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## Authoritarian Legacies and the Failure of Controlled Liberalism

With the restoration of Syria's sovereignty in September 1961, its first experience of populist authoritarian rule came to an end. Following Syria's secession from the U.A.R., local politicians revived the institutional forms of pluralist politics. Parliament was reconvened, and national elections for a constituent assembly were scheduled for December. Following a vigorous campaign, voters elected a large number of first-time officeholders, including an unprecedented number of representatives associated with business. Syria's government emphasized its determination to break with the "dictatorship" of the union and restore Syrian "liberalism," both economic and political. Leading politicians once again defined their mission as the construction of a social pact that would encompass capitalists and labor, land-owners and peasants.

Often, scholars of Syria define the union period as a brief interruption in Syrian politics, which resumed their previous course once the union ended.<sup>1</sup> Yet the union had deeply transformed Syria's political arena. "Class spirit" had become firmly embedded in institutional practices and routines. State institutions became more fully engaged in the mediation of social conflicts following the corporatist restructuring of interest groups. The institutional and legal mechanisms of Egyptian-style authoritarianism were implanted in Syria. Through land reform, the dramatic expansion of state intervention, and the deepening of import substitution industrialization, the structural contours of Syria's economy underwent significant change.

1. For this perspective, see Tabitha Petran, *Syria* (New York: Praeger, 1972), and Derek Hopwood, *Syria, 1945-1986: Politics and Society* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1988).

The system of internal dependency and the social and political coalitions it sustained did not disappear, but it had been substantially weakened.

The changes brought about during the union suggest that the "struggle for Syria" in the secessionist period and beyond can be explained more fully in terms of conflicts over the legacies of the union—whether to sustain or reverse the economic and social trajectory established under the U.A.R.—than in terms of the unresolved social conflicts of the preunion period. Among the most significant of the union's legacies in this regard was its relative success as a populist "incorporation project." The corporatist restructuring of interest groups carried out during the union gave popular sectors—labor and peasants in particular—a more powerful presence in Syrian political life. For secessionist governments, however, this legacy was decidedly mixed. Hoping to reverse what Syrian business leaders and land-owners widely regarded as the statist excesses of the union period, government officials found themselves enmeshed in a new cycle of conflicts associated with their efforts to redefine the role of the state in the economy. During a critical period of intense struggle to reduce the scope of state intervention and redirect Syria's development strategy, government officials confronted a political arena characterized not only by high levels of popular mobilization but also by organized popular sectors determined to preserve what they regarded as the organizational and social gains of the union.

In addition, Syria's post-U.A.R. political discourses emphasized the socially divisive character of Nasserist authoritarianism, attributing to it class-based social conflicts that would not otherwise have become so sharp. The business-dominated government thus linked democratization to an ideology of social unity, "social peace," and the suppression of class conflicts that might disrupt economic development and undermine efforts to secure the hegemony of the private sector. As a result, the pluralist expression of popular demands that resumed after 1961 was seen by its business-political elite not as indicators of Syrian democracy or as a legitimate process of renegotiating political and economic arrangements but as threats to the unity of Syrian society and a manifestation of "Nasserist" sympathies that could justifiably be suppressed.

In this setting, the authoritarian and countermobilizational mechanisms and routines established during the union proved highly adaptive for secessionist officials. Despite widespread condemnation of "Nasserist dictatorship" and despite the restoration of multiparty competitive politics, ministers and other officials turned easily to the authoritarian repertoire of the U.A.R. period to suppress competing political voices. Syria's experience, like that of other postcommunist and postauthoritarian systems, shows that the relationship between transitional regimes and their authoritarian pre-

decessors is by no means straightforward: civilian politicians often rely on authoritarian routines and institutions—bureaucratic, executive, and judicial—when faced with the proliferation of popular demands, the “resurrection of civil society,” that accompanies the breakdown of authoritarianism. Consolidating democratic institutions and the regime become opposing rather than complementary aims.

After 1961, Syria’s postauthoritarian political leaders sought to secure the hegemony of the private sector and rebuild a liberal form of capitalism as the framework for Syria’s development. Yet they pursued this aim not by rejecting the authoritarian legacy of Nasserist rule but by appropriating and adapting the state-centric, authoritarian, and corporatist practices of the United Arab Republic. The new civilian leadership only selectively deinstitutionalized authoritarianism in Syria. This strategy should not be taken merely as the cynical tactic of an opportunist political elite but as a reflection of the very real ambivalence of Syrian capitalists regarding the extent to which a new political order *should be* democratic and their reluctant willingness to accept the compromises that accompany democratic state building, an ambivalence shared by important factions in the military. Businessmen readily perceived many of the changes introduced during the union as enormously useful in the deepening of Syrian capitalism and in maintaining social peace (a concept in and of itself more commonly associated with authoritarianism than with democracy), including rule by decree, the use of emergency laws legitimating military control, continued suppression of the Syrian Communist Party, and control of trade union activities by the state.

Retaining such policies reflected the very real differences between a “capitalist project,” even one articulated in liberal terms, and a “democratic project,” differences that had contributed to the breakdown of Syrian politics in the years 1954–58. Moreover, the strategy of Syria’s capitalists demonstrated a lack of serious attention to how they might pragmatically accommodate their notion of liberal capitalism with a viable democratic system of rule. Restoring the hegemony of the private sector and economic reconstruction figured prominently in the discussions and writings of businessmen. But institution building and political reconstruction occupied a much less prominent place.

Even as a reaction to the developmental failures of the union, therefore, the authoritarian path to capitalism—a strategy pursued with much economic success in East Asia—proved to be structurally and institutionally unsustainable given the changes in the organization of the political arena that had occurred during the union. Secessionist governments hoped to accommodate the interests of labor and peasants by retaining populist redistributive policies and land reform, as well as to develop a ruling ideology

based on the principles of national unity and social harmony. Yet efforts to achieve a viable class compromise or to construct a stable social pact could not obscure the narrow social base of the regime and its pro-business agenda. Nor could a discourse of democratic inclusion—contra Nasserist authoritarianism—easily be reconciled with a reliance on authoritarian methods of political control and decision making. Democratic rhetoric came to be seen as a thin cover for efforts to impose the hegemony of one social class over others. The extent to which capitalists and landed elites manipulated efforts to construct a liberal, inclusive social pact in their own interests was not lost on the Ba’th or its military allies.

For the younger generation of Ba’thist leaders and their supporters in the military, this perception underscored their sense of the private sector’s determination to prevent meaningful change. It sharpened their commitment to radical social reforms and their willingness to engage in class conflict to secure the consolidation of a transformational regime, attributes that had a profound effect on political life in the post-1963 period. Like the union, therefore, the secessionist period provided critical experiences of political learning for the generation that would seize power following the Ba’thist coup in March 1963. It reinforced the perception that capitalists were determined to use the discourses of inclusion to secure political arrangements that ultimately were highly exclusionary.

Reliance on authoritarian practices to construct a social pact that privileged the interests of capitalists was thus a direct cause of the instability of postunion politics. By upholding the populist claims of the union period and by preserving the corporatist arrangements developed by Nasserist officials, the regime not only failed to contain the demands of labor and of other interests but actually enhanced their capacity to oppose the larger project of liberalizing Syria’s economy and to resist the regime’s authoritarian tendencies. At the same time, reliance on emergency measures and rule by decree elevated the power of the military, undermined efforts at democratization, and created precedents that crippled subsequent efforts to bring the military under civilian control.

### The Resurgence of the Private Sector

Following Syria’s secession from the union, the struggle between reformist and conservative coalitions over the organization of Syria’s political economy—with the military always present—once again became a critical aspect of political life. Debate returned to the issues involved in giving shape to the political economy of independent Syria, centering on the question of

defining boundaries—the boundaries of state intervention and the role of the private sector; of central planning versus markets; and of the inclusion or exclusion of workers and peasants, the share of workers and peasants in the distribution of national income, and the position of the landed oligarchy and its control over rural production.<sup>2</sup>

From its inception, the secessionist period was marked by frequent cabinet turnovers, military interventions, and parliamentary disruptions.<sup>3</sup> Throughout these years, the question of Arab unity and the proliferation of various pan-Arab unification schemes further exacerbated the level of social conflict.<sup>4</sup> "Nasserist sympathizers," both overt and covert, worked to destabilize secessionist regimes, leading to the rapid erosion of Syrian-Egyptian relations and of Nasser's standing in Syria.<sup>5</sup> Politicians were sharply divided over the U.A.R. and about what Syria's position should be with regard to unification efforts in general. Bitter debates concerning who to blame for the perceived failings of the union caused a split in June 1962 between Akram al-Hawrani's antiunion and anti-Nasser faction of the Ba'ith and the faction headed by Salah al-Din Bitar and Michel Aflaq. For the most part, Syrian political elites publicly proclaimed their continued dedication to pan-Arabism—entering unity talks with Iraq—even while exhibiting a new commitment to Syria's separateness as a nation and continuing to criticize both Nasser and the U.A.R. The issue of Arab unity generated conflict not just among political elites but also in trade unions, on university campuses, and in towns across Syria, where violent clashes between pro- and antiunion forces were a frequent occurrence.<sup>6</sup>

2. See "De l'économie de la province Syrienne à l'économie de la République Arabe Syrienne," *EPSPA*, no. 57 (September 1962), pp. 1–3.

3. There were seven governments during this brief period. Cabinets were formed or substantially reshuffled on the following dates: September 29, 1961 (with Ma'mun al-Kuzbari as prime minister); November 21, 1961 (Izzat al-Nuss); January 15, 1962 (Ma'ruf al-Dawalibi); April 16, 1962 (Bashir al-'Azma); June 20, 1962 (Bashir al-'Azma); September 17, 1962 (Khalid al-'Azma); and February 16, 1963 (Khalid al-'Azma).

4. The domestic politics of Arab unification efforts are covered in detail in Malik Muftic, *Sovereign Creations: Pan-Arabism and Political Order in Syria and Iraq* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996).

5. Various secessionist regimes blamed Nasser and his sympathizers for any kind of antigovernment manifestation. While little doubt exists that Egypt was intervening in Syrian politics, it is also clear that the label "Nasserist sympathizer" was conveniently applied to many, especially in the trade unions, who refused to accept the pro-business agenda of the new government and sought the retention of social welfare policies introduced during the union.

6. In June 1962, for example, an antiunity faction formed the Trade Union Group, broke with the General Federation of Trade Unions, and called for the dismissal of the GFTU's Executive Council for endorsing the reestablishment of unity with Egypt. See *COC* 49 (May–August 1962), p. 245.

Above and beyond the question of Arab unity and Syria's place in the region, however, the enduring consequences of the U.A.R. period were manifest through conflicts over the organization of Syria's domestic political economy. In contrast to the political dynamics of the preunion period, these struggles were heavily influenced by the new prominence of Syrian capitalists and the extent to which their views shaped the character of economic policy and state intervention. Nasser's emphasis on industrialization, as well as the successful efforts during the union to marginalize large landowners and impose corporatist controls over labor, combined to leave the business community in a position of relative strength after the union's collapse. With the resumption of civilian authority and of multiparty politics, political leaders and factions associated with business moved into central positions in the newly restored Syrian government. This was especially evident in the composition of the new executive branch—in the selection of People's Party leader Nazim al-Qudsi as president of the republic, a position to which he was reelected after the general elections of December 1961, and in the first cabinets of the secessionist period.

Reflecting the outlook of pro-reform Syrian capitalists, al-Qudsi supported restoring the primacy of the private sector but also favored retaining some of the social reforms introduced during the union.<sup>7</sup> The first secessionist cabinet did not contain any of the leading political figures of the preunion period or the most visible representatives of the old landed elite. It was headed by Ma'mun Kuzbari, also an attorney, who had in the 1950s allied himself with General Adib al-Shishakli and whose pragmatism is suggested by his subsequent leadership of the Nasserist National Union branch in Damascus during the U.A.R. The cabinet combined members of the People's and National Parties, both of which contained factions representing the landed oligarchy. But unlike preunion cabinets, which consisted of a small number of regulars who rotated in and out of government, only Kuzbari and two others, Leon Zamariya and Farhan al-Jandali, had previous cabinet experience, and none of them had occupied senior cabinet posts.<sup>8</sup>

7. For background on al-Qudsi, see Donald Reid, *Lawyers and Politics in the Arab World, 1880–1960* (Chicago: Bibliotheca Islamica, 1981). His only opponent for the post had been Khalid al-'Azma, whose reputation had grown after secession for his vigorous and consistent opposition to the union. But al-'Azma, supported by a coalition of "leftists and progressives," was seen as too far to the left and was defeated. See Khalid al-'Azma, *Mudhakkirat Khalid al-'Azma* (Memoirs of Khalid al-'Azma) (Beirut: Dar al-Muttahida lil-Nashr, 1972), 3:223–24.

8. Kuzbari had served in September 1955 as minister of education and in December 1956, Syria's last preunion cabinet, as minister of justice. Zamariya, a member of the People's Party, served very briefly in February 1955 as minister of finance. Farhan al-Jandali, also from the People's Party, served in four cabinets in 1950 and 1951 in the posts, respectively, of minister of health and education, minister of national economy, and twice as minister of public health.

Capitalists, moreover, were much better represented than in any pre-union cabinet, where merchants and industrialists had made up around 10 percent of all cabinet ministers from 1946 to 1958. In the Kuzbari cabinet, six of the eleven members had identifiable business connections of one kind or another. Kuzbari himself had served as counsel to the Khumasiya company and also came from a family involved in trading and industrial activities.<sup>9</sup> 'Awad Barakat, another attorney, had served as director of the Société des Banques Réunies.<sup>10</sup> Ahmad Sultan's family had large investments in industry throughout Syria, an example of the new national bourgeoisie that had emerged following World War II.<sup>11</sup> 'Adnan Quwatli, a respected professor of law, came from a family with strong business connections. The Quwatli family had extensive landholdings but was also involved in some of the earliest and most significant industrial enterprises in Syria, notably the founding in the 1930s of the Syrian Conserves Company. Other cabinet members were less prominent representatives of the business community, but Finance Minister Leon Zamariya was sympathetic to business concerns, and Public Works Minister 'Abd al-Rahman Huriya was part owner of a construction company in Latakia.

As on the ministerial level, parliament contained an unusually high number of first-timers: of the 172 deputies, 85 had not previously served in the assembly. Business interests were less well represented among parliamentary deputies, where landowners and lawyers were the two largest occupational categories, compared with the cabinet, but at this level as well, many of the lawyers had strong family ties to business.<sup>12</sup> In addition, pro-business

9. The Kuzbari family was among the founding investors of a number of firms in the 1950s, including the United Wool Manufacturing Company, the Arab Trading Company, and the Petroleum Trading Company. See data in 'Tasis ma'mal wa-shirkat, Wizarat al-Iqtisad, Qism al-Dawla, MWT, Damascus (Company and factory formation, Ministry of Economy, state papers, MWT, Damascus), and Syrian Arab Republic, *Al-Jarida al-Rasmiya* (Official Gazette) (Damascus: Government Press, 1951-61).

10. After the coup of March 8, 1963, Barakat's appointment was singled out as a symbol of the secessionist regime's subservience to business. In May 1963, the Ba'hist minister of economy 'Abd al-Karim Zahur attacked Barakat and other "bankers" (a reference to 'Izzat Tarabulsi) for running the economy "in the service of monopolistic and exploitative interests" (*Kalamat wa-khutab li-wuzara'*, Idbara 144, Qism al-Khass, MWT, Damascus [Addresses and speeches of ministers, file 144, private papers, MWT, Damascus]).

11. Sultan family holdings included large investments in the Cotton and Oils Company in Aleppo, the United Wool Manufacturing Company (together with the Kuzbari family) in Damascus, and the Wood and Wood Products Manufacturing Company in Latakia, among others. Notably, the last two of these firms, and at least one other in which the Sultan family invested, were founded during the United Arab Republic, making the Sultans an example of not only the national bourgeoisie but also the industrial elite, which did quite well for itself during the union with Egypt.

12. All data on 1961 parliamentary deputies are drawn from U.S. Department of Commerce, Office of Technical Services, Joint Publications Research Service, *Biographic Information*

deputies dominated key economic committees. In his memoirs, Khalid al-'Azam notes that the majority of members on the parliament's economic committee, which included many men who also held posts as company directors, were entirely unsympathetic to social reform. Their views, he noted, were closest to those of the industrialists.<sup>13</sup> Indeed, in some respects the committee and parliament in general were more conservative than the government. Thus, even in parliament, the business and financial communities had important channels of access for shaping economic policy.

The business cast of Syrian governments continued through at least April 1962, during which two subsequent cabinets were formed. Though cabinet turnover was rapid, persistently high levels of business representation continued. Ma'ruf al-Dawalibi, a strong opponent of the union and supporter of business interests, appointed a man whose family owned a textile manufacturing company, Muhammad 'Abadin, as minister of labor and social affairs in his cabinet, formed after the December 1961 general election.<sup>14</sup> Throughout the 1950s labor-management relations had been particularly combative in the heavily unionized textile sector, both in Damascus and Aleppo. 'Abadin's appointment suggests that government rhetoric about the preservation of workers' rights was tempered by its commitment to the interests of industrialists, among which the containment of labor ranked high.

Once in office, senior politicians immediately began to rebuild the web of interconnections that had bound capitalists and state officials in the preunion period. It authorized the formation of the Economic and Fiscal Reform Commission to advise the government on matters relating to the reform of U.A.R. policies, headed by 'Izzat Tarabulsi and with the participation of private sector businessmen.<sup>15</sup> In a dramatic shift from the approach of the union governments, in which state officials clearly dominated the business-state relationship, cabinet officials began a series of visits to regional centers to meet with local Chambers of Commerce, Industry, and Agriculture.<sup>16</sup> The meetings were intended to reassure business leaders

on Syrian Political Personalities, JPRS no. 16,928 (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1962).

13. Al-'Azam, *Mudhakkirat*, 3:244.

14. In 1960 the 'Abadin family founded the privately held Syrian Shiri Weaving Company in Damascus with paid-in capital of £\$1,500,000.

15. For Tarabulsi's views on economic reconstruction, see "'Izzat al-Tarabulsi yatahadith 'an al-ahwal al-iqtisadiya wal-naqdiyya. . ." ('Izzat al-Tarabulsi speaks on economic and fiscal conditions. . .), *Al-Hayat*, October 24, 1961.

16. Brief reports of these meetings are recorded in ministerial documents. They follow a standard format, noting time and place, as well as government and chamber representatives present. They include a précis of the meeting, recorded in a standard, mutually congratulatory tone, which reduces their reliability as historical accounts of the sessions but conveys quite well

that their concerns were once again matters of central importance to the government and that the government's priority was now to regain the ground that allegedly was lost under the U.A.R. Officials also met sporadically with leaders of the Damascus chambers at their headquarters to explain government policy, a sharp contrast from the union period when chamber members had to knock on government doors to petition for changes in economic regulations.<sup>17</sup>

### Liberal Capitalism and the Search for a New Social Pact

The enhanced position of the business community was visible not only through its role in government and the reemergence of strong business-state connections but also by its efforts, both intellectual and policy-oriented, to undo the statist legacy of the union and shift Syria's political economy in less interventionist directions. In practice this did not mean the complete domination of markets over planning. Given the increasingly radical Arab political environment of the early 1960s and the populist legacy of the union, even the pro-business cabinets of the secessionist period felt compelled to speak of their continued support for "socialism" and for the maintenance of popular organizations.<sup>18</sup> The resulting arrangements occupied a middle ground between the heavily corporatist and populist state capitalism of the U.A.R. and market capitalism. Its basic premise, as described by the Kuzbari government on September 29, 1961—only days after the break with Egypt—was a hybrid model captured in the phrase "natural dirigisme."<sup>19</sup>

According to the statement, the government pledged to follow a seven-point program: (1) to reestablish and guarantee political liberty, including freedom of speech and the press; (2) to abolish the emergency laws and

the intent of the government to rebuild relations with business. See *Kalamat wa-khutab li-ra'is al-wazara' wa-achirun*, Idbara 143, Qism al-Khass, MWT, Damascus (Addresses and speeches of the prime minister and others, file 143, private papers, MWT, Damascus).

17. In May 1962, for example, the minister of national economy went to the headquarters of the Damascus Chamber of Commerce to solicit the reactions of members to economic policies introduced by the government of Bashir al-'Azma.

18. For example, in October 1961, in two successive announcements, the cabinet declared that it would follow a "lightly directed," liberal economic development program, would return to a free exchange system, and would promote the participation of the government in all large public utility projects. Several days later it declared that "Arab socialism will be the base of economic, social, and agricultural development of the country" (COC 47 [September–December 1961], p. 417).

19. "La déclaration ministérielle du gouvernement de la République Arabe Syrienne," *ESPA*, no. 45 (September 1961), pp. 144–48.

all other laws contrary to human rights; (3) to reinforce the army; (4) to respect the rights acquired by civil servants; (5) to protect the trade union movement; (6) to adopt natural dirigisme and the protection of local producers; and (7) to cooperate with Arab states and the Arab League and to honor Syria's international commitments.<sup>20</sup> Within this framework, the government worked to restore the primacy of the private sector, limit the state to a general supervisory role, permit state intervention only where private sector capacities were insufficient, and restore the import substitution regime that had protected some Syrian producers, while easing restrictions on foreign exchange and trade.

Kuzbari's government also restructured Syria's foreign economic relations, with important consequences for domestic policy. Ties with the West and with international lending agencies were reestablished. Syrian officials vigorously sought and received loans from the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, and the U.S. Agency for International Development, as well as from France and other European countries—though officials also traveled to the Soviet Union and Eastern bloc states seeking their support. The widespread perception that the U.A.R. had brought the economy to ruin overcame any reluctance about the political consequences of accepting Western foreign aid.<sup>21</sup> In addition, a delegation from the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development arrived in Syria in February 1962 to advise on macroeconomic policy reform. The new government was applauded by Western states for its return to free market principles, and the atmosphere in Syria was seen as more congenial to Western interests than it had been at any time since World War II.<sup>22</sup>

In return for this support, the IMF and Syrian authorities cooperated in imposing the kinds of macroeconomic policies which have come to be seen as typical of IMF stabilization programs but which also suited the preferences of the new civilian government. These included the privatization of state-owned enterprises, export promotion measures, policies intended to

20. COC 47 (September–December 1961), p. 409.

21. Unless otherwise noted, data on foreign assistance are taken from COC issues from the period 1961–62. For the following, see COC 49 (May–August 1962), pp. 247–50: The IMF loaned \$6.6 million in March 1962, the World Bank provided a \$9.6 million stabilization loan in May 1962, and the U.S. government approved a \$14 million loan in June 1962. Also in July 1962, the U.S. Agency for International Development announced it would cooperate in an international effort to stabilize the Syrian economy, supported by a \$9 million loan. After lengthy negotiations France agreed in December 1962 to loan Syria about \$50 million.

22. As an American Middle East correspondent notes: "Any foreigner who moves around government offices will sense the new regime's international orientation. Westerners, accustomed since World War II to a continuous hostility, bask in the glow of friendship. Sometimes they wonder how deeply the old hatred and suspicion can be buried" (Dana Adams Schmidt, "Regime in Syria Leading to West," *New York Times*, October 16, 1961).

reduce inflation, raising the Central Bank discount rate, devaluing the currency, and eliminating restrictions on foreign exchange and on capital transfers in general. Stabilization also involved taking on foreign debt to pay for imports needed to make up for local shortages and for capital goods. In July 1962, Central Bank director M. Husni Sawwaf announced that Syria had received foreign loans totaling S£41.6 million to help importers pay for their purchases.<sup>23</sup> In the fall of 1962, a visiting IMF delegation concurred with Syrian officials that the stabilization program had been a resounding success, helped along by the end of a three-year drought that greatly improved the output of Syria's crucial agricultural sector.<sup>24</sup> Cost-of-living indexes showed that prices had dropped to about preunion levels, a balance of payments surplus had been achieved, Syrian exchange rates had strengthened against the dollar, bank deposits had increased, private sector lending had remained within program limits, and other positive results had been recorded. Overall, therefore, the conditions attached to international support provided a critical impetus for the liberalization of the Syrian economy. They also provided a convenient justification for a program of economic reconstruction that attached greater importance to the preferences of industry and merchants than to those of labor and peasants.

At the same time, the various separatist cabinets sought to consolidate their vision of Syrian society within a more broadly based economic and social coalition. These efforts focused on constructing a pact between business, labor, and the state of the kind that had first been envisioned by business leaders and progressive politicians in the late 1940s and early 1950s. The pact rested on an explicitly corporatist trade-off: in response for the recognition and preservation of their rights, the government expected peasants and workers to accept an economic strategy which accorded priority to the claims of business and which would place new limits on the scope of agrarian reform policies. Within these boundaries, the government was prepared to recognize and preserve the economic gains of labor and peasants.

As this suggests, secessionist governments by no means excluded large landowners from their efforts to create an inclusive coalition. While not as powerful politically or economically as in the past and while business interests predominated during the secessionist period, the landed elite also enjoyed a revival of its fortunes following the collapse of the union. It found the doors of government once again open, and the efforts of landlords to

23. *COC* 49 (May–August 1962), p. 249.

24. "The IMF mission, headed by Mr Gunter, director of the Middle East department of the international monetary organization, has appreciated with satisfaction the clear success of the program to stabilize the national economy, and the constructive spirit with which it has been applied" ("Succès de programme de stabilisation économique," *EFSPA*, no. 58 [October 1962], pp. 1–3).

undo the agrarian reform program met with a measure of success. Nonetheless, in a clear statement of the landed elite's diminished influence, secessionist governments explicitly and repeatedly rejected the wholesale reversal of land reform legislation, approving instead policies to "correct excesses" in the application of land reform while preserving intact its redistributive and collectivist elements.

The explicit rationales for the construction of a such a broadly based, inclusionary social pact illustrate the desire of Syria's capitalists to avoid the polarizing conflicts that characterized Syria in the preunion period. Justifications for a pact-building strategy also reflected a clear interest on the part of the new government and business leaders to overcome what they saw as the institutionalization of class-based social divisions and class-based state structures resulting from the populist policies of the union, divisions that constrained their control over the Syrian economy. Nasserism's legacy was seen as destructive of social peace, private sector initiative, and economic development. As an economic analyst noted of the 1962 law that denationalized leading sectors of the economy: "Social peace has been troubled less by the nationalizations than by the provocation and development of class spirit during recent years. The new [denationalization] law includes many arrangements which confirm the advantages previously accorded to workers; but in order for these arrangements to play their role in the reestablishment of social peace, other efforts will have to be deployed with an eye towards reforming the social ambiance and normalizing patron-worker relations."<sup>25</sup> Clearly, however, and despite the rhetoric of class compromise and national unity which accompanied the process of coalition building, the aims of a business-sponsored social pact had less to do with "reforming the social ambiance" than with creating an environment conducive to the pursuit of business and industrial development—unconstrained by the opposition of workers, peasants, and an autonomous state sector. Pact building, in other words, was used by the business community as the vehicle for achieving the hegemony of private sector interests and as the underpinnings of a ruling ideology oriented around business concerns, despite being packaged in a discourse of democratic principles, social equity, and social justice.

Writings and speeches of leading politicians engaged in the enterprise of searching for a new social and economic system for Syria illustrate these elements of the social pact.<sup>26</sup> Several business leaders and government offi-

25. Chafic Akhras, "Le dénationalisation des industries et l'économie syrienne," *EFSPA*, no. 50 (February 1962), p. 49.

26. The metaphor of searching for a new social and economic order figured prominently in post-U.A.R. writings that describe how Syria had lost sight of, but would now rediscover, its true and natural developmental course, for example, an economy guided by liberal principles

cial, including 'Izzat Tarablusi and 'Awad Barakat, both of whom served during this period as ministers of economy, contributed to the debate over Syria's economic future with programmatic statements about what needed to be done to restore the country's economic and social equilibrium.<sup>27</sup> But perhaps the most comprehensive outline of what the new regime had in mind emerged from a "state of the nation" address given by Prime Minister Ma'ruf al-Dawalibi in January 1962 to open the first session of parliament following general elections the previous December.<sup>28</sup> In practice, many of Dawalibi's proposals reflected policies already adopted by the Kuzbari government, but Dawalibi's statement sets them in a more coherent ideological framework.

Depicting the union as an unfortunate episode in Syria's history, Dawalibi criticized its policies for stifling private initiative, discouraging investment, creating "panic in place of security and enthusiasm," and causing the stagnation of trade. He attacked land reform as poorly planned and badly executed. Following the lines set down by Kuzbari's government, Dawalibi described a set of arrangements designed to create a general societal consensus in support of "controlled economic liberalism." Syria's economic policies would be based, he said, on the principles of liberty, just and constructive socialism, and a healthy democracy. The overall role of the state was to "orient the national economy in view of the public interest." "The government," Dawalibi emphasized, "considers that the present economic regime must be based on respect for individual property, on the encouragement of personal initiative under its protection and its control, and on granting to individuals the liberty to exercise their economic, commercial, industrial, and agricultural activities, and to pursue their progress with liberty, personal dignity and economic stability: all of this within the limits of the social and economic policy of the state which is directed to achieve full socialism with faith and good will."

and driven by the private sector. Immediately after the secession, the editors of *EFSPA* published a series of pieces with this general theme. See Albert Coudsy, "Prolégomènes économiques pour une rénovation Syrienne," *EFSPA*, no. 45 (September 1961), pp. 22–32; "La Syrie a la recherche d'un régime économique et social," *EFSPA*, no. 46 (October 1961), pp. 1–3; and 'Awad Barakat, "Le secteur privé et le développement économique en Syrie," *EFSPA*, no. 59 (November 1962), pp. 33–62. See also Chafic Akhras, "Les objectifs économiques de la nation et la recherche d'un système économique et social," *EFSPA*, no. 43 (July 1961), pp. 14–19.

27. 'Awad Barakat, "Opinions sur la politique économique en Syrie," *EFSPA*, no. 50 (February 1962), pp. 27–39; 'Izzat Tarablusi, "Les conditions fondamentales du développement de l'économie Syrienne," *EFSPA*, no. 59 (November 1962), pp. 21–32.

28. "Déclaration ministérielle du gouvernement Dawalibi devant la chambre," *EFSPA*, no. 61 (January 1962), pp. 116–28. All the following material from Dawalibi's speech is taken from this source.

Dawalibi then refined these general principles by giving concrete commitments on the part of the regime to protect the interests of various segments of the workforce. For agricultural workers, he indicated that "maintaining the principles of the agrarian reform law is considered a fundamental principle for the realization of social justice and national production." All the rights acquired by peasants during the union would be maintained, and the state would continue to offer peasants technical advice, seeds, loans, water, electricity, and education and to support agricultural cooperatives and participation in peasant syndicates. At the same time, however, the government would "preserve the rights of the landowners struck by this law," to reimburse them fully and promptly, and to return lands incorrectly expropriated. Emphasizing the regime's interest in dampening class conflict, Dawalibi announced that the overall goal of his government was to create an atmosphere of "charitable human relations and of close and fruitful collaboration between all of those who work the land."

A similar approach was adopted with regard to industry and trade. On the one hand, the government pledged to provide support for exports, for the liberalization of imports, and for the free movement of capital into and out of Syria—with Arab capital offered special incentives to encourage the creation of an Arab common market. More important as an indication of the regime's orientation, however, Dawalibi noted that to overcome the exploitative, unjust, and disruptive effects of state monopolies, his government found it "necessary to abrogate the nationalization legislation in its present form, total or partial, and to reorganize the nationalized enterprises on an equitable basis."

On the other hand, industry would not be totally deregulated. Shareholders would be subject to a "reasonable" ceiling in the number of shares they could hold; the state would guarantee the purchase of shares exceeding the number permitted to be privately held and would make such shares available first to workers. Despite the government's promise to embark on a large-scale privatization program, two categories of workers received explicit guarantees either restoring rights and benefits lost during the union or preserving benefits already gained, such as social security, health insurance, and regulated working conditions. State employees, whose working conditions and salaries had been set at lower, Egyptian levels during the union, received assurances regarding job security, improved working conditions, and higher wages. Private sector workers received more sweeping promises: the government committed itself to a full-employment policy, to protect and promote the formation of trade unions, to expand the limits of trade union activity, and to "maintain and protect the rights acquired by workers and assure them of social services." Here, too, however, the in-

terest in "class harmony" was manifest, indicating that trade union autonomy would not be substantively strengthened. The regime, according to Dawalibi, would "coordinate the interests of employers and employees and establish relations of good will between them."

Following a vote of confidence from the constituent assembly, a vote opposed by Ba'hist and other progressive deputies, Dawalibi's cabinet immediately began to implement a program of economic reforms based on the terms of his parliamentary address. Between January and March, the government moved to dismantle the statist and populist foundations of the previous regime and create instead the "controlled liberal" economy Dawalibi had described. In January, import restrictions began to be lifted on basic commodities. Regulations governing the management and investment practices of private companies were also relaxed. In late January, the Economic and Fiscal Reform Commission issued a report to President Qudsi endorsing the denationalization of state-owned enterprises. The report recommended, as Dawalibi had proposed, that individual shareholdings in private companies be limited and that surplus shares be offered for sale—with preference given to workers, who would receive government help to buy them. In fact, the commission went further than Dawalibi in some areas. It removed from a draft of the denationalization law a provision that would have maintained for the state a 25 percent stake in Syrian banks, advocating instead their complete privatization.

In the parliamentary session that opened on January 29, the government forwarded three major pieces of legislation for review: the revised agrarian reform law and two denationalization proposals, one for industry and the other for banks, incorporating the changes recommended by Tarabusi's commission.<sup>29</sup> On February 14, after discussions in the economic committee of parliament and several days of debate, the assembly approved laws privatizing all industries and all banks nationalized under the union. The government had presented the bill as a crucial step in reversing the "state capitalist dictatorship" of the union period, resurrecting the essential role of private capitalists in national development and guaranteeing the confidence of business.

Dawalibi's commitment to maintaining workers' rights also figured prominently in the bill, which was depicted as advancing three aims in this regard: preventing the concentration of capital in a few hands; safeguarding workers' benefits; and guaranteeing state supervision over production. The new law retained two seats out of seven on company boards for work-

29. A general account of the debates surrounding these bills can be found in al-'Azim, *Mudhakkirat*, 3:241–56.

ers and raised labor's share in corporate profits from 10 to 25 percent. These measures were applied only to firms with capital of £2.5 million or more, however, which were required to become joint-stock companies and to make 60 percent of their shares available to the public.<sup>30</sup> The measures affected an estimated seventy-five thousand workers but excluded almost as many. In addition, limits on individual shareholdings were instituted to prevent the restoration of closely held, family-based corporate ownership. No individual could own more than 7 percent of any company with capital under £5 million or more than 5 percent of any company larger than £5 million. These limits, obviously, would not have prevented the return of industrial oligopolies. In addition, however, no individual was permitted to own more than £5175,000 worth of shares in total, only a slightly more effective means of ensuring broader distribution of corporate ownership.<sup>31</sup>

The reform of commercial, monetary, and fiscal law continued throughout the short tenure of the Dawalibi government as well. Later in February the Ministry of Economy approved the circulation of shares of denationalized companies: some ninety thousand people, the ministry estimated, had been affected by the end of share trading that followed the nationalizations of 1961.<sup>32</sup> In March, the ministry began to rewrite Syria's tax, customs, and finance laws, to eliminate those "no longer in harmony with the economic situation of the country, notably [those] concerning progressive taxation."<sup>33</sup>

The government was simultaneously working to reorganize the agrarian reform program. On February 17, after several days of debate, the parliament approved eight amendments to Agrarian Reform Law 161 of 1958 which were essentially designed to undermine its intent.<sup>34</sup> The changes raised the limits of individual landownership from eighty to two hundred hectares of irrigated land and from two hundred to six hundred hectares of nonirrigated land, thereby exempting all but a small number of the largest landowners from the requirements of the law. The changes reduced the

30. Ba'ith Party representative and former minister of economy Khalil al-Kallas noted that other than the Khumasiya combine, only four firms would be affected by these provisions (*ibid.*, 3:236).

31. This summary is also based on accounts in *COC 48* (January–April 1962), p. 86; *Le Monde*, February 16, 1962; *New York Times*, February 15, 1962; and *Al-Hayat*, March 1, 1962.

32. The text of this law is reproduced in *EFSPA*, no. 51 (March 1962), pp. 122–23. The estimate of shareholders is probably high. Another source cites a government figure of about forty-five thousand shareholders in fifty-five companies nationalized in 1963 (Mohammed R. Kassm, "Nationalization of the Syrian Textile Industry with Special Reference to Labor Behavior," Ph.D. diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1968, p. 104).

33. *COC 48* (January–April 1962), p. 87.

34. The modifications to Law no. 161 are reproduced in *EFSPA*, no. 51 (March 1962), pp. 124–31.



compensation period for confiscated land, raised the interest rate on compensation payments, increased the amount of land that owners could distribute to family members, and reduced the amount of nonirrigated land to be distributed to peasants. On the other hand, despite this apparent setback for agrarian reform, the regime accelerated the distribution of seized lands, and peasants now received the land for free, whereas under the 1958 law they had been required to pay the full price of the land over a forty-year period, plus administrative costs.<sup>35</sup> Peasants were assured, moreover, that no land that had already been distributed would be returned to its previous owners.

Collectively, these legislative efforts represented the most thorough attempt in Syria's modern history to create the material and institutional bases for an inclusive social pact. Workers, peasants, capitalists, and landlords were envisioned as participants in a grand, classless coalition of social forces. The compromises contained in the legislation of January–March 1962 were intended to ensure the social stability necessary for economic growth, under the supervision of a state that reserved for itself the capacity to define the public good and to set boundaries on the role of individual classes. The state would actively manage the processes of capital accumulation and distribution according to a rather ambiguous notion of social justice based on the incorporation of workers and peasants in the project of deepening capitalism in Syria.

### The Failure of Controlled Liberalism

Yet neither the rhetoric of democracy and popular participation nor the explicit safeguards and concessions offered to workers and peasants were sufficient to guarantee the success of Syria's experiment with controlled liberalism or the consent of the governed to the new regime's ideology of "just capitalism," for at least three reasons. First, the government never fully honored its commitment to restore political and personal freedoms. From the first days following secession, the regime's continuing reliance on authoritarian tactics undermined the rhetoric of democratization. It sought to impose consent and compel the formation of a social pact through non-democratic means, adopting the same repressive practices as the regime it replaced. Second, organized interest groups immediately understood that the compromises asked of them far outweighed the potential gains they

35. In the three years from 1959 to 1961, for example, only sixty-three thousand hectares had been distributed. In 1962 alone, ninety-two thousand hectares were distributed. See also Ziad Keilany, "Land Reform in Syria," *Middle Eastern Studies* 16 (October 1980), pp. 209–24.

were being offered. Finally, despite the Dawalibi government's best efforts to appear inclusive, its exclusionary character was painfully transparent.

Restrictions of various kinds affected virtually every area of political life and expression in the post-U.A.R. period. While individual politicians from the preunion period were permitted to take part in politics, preunion parties were banned on the grounds that their revival would rekindle the conflicts that created Syria's political crisis in 1957–58.<sup>36</sup> Whatever the validity of these concerns, the restriction prevented progressive and reformist movements in particular from organizing effective campaigns for the December elections. Secessionist governments kept in force a ban on the Syrian Communist Party that had been introduced during the union, continuing to harass its members. Party leader Khalid Bakdash tried to return to Syria in the first days after the secession. His plane landed at the Damascus airport, but the authorities prevented him from disembarking, and he returned to exile without setting foot on Syrian soil.

A wide range of emergency laws also remained in effect, along with severe restrictions on the press. Unions continued to be forbidden from engaging in political activity. Viewed as potential sources of communist or Nasserist opposition, unions were kept under particularly close scrutiny by internal security agencies, though they were not purged of opposition members as they had been during the U.A.R. The expansion of state institutions under the union had greatly increased the capacity of officials to intervene in economic and political affairs, and the state apparatus was used by secessionist regimes to suppress opposition and reward supporters. A number of institutions established during the union to ensure compliance with emergency decrees remained in operation, including the system of state security tribunals. The government also used the ongoing process of constitutional reform to try to strengthen the power of the executive, reduce the autonomy and power of the judiciary, and institutionalize the practice of rule by decree, a much criticized hallmark of President Nasser.<sup>37</sup> Moreover, the military was never fully excluded from politics. After the secession the army had taken over district-level administration, which it refused to relinquish to the Ministry of Interior.<sup>38</sup> On the national level, it saw its role as the ulti-

36. The ban on parties was announced in October 1961. In November, just before the election campaign got under way, seventy politicians signed a national unity pact renouncing the partisan politics of the U.A.R.

37. See *COC* 48 (January–April 1962), p. 77. The abuse of executive privilege was a leading issue of the democratic movement during much of this period. See *COC* 49 (May–August 1962), p. 242.

38. In May 1962, Interior Minister 'Abd al-Halim Qaddur resigned from the cabinet of Bashir al-'Azma in protest over the military's refusal to cede its authority over district administration.

mate mediator of the political arena and made its presence felt in numerous ways.<sup>39</sup>

In addition, the failure of the would-be liberal experiment was caused by the deep suspicion, if not outright opposition, with which trade unions, civil servants, the urban intelligentsia, and radical factions of the military responded to the government's efforts at economic reform. Both public and private sector workers had benefited from the social services introduced during the union period and felt that the new government was not adequately protecting these gains. Privatization, in particular, appeared as an effort to disenfranchise workers under the guise of national economic renewal. Workers who had become public sector employees through the nationalization of industries and banks were especially concerned. Once denationalized, many employers would be too small or too poorly capitalized to be covered by regulations regarding the distribution of profits and workers' representation on company boards. Employees also seemed to prefer the security of working for the state to the uncertainties of private sector employment. These concerns were not unrealistic, for business elites only exacerbated the distrust and suspicion between capitalists and labor after the union. Following the secession, factory owners exploited their political clout and showed an increasing willingness to violate regulations that protected workers from arbitrary dismissal, guaranteed a minimum wage, and provided social benefits.<sup>40</sup> In the countryside, those landlords not satisfied with legislative efforts to restore their property also ignored the law, claiming ownership of lands that had been distributed to peasants and trying to force peasants back into highly dependent sharecropping relationships.

As a result, even while Syria's new government was gaining stature in the West, a loose but broadly based opposition movement emerged to challenge it on a variety of fronts. Reunification with Egypt, the authoritarian character of the regime, and its social policies were the main issues around which opposition mobilized. University students were perhaps the most politically outspoken and active group in the country. Throughout the secessionist period, students demonstrated repeatedly against both the regime's apparent lack of interest in reconstructing some form of union with Egypt and

39. It was the military—in particular the officers who had organized Syria's withdrawal from the union—which announced in October 1961 that political parties would be banned and which supported the retention of emergency laws and press restrictions.

40. In June 1962, for example, even after the Dawalibi government had fallen and Bashir al-Azma had formed a more "progressive" cabinet, workers petitioned the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs to stop the illegal dismissal of workers, especially in the textile sector. Workers' grievances led to an extended period of national labor unrest the next month, which I discuss below in this chapter. See accounts in *Al-Hayat*, July 6, 8, 11, 13, and 19, 1962. See also the *London Times*, July 9 and 11, 1962.

its economic and social policies at home. These demonstrations led to violent, sometimes fatal clashes between Ba'hist and Islamist student groups, often spilling over into larger confrontations. Indeed, it was during this period that business and Islamist interests came together to oppose the secular socialism of the Ba'th, an alliance that would play an important role in Syria over the next three decades. The government responded to student protests by imposing stricter controls over universities and intervening in university administration and appointments in an effort to quell campus unrest.

Students were not alone in their opposition. Trade union federations, individual syndicates, journalists, and former politicians joined to protest economic liberalization and political repression. Despite assurances from President Qudsi to the head of the General Federation of Trade Unions that he would do everything permitted by the constitution to preserve workers' rights, the rank and file continued to express their opposition to the government's economic programs. Unionized bank employees in Damascus went on strike in early February 1962 to protest the loss of benefits they felt would accompany denationalization. Tensions were high in the textile sector as well, where workers viewed the return to private ownership as a threat to job security. The Ba'th Party added its voice to the larger chorus of criticism, though it was still politically weakened by its public association with the failures of the U.A.R. and by its internal fixation with assessing blame for what went wrong. Along with other opposition parties and movements, the Ba'th had been subjected to the regime's general efforts to repress its critics. Statements released in the fall of 1961 and following the Fifth Congress of the National Command made clear the party's sharp critique of the policies adopted by various secessionist governments and its sense that "forces of reaction" had taken over the country. Following the closure of its newspaper, *Al-Ba'th*, and a crackdown on leading members of the party, also in spring 1962, the Ba'th National Command broadened its attack, issuing a blistering communiqué that left little doubt about the extent of its antagonism toward a government it clearly associated with the interests of capitalists.<sup>41</sup>

The scope of opposition indicates that while the Kuzbari and Dawalibi governments succeeded in moving their legislative agenda through parlia-

41. The final communiqué of the Fifth National Congress is reprinted in *Nidal al-Ba'th (Struggles of the Ba'th)*, vol. 4, *The First Seven National Congresses, 1947-1962* (Beirut: Dar al-Falāh, 1976), pp. 121-53. The communiqué of the National Command is reprinted in *Nidal al-Ba'th*, vol. 6, *The National Command, 1955-1962* (Beirut: Dar al-Falāh, 1976), pp. 240-45. See also John Devlin, *The Ba'th Party: A History from Its Origins to 1966* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1976), p. 108.

ment and thus establishing the legal foundations for an economy based on the interests of business, they failed in the more important tasks of legitimating their ideological claims within Syrian society at large or in consolidating a viable social coalition. Through their policies and their authoritarian style of governance, capitalists and their political allies themselves undermined meaningful prospects for the construction of a social pact. This effort did not fail because civilian politicians in the first months after the secession ignored or dismissed the interests of labor and peasants. The social pact articulated by Dawalibi and other business-political leaders explicitly acknowledged the claims of these groups to certain distributional benefits, even if more narrowly defined than under the U.A.R. It failed because the entire project of creating a so-called liberal-capitalist social order in Syria threatened to undermine the political and economic gains of newly mobilized workers and peasants. The success of the project hinged on redefining the role of popular sectors as subordinate actors in a development strategy designed to advance the interests of the business community. What the government saw as substantive compromises that addressed the concerns of unions and peasants were seen by these groups as a danger to the benefits they had already acquired, as undermining the likelihood of further gains, and as diminishing the relative security of workers situated in sectors nationalized during the last months of the union. Indeed, in assessing the Dawalibi regime, British diplomats singled out the enthusiasm with which it pursued the interests of business as a critical factor in its collapse.

The programme of Dr. Dawalibi's Government, which gave grounds for hope in foreshadowing the restoration of political parties and the freedom of the press together with denationalisation measures and revision of the Agrarian Reform law, was approved by the large right-wing majority in the Assembly against the efforts of the Socialists, the Baathists and Nasserite minorities despite demonstrations and a rash of strikes. . . . On the financial side it undertook a series of measures recommended—and indeed imposed—by the International Monetary Fund. To restore business confidence it undertook to de-nationalise banks, and to revise the agrarian reform law, both to take account of Syrian conditions and to provide more elasticity of operation. . . . But beneath this facade of progress things were not going well. The Government made the mistake of trying to liberalise too quickly. Its predominantly right-wing complexion gave rise to the suspicion that its supporters were solely out for their own interests and cared little for the less fortunate sections of the community.<sup>42</sup>

42. British Embassy Damascus to Foreign Office, "Annual Report for 1962," Public Record Office (PRO), FO371/170593.

Perhaps most important, the government failed to appreciate that corporatist arrangements are not easy to reconstruct. Although unions constituted only one element of the opposition to Dawalibi, the centralization of unions during the U.A.R. period had provided them with a more cohesive institutional base from which to protect their interests and resist denationalization. And although denationalization was eventually implemented, the protests of unions, together with campus unrest and the efforts of pro-democracy parliamentarians, brought about the downfall of the Dawalibi government, a renewed cycle of direct military interventions, and the collapse of controlled liberalism.

In late March 1962, under increasing pressure from parliament, Prime Minister Dawalibi acceded to demands for a debate on the government's refusal to rescind the emergency laws. During that debate deputies withdrew their confidence in the government, requested Dawalibi's resignation, and proposed the formation of a National Unity government to oversee the protection of full political and personal freedoms. Dawalibi resigned on March 25, but negotiations over the formation of a new government were preempted by a military coup on March 28, inaugurating a quick series of inconclusive and poorly organized countercoups that split the armed forces and reinforced the pattern of "corrective" military intervention in politics.

Initiated by some of the officers who had brought about Syria's break with Egypt, the March 28 coup was justified on the grounds that the civilian government had deviated from the goals of the separatist movement—social reform and the reunification with Egypt on the basis of Syrian-Egyptian equality—and had moved too far to the right. Parliament was dissolved, and dozens of politicians, including President al-Qudsi, were arrested. Notably, the directors of the Khumasiya company were also among those detained, a clear military response to the perception that Syria's largest capitalists had become too powerful under the Dawalibi government. The coup provoked sharp public criticism, however, and despite the imposition of a military curfew, public demonstrations were held to press for the restoration of civilian rule. The coup also galvanized contending factions within the military to mount a countercoup aimed at preventing reunification with Egypt.

To repair the split in the armed forces, Syria's commander in chief General Zahr al-Din negotiated a settlement that called for the withdrawal of the military from politics, the return to office of President Qudsi, the formation of a more progressive cabinet under Bashir al-'Azma, and renewed efforts to negotiate some form of unification with Egypt.<sup>43</sup> Although senior

43. The officers involved in the coup were permitted to go into exile. They returned to Syria clandestinely in January 1963 and participated in the events preceding the March 1963 coup that brought the Ba'ath to power. The coup and subsequent events are described in detail by

officers apparently hoped for a quick return to parliamentary rule, deputies resisted returning to office under military sponsorship, demanded new elections, and resumed their campaign for the full restoration of democracy. The General Federation of Trade Unions was among the groups that applauded the changes and the promise that liberalism would no longer serve as the basis of government policy.<sup>44</sup> Al-'Azma's government renationalized the Khumasiya company, even while emphasizing that it did not intend to launch a systematic program of renationalization. It restored the land reform legislation of 1958 essentially intact and raised labor's share of company profits to insure a more equitable distribution.<sup>45</sup> Shortly thereafter, on May 21, it issued a decree partially renationalizing banks: the state would retain a 25 percent stake in Syrian banks and 40 percent of non-Syrian, Arab-owned banks; foreign banks were completely nationalized. Stricter import controls were imposed, and flour mills were nationalized.

### The Damascus Consensus

Beyond the drama, confusion, and uncertainty that attended these events, they illustrate the extent to which the boundaries of political and social policy established during the United Arab Republic and the institutional legacies of the union constrained postauthoritarian regimes in Syria. The populist "bargains" negotiated between Nasser and various social classes, in Egypt and in Syria, imposed crucial limits on the ability of the Kuzbari and Dawalibi governments to restructure the economy, to redefine the position of interests within the ruling coalition, and to construct a social pact that reflected the preferences of business. At the same time, the authoritarian character of existing institutional and legislative mechanisms provided a readily accessible repertoire of tools for responding to what the government

Zahr al-Din, who presided over the negotiations (Marshall Abd al-Karim Zahr al-Din, *Mudhakkirat 'an fatrat al-infisal* [My memoirs on the separatist period] [Damascus: n.p., 1965], pp. 190–264).

44. According to reports in the Western press, trade unions regarded the coup as "a salvation from reactionaries and imperialists" (*New York Times*, March 30, 1962). Army chief General Zahr al-Din told a news conference that the "revolution" of March 28 sought a "directed and controlled economy" and a "socialism that liberates the individual from servitude and that . . . aims at increasing the national income with the just distribution of income to all strata who participate in production" (*New York Times*, March 31, 1962).

45. Of the workers' 25 percent share, half was to be divided among workers on an equal basis and half according to a seniority-based scale. No worker could receive more than £S750, with any residual funds financing the provision of social services (*COC* 49 [May–August 1962], p. 245).

perceived as excessive popular demands, threats to social peace, and the persistence of a divisive class spirit in Syrian politics. Confronting an environment of high social mobilization, the first civilian cabinets of postunion Syria limited democratic freedoms, deployed the authoritarian and corporatist instruments of the U.A.R. period, and undermined efforts to establish truly democratic forms of political participation.

At the same time, the events of March and April 1962 established a pattern that persisted throughout the remaining months of the separatist period and further contributed to the emergence of a radical, populist authoritarian strategy of state formation after March 1963. They reinforced the threshold beyond which no subsequent efforts to form a social pact or class compromise could be expected to succeed. In so doing, these events helped define what might be called a "Damascus consensus," defining the boundaries beyond which the mobilizational gains of the union could not be rolled back. They institutionalized a set of minimum conditions which guided the two subsequent secessionist cabinets (both headed by Khalid al-'Azma) and which were taken as a starting point by the Ba'ith after 1963. These minimum conditions were, first, that the rights and benefits of workers and peasants had to be protected and, second, that the privileged relationship between workers, peasants, and the state had to be maintained. State management, if not full ownership, of the largest industrial concerns and banks was seen as essential for guaranteeing that the private sector, and the national economy as a whole, operated according to some general principles of distributional equity. Initially, the position of the private sector and of private property were also protected by guarantees: Khalid al-'Azma, like his predecessors, rejected wide-scale nationalizations and welcomed private investment, both domestic and foreign. The conclusion was nonetheless inescapable that henceforth the interests of the private sector would not determine the orientation of the national economy.

The fundamental relationship between state and capital was thus defined in terms of the control and subordination of capital to social criteria established and defended by the state, not in terms of their cooperative participation in the process of capital accumulation. This relationship was reflected in the growing militancy of the Muslim Brotherhood's resistance to the al-'Azma and al-'Azma regimes and in the consolidation of an opposition alliance among business, landlords, and the Muslim Brotherhood, deepening the level of social conflict and adding an additional element of instability to Syria's already strained political system.<sup>46</sup> In short, as in the preunion

46. In August 1962, Muslim Brotherhood leader 'Issam al-Attar called for the resignation of the al-'Azma government because "communists occupied the important posts" (*COC* 49

period, Syria's capitalists reacted to the threat of growing state control and rising popular demands by forming a conservative coalition with landed elites and, in this case, with militant Islamist movements as well.

The March 1962 coup and its aftermath also established the role of the armed forces as the defenders of these minimum conditions. As in the past, military officers would not hesitate to intervene when they perceived that civilian politicians were unable to fulfill their mandate. By its actions—its resistance to civilian control and its endorsement of rule by executive decree—the military sought to ensure that the survival of any future government was dependent on its support. It also ensured, however, that the issue of democratization—in particular the problems of reconstituting parliament and establishing civilian control over the armed forces—would re-emerge after the coup and would ultimately determine the survival not only of subsequent governments but also of the secessionist regime itself.

The al-'Azma government was permanently tainted by its origins in the March 28 coup and never succeeded in either establishing its legitimacy or consolidating its authority. Throughout its tenure it was plagued by cabinet disruptions, as ministers resigned to protest al-'Azma's failure to lift emergency laws and his policy toward reunification with Egypt.<sup>47</sup> Moreover, the government quickly lost the support of even those groups which had initially welcomed it, in particular the trade unions. In June and July 1962, it attempted to reduce the degree of trade union centralization imposed during the U.A.R. and strengthen state control over union finances. Both measures were intended to decrease the influence of the Nasserist GFTU Executive Committee elected during the U.A.R. period, which was seen as a key source of pro-Egyptian and proreunification sympathies. Yet organized labor perceived these measures as efforts to fragment unions and render them more tractable to government intervention.

The reorganization (Decree no. 50) provoked nationwide labor unrest.<sup>48</sup> To preempt the launching of a general strike, the minister of interior prohibited the convening of a trade union congress on July 2. Within days, textile workers in Aleppo went on strike to protest the new decree. They also demanded an end to arbitrary dismissals and a reduction in worker contributions to social security. The strike subsequently spread to

[May–August 1962], p. 243). Al-Attar continued to mobilize opposition to the government throughout the rest of the union. See Petran, *Syria*, p. 161.

47. During the week of May 21–27, four ministers resigned, leading al-'Azma to notify the president that his government could no longer function. The crisis was not resolved until June 20, when al-'Azma finally cobbled together a new cabinet.

48. The text of the decree is reproduced in *COC* 49 (May–August 1962), pp. 303–11.

Homs and Damascus, where ten thousand unionized factory workers participated in the protest, including those of the Khumasiya companies and a leading textile mill. In both Aleppo and Damascus, protests were violently suppressed by the police. Several workers were killed and many hundreds arrested. The minister of labor and social affairs dissolved the General Federation of Trade Unions and arrested its president, Tal'at Taghlibi, and over fifty other union leaders. The use of force and a government offer not to prosecute workers who returned to their jobs and signed pledges renouncing the strike led to the end of the protests. By July 14 a majority of those arrested had been freed, and factories had reopened.<sup>49</sup>

The growing democracy movement among parliamentarians was much harder for the regime to contain. Based on an extraordinary, albeit short-lived, alliance led by Khalid al-'Azam and including Akram al-Hawrani, Muslim Brotherhood leader 'Issam al-Attar, and other deputies such as former prime minister Ma'ruf al-Dawalibi and Nationalist Party leader Sabri al-Asali, the parliamentarians waged an effective campaign against the continuation of emergency laws, restrictions on the press, and the illegal dissolution of parliament following the March 28 coup.<sup>50</sup> The group lobbied for the restoration of the 1950 constitution and the convening of a transitional government to oversee the restoration of parliamentary rule and supervise new elections.

On June 1, 112 former deputies (out of 172 elected) presented a petition to President al-Qudsi requesting the restoration of parliament. He rejected their demands. "Under the present circumstances," he responded, "any modification in the current statutes [would be] detrimental."<sup>51</sup> Operating independently of the government and still under threat of reprisals, the deputies continued to meet to discuss a formula for the restoration of democratic rule. In the face of their continuing pressure, the government began to yield. A schedule for new elections was announced in late July. In August the government eased restrictions on intellectual activities, authorizing the publication of several new cultural journals. In September, Qudsi received a delegation of deputies and finally reached an agreement on a

49. This account is based primarily on reports from *COC* 49 (May–August 1962), p. 246, and *Al-Hayat*, July 7, 8, 10, 11, and 13, 1962. Petran's account focuses on divisions within the union over reunification but ignores aspects of the unrest relating to workers' economic grievances and their desire to retain union autonomy (*Syria*, pp. 159–60).

50. The best available account of these efforts, other than the statements and details provided in *COC*, is Khalid al-'Azam's memoirs. He includes not only details of meetings and decisions taken but also sketches on the personalities involved, notably Muslim Brotherhood leader 'Issam al-Attar (*Mudhakkirat*, 3:284–92, 296–302).

51. *COC* 49 (May–August 1962), p. 237; Al-'Azam, *Mudhakkirat*, 3:290–91.

strategy for legally dissolving the 1961 chamber, amending the 1950 constitution and agreeing to hold one session of parliament to permit the investiture of Khalid al-'Azam as prime minister on September 13. The compromise was accepted by the vast majority of deputies but rejected by a small group of Nasserists, members of Hawrani's faction, and other progressive deputies.

For the remaining few months preceding the "revolution" of March 8, 1963, al-'Azam's government was subject to continuous disruptions from Islamist movements, the military, conservative members of parliament, the Egyptian government, and the newly installed Ba'athist government of Iraq. Nonetheless, al-'Azam moved to implement democratic reforms and protect democratic institutions from the intervention of the armed forces. Against the opposition of the military, he rescinded the emergency laws in December, once again permitting political parties to function. Elections were planned for the following summer. His government accelerated the distribution of expropriated land to peasants and reduced the amount they were charged for it. At the same time, he continued his efforts to stimulate private investment, offering assurances that no further nationalizations were planned.

Threatened by al-'Azam's efforts to curb military autonomy and in the context of escalating civil violence, the rise of a Ba'athist government in Iraq, and an emerging Egyptian-Iraqi alliance, a pro-unionist, pro-Ba'ath faction of the officer corps seized power on March 8, ending a tumultuous and brief effort to dismantle the authoritarian legacy of the union. The popular and political forces which had brought about the restoration of parliament following its dissolution in 1962 and which had begun to place Syria's democratic institutions and practices on more solid footing were pushed into the background by the return of direct military rule. Only one of several groups participating in the March 1963 coup, the Ba'ath Party soon established itself as Syria's leading political force. Within the next two years it was able to consolidate a durable populist authoritarian system of rule. Ultimately, the tentative and flawed transition from authoritarianism gave rise to a much more durable and resilient form of authoritarian regime than Syria had experienced in the past.

Throughout the secessionist period, as in previous phases of Syrian politics, the role of capitalists was particularly important in the collapse of Syria's transition from authoritarian rule. By working to establish a system of rule that served its own economic interests first and democratic interests second, by its willingness to embrace the authoritarian routines and institutions of the previous regime, and by adopting a strategy of economic reconstruction intended to consolidate the hegemony of the private sector, Syria's business

community effectively undermined its self-proclaimed commitments to social unity and to building an inclusive social pact. In the end, the "authoritarian path to democracy" was a poor strategy for the creation of either stable democratic institutions or the hegemony of business.

These choices led to a full-fledged authoritarian system far less sympathetic to the concerns of business than any of the secessionist regimes had been. The Ba'ath engaged in a radical populist form of social mobilization and capital accumulation, marked by widespread nationalizations and extensive state intervention in the economy. Through what can justifiably be considered a social revolution from above, Ba'athist leaders achieved the successful consolidation of a radical populist authoritarian system of rule. Keenly aware that their power initially rested on a thin social and institutional base and that Syria's capitalists and landlords retained considerable power of their own, the Ba'ath adopted a radical strategy of state building. Yet its success was far from inevitable given the organizational fragility of the Ba'ath and the strength of the forces that opposed it. Indeed, the emergence of a stable system of rule under the Ba'ath continues to strike observers of the period as one of the core puzzles of Syrian politics. Addressing this puzzle, making clear why the struggle for Syria took the course it did during the subsequent years, and explaining how such an outcome was possible are my tasks in the following chapter.

## 7

## Consolidating Populist Authoritarian Rule

For many Syrians the events of March 8, 1963, combined a dreary sense of familiarity with the unease of sudden change. Several times the military had intervened during the roughest political stalemates of the postunion period. Now, once again, the streets of Damascus were filled with signs of a military coup d'état. Armed units took up positions around key government offices and communications centers. Military vehicles moved slowly through residential neighborhoods, loudspeakers blaring the contents of "proclamation number one," urging citizens to stay calm, remain indoors, and observe curfew rules. Lines formed at neighborhood bakeries and small grocery stores as people rushed to stock up on bread, milk, and other essential items before the curfew took effect.

March 8, however, was not the beginning of just another short-term disruption in Syria's crisis-ridden political system.<sup>1</sup> With the success of the military coup and the subsequent consolidation of Ba'athist power, Syria's social, economic, and political life was dramatically and thoroughly transformed. By 1970, the year that marked Hafiz al-Asad's full ascension to power, the trajectory of Syrian state formation had been decisively altered.

The scope of the changes brought about by the Ba'ath between 1963 and 1970 would be hard to overestimate. Although Syria does not figure in the literature on social revolutions, its experiences during these years represent nothing less than a revolutionary transformation of the state, society,

1. For a detailed analytic chronology of the March 8 coup, see Donald Betz, "Conflict of Principle and Policy: A Case Study of the Arab Baath Socialist Party in Power in Syria, 8 March 1963–23 February 1966," Ph.D. diss., University of Denver, 1973.

and economy. In this relatively short span of time, the leadership of the Ba'ath completed the marginalization of Syria's landholding class; broke the political power of capitalists; created a public sector that controlled three-quarters of the national economy; redistributed some 40 percent of agricultural land; and strengthened the repressive-corporatist model of mobilization and social incorporation introduced by its predecessors. The Ba'ath's leadership consolidated the populist authoritarian transformation of state bureaucratic structures and practices, recasting the state as an "omnipresent agent of development."<sup>2</sup>

In accomplishing these aims, the leaders of the Ba'ath exhibited few of the reservations about unleashing "potentially uncontrollable elements of class conflict" that are more characteristic of populist politicians such as Nasser or Cárdenas.<sup>3</sup> Instead, they enthusiastically embraced the "iron fist" and deployed both state-sponsored violence and class conflict as central elements in their strategy of populist authoritarian state formation. And despite impressive levels of intraparty conflict between 1963 and 1970, the Ba'ath consolidated a system of rule that has proven remarkably durable, even relatively adaptive. Although they have faced numerous stresses over the years, the core elements put in place during this phase of Ba'athist rule remain tangible and potent elements of Syrian authoritarianism today.

In short, Ba'athist politicians "succeeded" during these seven years in consolidating a radical, populist authoritarian system of rule. In the process, they managed to depart from the path of failed consolidation that is more characteristic of such regimes. Unlike the brief but dramatic experience of radical populism in Peru at about the same time or the experience of populist reformers in Mexico or Egypt—who established durable systems of rule by diluting their populist commitments—successive Ba'athist regimes in Syria were able successfully to overcome the dilemmas that typically attend efforts to consolidate populist norms and institutions. Mobilizing opposition to an existing system of rule; transforming newly mobilized groups into a tractable populist coalition; and, perhaps most difficult of all, overcoming the constraints of dependent capitalist development to institutionalize a radical strategy of capital accumulation—these dilemmas have gradually eroded the anticapitalist, transformational character of other experiences of populist state formation. Indeed, they contributed to the failure of earlier efforts to impose a populist authoritarian system of rule in Syria, notably during the 1958–61 union with Egypt.

2. Michel Seurat, "Etat et paysans en Syrie," in *L'état de barbarie* (Paris: Seuil, 1989), p. 275.

3. John Waterbury, *The Egypt of Nasser and Sadat: The Political Economy of Two Regimes* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), pp. 37–38.

Between 1963 and 1970, however, the Ba'ath Party surmounted the dilemmas of mobilization and countermobilization through the massive redesign of Syria's institutional landscape, creating a dense array of new political and social institutions to incorporate yet control large segments of Syrian society. Ba'athist elites also avoided the economic-structural dilemmas that typically constrain the institutionalization of a radical-populist political economy, repressing and excluding capitalists and setting Syria on a developmental trajectory that many observers viewed as deeply anticapitalist, though it clearly fell short of its self-proclaimed socialist identity.

As the experiences of Mexico, Egypt, and Peru demonstrate (see Chapter 1), the failure of populist consolidation is usually explained as a result of the embeddedness of a local economy and local business interests in transnational capitalist networks that restrict the developmental options of populist reformers and limit the possibilities for domestic social transformation. Failed consolidation is also attributed to the reluctance of populist elites to adopt strategies of state formation that exclude capitalists, incorporate popular social groups, but jeopardize prospects for accumulation. In Syria, however, these constraints were largely absent. The local economy was relatively unintegrated into transnational capitalist networks. Local capitalists, who were virtually unanimous in their opposition to the Ba'ath, had few external resources on which to draw to bolster their domestic standing and check the transformational ambitions of the Ba'ath. As a result, Ba'athist elites benefited from an unusual degree of autonomy in adopting an exclusionary strategy of state formation as the basis for securing their control over the national economy.

By the time of Asad's ascension to power, the competing visions of the Syrian state that had emerged with the coming of independence—visions that were centrally implicated in postindependence political struggles—had been suppressed in favor of a single, dominant image of Syria's political identity as a radically populist regime. The restructuring of Syria's political economy had been consolidated, shattering capitalists' hopes for the creation of a social order organized around some notion of controlled liberalism. And while tensions over the organization of Syria's economy continued to generate serious conflicts throughout this period, by 1970 the sense that alternative trajectories were possible for the organization of the Syrian polity had been definitively suppressed.<sup>4</sup>

4. Challenges to this vision never fully disappeared but were forced underground, surfacing most dramatically in the Islamist insurrection of 1976–82. A different and perhaps more powerful challenge has arisen with the more recent movement toward economic reform, as well as with strong international pressure for political reform.

### State Formation by Design or by Default?

This image of Syrian politics in the early years of the Ba'ath, with its emphasis on populist authoritarian state formation, institution building, and the capacity of party leaders to impose a durable populist system of rule, sharply contradicts accounts based on Latin American experiences, which tend, as I argued in Chapter 1, to emphasize the fragility and structural instability of populist arrangements. These accounts contend that there exists an inverse relationship between the radicalism of populist experiments in Latin America and their durability. As I will show in this chapter, Syria's experience of populist state building presents an important test of such arguments. At the same time, the account presented here also contrasts sharply with conventional renderings of the 1963–70 period among scholars of Syria and the Middle East. By and large, this literature focuses on the internal affairs of the Ba'ath and is captivated by factional rivalries, intergenerational conflict, and the rise and fall of party elites. The prevailing images of this period are portrayed in terms of chaos, instability, and discord, even in narratives that take note of the broader social conflicts that attended the Ba'ath's efforts to build a durable system of rule.<sup>5</sup> The dominant theme in such accounts revolves around the futile effort of the old guard of the Ba'ath, led by its founders Michel Aflaq and Salah al-Din Bitar, to hold on to power in the face of challenges from a more powerful coalition of junior military officers and civilians who represented the radical wing of the party. They highlight, as well, the continuing conflicts between Syrian political factions around the question of union with Egypt and Iraq.

These were indeed prominent elements of political life during the early years of Ba'athist rule. Yet such images illustrate only a part of the story, leaving the deep institutional transformation of Syria's political economy largely unexplored and almost entirely unexplained. Indeed, for many scholars of modern Syrian politics, the formation of a consolidated and viable system of

5. For an example of this perspective, see Fred Lawson, "Class Politics and State Power in Syria," in *Power and Stability in the Middle East*, ed. Berch Berberoglu (London: Zed, 1989), pp. 15–30. An exception to the general tendency is Raymond A. Hinnebusch, *Peasant and Bureaucracy in Ba'athist Syria: The Political Economy of Rural Development* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1989), and *Authoritarian Power and State Formation in Ba'athist Syria* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1996). Hinnebusch links the dynamics of state formation during the 1960s with the process of Ba'ath Party consolidation. Because the party was so deeply fragmented, he concludes that it was unable to "translate its blueprint into reality" (*Authoritarian Power*, p. 127). I argue that state formation and party consolidation are not necessarily linked and show that the blueprint moved much further toward implementation between 1963 and 1966 than Hinnebusch acknowledges.



rule during these years is ignored, presented as a puzzle, or seen as the unintended outcome of the more important power struggles within the party. In the definitive study of intra-Ba'athist politics during the 1963–66 period, for example, Itamar Rabinovich concludes by noting the profound gap between the turmoil that marked elite politics, on the one hand, and the stability of the system of rule created during those years, on the other. "It is curious," he writes, "that the years 1963–6 which saw such profound social and political changes take place in Syria witnessed there also the emergence of a relatively solid (or at least durable) political structure."<sup>6</sup> In a more recent study, Malik Mufti emphasizes his sense that "state building clearly did not top the agenda of Syrian or Iraqi rulers during the praetorian era. Their energies remained focused almost exclusively on the acquisition and consolidation of power."<sup>7</sup>

In these accounts and others, the consolidation of Ba'athist authoritarianism is depicted as having happened through a process that might best be described as incidental or even accidental state formation. Deeply personalized struggles for power are presented as having pushed aside, suppressed, or overwhelmed efforts at institution building. Nor is the existing institutional context seen to affect political dynamics in a meaningful way. In this conventional account of Syrian politics after the coup of March 8, 1963, politics and the formation of a durable system of rule are understood as incommensurate practices.

Rejecting such perspectives, I offer an alternative argument, in which the formation and consolidation of populist authoritarian institutions move to center stage. In place of the intra-Ba'athist conflicts, the personal rivalries, and the political instability that define the dominant narratives of this period, I foreground the processes of institutional and social reorganization that such narratives neglect, linking these processes to my larger argument about the effects of economic and institutional structures on the organization of social conflict, especially their effects on the possibility for consolidating a populist authoritarian system of rule. Among other things, this approach reflects my sense that a narrow focus on personal rivalries within the ruling party obscures the extent to which various factions of the Ba'ath pursued a rather consistent strategy of state building from 1963 to 1970, a strategy designed explicitly to overcome the political and economic dilemmas associated with the consolidation of a populist authoritarian system of rule.

6. Itamar Rabinovich, *Syria under the Ba'ath, 1963–66: The Army-Party Symbiosis* (Jerusalem: Israel University Press, 1972), p. 213.

7. Malik Mufti, *Sovereign Creations: Pan-Arabism and Political Order in Syria and Iraq* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996), p. 189.

This outcome was not in any sense incidental to the leaders of the Ba'ath. It was a core focus of their politics throughout the 1963–70 period and survived deep disagreements among contending Ba'athist elites. Such differences were not only personal or sectarian, as is typically emphasized, but substantive as well. They concerned relations between state and capital, strategies of popular mobilization, and—no less consequential—strategies of control and repression. Conflicts among Ba'athist leaders reflected a keen understanding of the demands of state building and of economic restructuring, including the relationship between institution building and popular legitimacy, the need to incorporate workers, peasants, students, and small merchants, to rebuild state institutions, redefine property rights, and overcome the residual power of former ruling elites. How to manage these demands occupied a significant place on the Ba'ath's political agenda and animated important intraparty debates over issues of institutional design.

Institution building was thus explicitly recognized as a critical element in the Ba'athist strategy of state formation and regime consolidation, even by party leaders who otherwise had very little in common. Contrary to conventional understandings of Syrian politics in these years, Ba'athist elites did in fact carry with them into power a rather well-formed theory of populist authoritarian state formation.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, they brought with them more than one theory, and disagreements over which theory should guide Ba'athist practice are as important for understanding the dynamics of intraparty conflicts as the personal rivalries that most accounts single out for attention.

### Shaping the Ba'athist Repertoire of State Formation

Returning to the question at the core of this book, what made it possible for Ba'athist elites to act? In two previous phases of Syrian state formation—the postindependence period from 1946 to 1958 and the union with Egypt—reformist forces had failed in consolidating a populist system of rule. How were they now able to overcome the obstacles that previously had defeated such efforts? What made it possible for these elites to translate their understanding of state building into a durable populist authoritarian regime in Syria between 1963 and 1970, an outcome which scholars of Syria find mystifying and which scholars of populism largely discount?

Two factors stand out in answering these questions. In part, Syria's rela-

8. See Malcolm H. Kerr, "Notes on the Background of Arab Socialist Thought," *Contemporary History* 3 (July 1968), pp. 145–59.

tive lack of integration into the world capitalist economy lowered the political and economic costs associated with a radical populist strategy of state formation. Just as important, however, the Ba'ath inherited a rich legacy of authoritarian institutions and practices to draw on in implementing a strategy of radical populist state formation. Experiences of social conflict during the secessionist period in particular had established a framework—a "Dainascus Consensus" of sorts—concerning the appropriate organization of the political economy and the boundaries of popular incorporation. Together, these resources not only helped shape a distinctive strategy of authoritarian state formation but also helped to define and make accessible the goal of populist social transformation. They provide a basis for explaining how the politics of factionalism and elite rivalry interacted with a set of institutional constraints and incentives to influence the strategic choices of Ba'athist elites as they labored to build a viable populist system of rule.

More specifically, I argue that the imperatives of regime consolidation took on a particular form—and were possible to address through a populist authoritarian strategy of state formation—as a result of two critical factors: first, the institutional environment in which the Ba'ath constructed a system of rule and, second, the Ba'ath's perception of its own vulnerability in the face of a weakened but still powerful coalition of landed, commercial, and industrial elites. The former had a defining impact on Ba'athist notions about how to construct a state and the institutional mechanisms available to implement them. The latter—the result of political learning that was most profoundly influenced by the lessons of the U.A.R. and the secessionist period that followed—shaped the perceptions of all Ba'athist elites, not only those identified in the literature as radicals, concerning the limited possibilities for establishing a durable political order on the basis of a broad, inclusive social coalition. It helped to structure the dynamic of conflicts over the economy as an irreconcilable struggle between the Ba'ath and the social groups from which it seized power, notably Syrian capitalists.

Importantly, it was precisely the Ba'ath's *economic vulnerability*—the extent to which capitalists could undermine the party's capacity to reorganize the Syrian political economy through their control over capital and other resources—that gave social conflicts this distinctive strategic dynamic. Economic vulnerability shaped perceptions among Ba'athist elites concerning their political options and the limited possibilities for an accommodationist rather than a conflictual strategy of state formation. It promoted a high-risk strategy of state building based on the large-scale transfer of private assets to the state, class polarization, and repression. This vulnerability also created a strategic context in which the demands of regime consolidation compelled the emerging leadership of the Ba'ath to seize control of the

economy and push forward the radical reorganization of Syrian society as the means for ensuring the decisive marginalization of the commercial, industrial, and landed elites, who, though weakened politically, remained the dominant economic actors in the country.

Several elements of the institutional legacy inherited by the Ba'ath stand out as central in producing this dynamic. First, as I described in Chapters 4 and 5, the institutional, legislative, and juridical changes brought about during the union with Egypt—changes that secessionist regimes had explicitly avoided dismantling—provided the Ba'ath with a readily accessible set of mechanisms and techniques that could be appropriated and re-designed to meet the particular requirements of populist authoritarian state building. Indeed, during the 1963–70 period, Ba'athist leaders were sometimes depicted as perfecting practices such as rule by decree, domestic surveillance, and the corporatist restructuring of society which had become the common currency of governance during the union.

In addition, as demonstrated throughout previous chapters, the deepening of state intervention since independence and the increasing prominence of the state in the organization of the Syrian economy valorized and made available to the Ba'ath a broad popular willingness to view the state as the legitimate agent of social change. Even while quite profound differences over the appropriate role of the state persisted, the expansion of the state apparatus during the 1950s and 1960s permitted Ba'athist leaders to embed a radically transformative social and political project within an existing set of state institutions, rather than having to create them *de novo*. Ba'athist elites also recognized, however, that the enormous growth in state capacity over the previous two decades represented a double-edged sword. It held out tremendous potential but could be harnessed reliably to their particular strategy of state building only if this capacity were first brought under their control. Describing the state structures (and the state bureaucrats) they inherited as "agents of reaction and feudalism," they made civil service reform, the reorganization of state institutions, and the subordination of the state to the party critical elements in their strategy of populist authoritarian state building. Ba'athist elites thus pursued the task of transforming Syria's institutional landscape through a hybrid strategy, appropriating the institutions and practices of its predecessors, mixing in some home-brewed innovations, and combining both with borrowings from the models and rhetorics then current in much of the Middle East, the broader developing world, and the socialist bloc.

In short, Ba'athist elites had much to work with, considerably more than is acknowledged by those who emphasize their lack of internal unity and deeply fractious intraparty conflicts. Their raw materials included not only

the availability of a distinctive form of state institutional capacity but also a well-tested model for how to deploy that capacity. Discourses of populism had long since established a broad resonance within the Syrian political arena. The notion of the state as instrument of social reform and social organization was no longer at issue. Corporatist strategies of social mobilization and control had become familiar aspects of the Syrian political repertoire. Seen in this light, the Ba'ath's consolidation of a populist authoritarian system of rule appears much less mystifying than many observers of Syria make it appear.

In the following sections of this chapter I explore the factors that shaped the Ba'ath's strategy of state formation, with a particular emphasis on the conditions that permitted Ba'athist elites to overcome the dilemmas that typically constrain the consolidation of a radically populist authoritarian system of rule. In emphasizing these factors, I will refer relatively little to the well-documented factional struggles within the Ba'ath. Instead, the focus will be on the several transformations that marked the populist reorganization of Syria's political economy and the consolidation of a populist authoritarian system of rule. As in earlier chapters, I single out three broad areas for special attention: transformations in the structure and content of key political institutions and practices of governance; relations between state and capital; and the reorganization of Syrian society, notably the profound transformations achieved by the Ba'ath in the institutional and associational life of the country. Each section underscores the central arguments of this chapter concerning the intentionality of Ba'athist state building, the structural underpinnings of Ba'athist political strategies, and the dynamics that generated a consolidated populist authoritarian system of rule in Syria.

### State Reform and the Radicalization of the Bureaucracy

The basic difficulty facing any socialist experiment consists not so much in the ideology and class interests which are antagonistic to socialism but rather in creating new state agencies and clearly defining their various spheres of authority so that no struggle for power can ensue.

—Michel Aflaq, "Interview with Mr. Michel Aflaq  
by the Beirut Daily *Al-Ahram*"

The Ba'ath's performance during its early years in power appeared to many observers to be something of a tragic comedy. Despite the party's long years of opposition and its ruthless pursuit of power, its leadership seemed pro-

foundly ill-equipped for the actual demands of governance. Inexperienced in the mundane tasks of national administration, struggling to contain powerful domestic opposition, lacking popular support, and riven by deep factional disputes, the Ba'ath did not leave a terribly positive impression of its readiness to rule. Indicators of its ill-preparedness abounded. Cabinets formed and collapsed at an alarming rate. Civilian and military factions of the party jostled to advance their positions at one another's expense. Party leaders struggled to cope with both internal and regional pressures to enter again into some form of unity agreement with Egypt, Iraq, or both. Strikes, protests, capital flight, and demonstrations signaled the discontent of Syrians ranging from supporters of Nasser to businessmen, civil servants, and the Muslim Brotherhood.

Yet in the stormy environment surrounding the Ba'ath's early months in power, the leadership of the party nonetheless managed to establish a broad and lasting template for its approach to issues of governance and for the populist transformation of Syrian society and economy. Moreover, the Ba'ath's strategy of state formation took clear shape within months after the March 8 coup. By the time of the Sixth National Congress of the party in October 1963, radical factions among the leadership had produced a fully elaborated statement of party goals. Within two years, the design of a Ba'athist system of rule shaped by these goals was largely complete.

This is not to suggest that such a template emerged full blown on the morning of March 9. It developed slowly, unevenly, in fits and starts, and often as a result of particular instances of crisis management rather than the careful implementation of well-crafted policy measures. Nevertheless, how the Ba'ath leadership perceived of and responded to crises was not by any means haphazard. Its actions were deeply influenced by notions of how to construct relationships among the state apparatus, the party, the economy, and society in ways that would contribute most effectively to the consolidation of Ba'athist power and to the transformation of Syria's political economy—outcomes that were understood as highly interdependent. Its approach was powerfully influenced by what institutional resources were available and by the leadership's perceptions of what had and had not worked during the years of postindependence political struggle. And while many observers tend to discount the effect of Ba'athist ideology on the political practice of Ba'athists, domestic policies and the discourses adopted to legitimate them bear the clear imprint of such party ideologues as Yassin al-Hafiz, Yusuf Zu'ayyin, Jamal al-Atasi, and Ilyas Murqus. Each of these civilian leaders of the Ba'ath had produced lengthy treatises intended to guide the party's policymaking, and all held cabinet-level positions in Ba'athist governments from time to time during the 1960s.

As in any populist authoritarian transition, a key dilemma confronted by the Ba'ath in March 1963 was how to manage the unruly and deeply conflictual process of mobilizing a populist social coalition and restructuring the Syrian political economy. An essential prerequisite for this was the construction of a state apparatus that operated as a predictable and reliable instrument of the regime. Among the first areas of reform tackled by the Ba'ath, therefore, and one in which the imprint of Ba'athist ideology was most distinct, was the reorganization of the state bureaucracy to establish party control over agencies and institutions that had acquired substantial autonomy in the period since independence. The project of state bureaucratic reform aimed not only to change the social composition of the bureaucracy but also to redefine the identity of the state and state institutions, to embed within them the norms of radical populism, and to use them as the means for constructing a populist social pact.

Beginning with its initial announcement of the coup in the early hours of March 8, the party leadership launched what would soon grow into a far-reaching program to transform the institutions of economic and political governance and bring under party control the military, the civil service, the police, teachers, imams, provincial authorities, and the judiciary. On May 20, Prime Minister Salah al-Din Bitar, who held the prime ministership numerous times between 1963 and 1965, gave a midnight radio address in which he presented a lengthy statement on the policy aims of his government. Turning to the subject of state reform, Bitar emphasized the need to "develop the government machinery in a manner making it responsive to and facilitating the realization of the goals drawn up by the revolution. . . . It is the duty of the state machinery," he stressed, "to change its mentality and the method of its activity in a rational manner. This requires the removal of all the residue and the various types of impediments obstructing it from accomplishing its task."<sup>9</sup>

Bitar's speech signaled the start of a broad-based campaign to purge the civil service and replace existing personnel with those perceived to be loyal to the Ba'ath. Although relatively small numbers of civil servants enjoyed protection from political interference, on May 29 the government published two legislative decrees amending existing civil service laws and increasing its authority to intervene in the hiring and firing of protected state personnel.<sup>10</sup> Large-scale dismissals of top civil servants from a wide range of agen-

9. "Bitar Ministerial Statement of May 20," Damascus to Secretary of State, May 24, 1963, no. A-359, RG59/4055, National Archives [henceforth cited as NA].

10. "Ba'ath Regime's Efforts to Purge Ranks of Government Employees," Damascus to Secretary of State, June 6, 1963, no. A-366, RG59/4055, NA.

cies and ministries followed their publication.<sup>11</sup> These were accompanied by the rotation of precoup personnel out of significant positions in the Foreign Ministry, Ministry of Interior, Central Bank, and other key agencies. Salaries of top civil servants were reduced to levels more in keeping with the new populist identity of the state bureaucracy.

Attacks on the civil service were supported by a spate of highly polemical articles and editorials that appeared in party- and government-controlled media over the course of the summer and fall. These articles conveyed a well-honed sense of the capacity of the bureaucracy to obstruct Ba'athist plans for Syria's economic transformation. They noted the potential for the emergence of opposition coalitions between senior bureaucrats and former economic and political elites, many of whom came from similar social backgrounds.<sup>12</sup> In attacking the precoup civil service, news reports focused on its lack of loyalty, corruption, and submission to interests of Syria's former reactionary rulers. They highlighted the "popular demand" for a broad purge of "suspect elements" within the state apparatus and the need for measures to compensate for the civil service having trained and employed "a specific class of people" in the past.<sup>13</sup> According to Syria's controlled media, the way to accomplish this was to place the civil service "under the supervision of the organized popular masses, which means the enforcement of decentralization and socialist democracy," and to educate employees to contend with "new concepts which are beyond the existing civil service."<sup>14</sup> As summarized in *Al-Ba'ath* in early November, Syria's state apparatus was cast as "a reactionary and bourgeois machinery . . . an obedient tool in the hands of the exploiting classes and the reactionary rulers. . . . Therefore, one of the principal tasks of the revolution . . . is the reform of the state machinery so that it may become worthy of the people."<sup>15</sup>

11. The "common denominator of the ousted officials," according to one U.S. Embassy report, "was the fact that they are experienced technical administrators who have no record of past political activity independent of their permanent positions. . . . [T]he dismissed officials had placed themselves at the disposal of every past regime in Syria no matter what its political coloring, whereas the Ba'ath wants the senior positions in the bureaucracy to be filled by people who are at least sympathetic to its views" ("Dismissals from Syrian Civil Service," Damascus to Secretary of State, June 20, 1963, no. A-397, RG59/4055, NA).

12. As one U.S. Embassy report from Fall 1963 noted: "The Ba'ath, which takes its revolutionary principles seriously, faces considerable problems in tackling the economic development of Syria. A major problem is the resistance encountered from the sizable body of civil servants who regard what they conceive to be its doctrinaire approach and *etatisme* with suspicion and distaste" (Damascus to Secretary of State, September 18, 1963, no. A-93, RG59/2685, NA).

13. *Ibid.*

14. Cited in Betz, "Conflict of Principle and Policy," p. 171.

15. "Ba'ath Views and Goals re the Civil Service," Damascus to Secretary of State, November 11, 1963, no. A-152, RG59/4055, NA.