offering promises against nationalization, guarantees on the security of property, and special exemptions from new economic regulations. In January 1959, Central Minister of Industry Aziz Sidqi told Syrian businessmen that the private sector would not be restricted to the investments allocated to it in the first five-year plan. In July of that year Nasser reaffirmed that capital “will remain free.” In January 1961, the central minister of agriculture denied that the regime planned to introduce collective farms, declaring its commitment to the preservation of private property.

15. Despite Syrian complaints about Egyptian exploitation, it is also the case that Egypt made up deficits in the Syrian budget and provided other forms of financial assistance during the union.

16. Nasser's post-1961 views on public sector-private sector relations are reflected in the Charter of National Action, translated and reproduced in Nissim Rejwan, *Nasserist Ideology* (New York: Halstead, 1974), pp. 227–55.

of opposing Egyptian authority.¹⁷ This transformation in the position of the state and its relationship to various social groups represented a formative step in the move toward populist authoritarianism. The lingering controversy surrounding Syria's experience of unification, in particular the hostility it engendered between Nasser and the Ba'athist leadership, has tended to obscure just how deeply the union influenced subsequent developments. As a model to emulate, refashion, and resist, however, it occupied a central position in the early years of Ba'athist state building.

And beyond the social and economic transformations resulting from the union, it also generated the state-institutional and bureaucratic conditions necessary for the later consolidation of a populist authoritarian regime. Building a populist authoritarian system of rule is not only a matter of mobilizing popular sectors but also has critical countermobilizational dimensions, using the state apparatus to break existing economic coalitions and existing patterns of economic dependence and control. Power holders use the state to subordinate particular interests—in this instance the fractious political parties of preunion Syria—before redefining the general interest in terms of a social unity represented by a single, mass-based party, organized interests, the army, and state institutions.¹⁸ The state was to become the authoritative mediator of economic relations within the private sector even while preserving that sector's role as a source of capital accumulation. Nasser underscored these concepts in his use of the phrase “democratic cooperative socialism” (*ishtirakiya ta'awuniya dimuqratiya*) to describe the character of the new order he hoped to construct.¹⁹

This formulation and Nasser's experience of the union make clear once again the power of the dilemmas that constrain the consolidation of any populist authoritarian regime. Overcoming obstacles to popular mobilization while containing popular demands and restructuring the dominant social groups engages populist authoritarian elites in a process with two distinct phases. In the first, existing political arrangements must be reshaped, broken, or reconstituted under state control. In the second, new populist

17. On the evolution of corporatist theory and practice in Egypt under Nasser, see Robert Bianchi, *Unruly Corporatism: Associational Life in Twentieth-Century Egypt* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), pp. 77–82.

18. In an interview in July 1959 Nasser affirmed this view. “The National Union,” he said, “is one means for us to enforce our internal conditions and the necessities of our foreign policy. It is the cadre through which we will realize our revolution, for the security of the homeland and to safeguard its independence. It is a form of peaceful coexistence between the social classes” (*Al-Ahram*, July 2, 1959; emphasis added).

19. On the concept of democratic cooperative socialism, see Abdel-Malek, *Egypt*, pp. 288–307.

and corporatist arrangements are introduced in their place. During both phases, populist authoritarian elites must cope with the powerful legacies of existing political and economic institutions—with the structural constraints that shaped politics in the preauthoritarian period.

Nasser, like many populist authoritarian leaders, was more successful in the first phase of his efforts than in the second. He was not entirely a captive of the past. Egyptian-sponsored policies brought about significant changes in the organization of Syria's political economy. Yet his identity as an outsider made it possible for business interests to exploit Syrian nationalism as a potent source of opposition to Nasserist policies, effectively undermining efforts to reorganize Syria's economy. Only after March 1963 was the Ba'ath able to deepen the project of populist authoritarian state formation, largely by drawing on practices and techniques that became part of the Syrian political repertoire during the union.

It must also be recognized, however, that the ability of union authorities to reorganize the economy faced a number of obstacles, and Nasserist policies often led to unintended consequences. At first Nasser's willingness to restructure the Syrian private sector was moderated by his concern to maintain private investment. Egyptian officials thus pursued a hybrid approach in their relations with Syrian capitalists, combining sanctions and regulation with a measure of incentives and support. Subsequently, however, as capitalist resistance to the union became more pronounced, the autonomy of the private sector was seen as an obstacle to the consolidation of populist reforms. Egyptian officials moved to strengthen their hold over the economy, but Syrian capitalists were able to exploit their relatively privileged position to challenge Nasserist policies. Further, economic nationalism helped mobilize an anti-U.A.R. coalition among the very groups that Nasser hoped to disorganize and control. The suppression of reformist parties such as the Ba'ath and the SCP, along with the corporatist organization of labor and peasants, undermined the possibility for local challenges to the capitalists and landed elites who opposed the union. At the same time, Nasser's mass movement, the National Union, became an instrument for the expression of professional, business, and state-bureaucratic interests rather than a meaningful vehicle of mass mobilization.

Quite unintentionally, therefore, the consequence of Nasser's policies was to provide new bases for the emergence of an autonomous capitalist class. Opposition to the rise of Egyptian-style, state-led populist industrialization created a powerful rationale for maintaining the coalition of capitalists and landowners that Egyptian officials explicitly tried to destroy. At the same time, however, Egyptian-sponsored reforms decisively altered the balance of power within this coalition, enhancing the influence of capitalists and

diminishing the position of large landowners. Paradoxically, perhaps, the deepening of state control over the rural economy during the union helped erode the dependence of capitalists on the landed elite, creating new opportunities for business groups to develop political agendas based more narrowly on their own economic interests. Yet the alliance survived, and in the end, criticizing his own willingness to accommodate Syrian capitalists and landowners (who might have been surprised to find themselves described as having had his confidence), Nasser blamed this coalition for the union's demise. Two years after Syria's secession, he recalled: "The people wanted unity in order to achieve its hopes of freedom and socialism. . . . However, the social contradiction, the dictatorship of landowning and capitalist interests whose forces were ruling Syria in the days before the union, continued to exist and deceive us after 1958. I said after secession that we had made a mistake in believing in the forces which were the natural enemies of the revolution. We co-operated with reactionary opportunists who deceived us in order to destroy the union and maintain their exploitation."²⁰

In this sense, the outcome of Nasser's corporatizing efforts seems to have been quite different in Syria than it was in Egypt. In assessing the trajectory of Egyptian corporatism, Bianchi notes that "Nasser's early enthusiasm to build corporatist structures was weakest regarding the social groups which had the most to gain from the revolution [labor and peasants] and strongest regarding the groups who had the most to lose [businessmen and landlords]."²¹ In Syria, on the other hand, Egyptian officials pursued a policy that was almost the reverse of the one Bianchi describes. Labor was subjected to a harsh and repressive process of corporatist incorporation, while business was extended considerably more organizational latitude. Moreover, it was partly the resilience of Syrian capitalists in the face of Nasserist efforts to break their autonomy that led the rising generation of Ba'athist leaders to impose much tighter controls on the private sector after 1963.

Nasserist policies, therefore, had the effect of enhancing the position of capitalists relative to that of labor, peasants, and landlords, even while they subordinated the private sector to state management and control. Yet there was significant variation in how these policies played out. Union authorities did not adopt a uniform style of political restructuring across social groups in Syria, nor did they adhere during the union to an unchanging relationship with any particular group. Institutional arrangements and the particular mechanisms of control through which U.A.R. officials imposed their

20. Gamal 'Abd al-Nasser, "Speech on the Occasion of the 5th Anniversary of the Union," *Al-Ahram*, February 22, 1963. Reprinted in Walid Khalidi and Yusuf Ibish, eds., *Arab Political Documents, 1963* (Beirut: American University of Beirut, 1963), p. 36.

21. Bianchi, *Unruly Corporatism*, p. 77.