

LAND TENURE REFORM  
IN SYRIA

by

HISHAM EL-AKHRASS  
B. S., Cairo University, 1956

---

A MASTER'S REPORT

submitted in partial fulfillment of the

requirement for the degree

MASTER OF SCIENCE

Department of Economics and Sociology

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY  
Manhattan, Kansas

1963

Approved by:

*Wilfred H. Pine*  
Major Professor

## ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The author would like to express his deepest gratitude to Prof. Wilfred H. Pine for his valuable advice and help in reviewing the manuscript several times and encouragement during the graduate study.

Suggestions and encouragement extended by Prof. Leo M. Hoover, Prof. Edgar S. Bagley, and Prof. A. M. Feyerherm are sincerely appreciated.

The author wishes to express his appreciation to his wife, Amal, for her patient contributions.

---



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

|   | Page |
|---|------|
| ACKNOWLEDGMENT . . . . .  | i    |
| Chapter   |      |
| I. INTRODUCTION . . . . .   | 1    |
| The Problem: Coverage of Terms-Nature-Significance.   |      |
| The Objective.  |      |
| Scope of The Study.   |      |
| Procedure.  |      |
| II. AGRARIAN STRUCTURE AND TENURE SYSTEM PRIOR TO 1958 . . . . .  | 9    |
| The Background.   |      |
| Land Tenure System: Land Ownership-Tenancy and Partnership-Hired Labor.   |      |
| Supplements: Credit-Taxation-Reclamation and Settlement.  |      |
| The Whole Economic Situation: Capitalistic System-Sharecropping System-Family Farm System.                      |      |
| Reform Attempts and Proposals: Attempts-Proposals.  |      |
| III. AGRARIAN REFORM LAWS OF 1958 . . . . .   | 48   |
| Agrarian Reform Law: Land Requisition-Landownership Redistribution-Cooperative Societies-Effects and Appraisal. |      |
| Agricultural Relations Law: Definitions-Rights and Duties-Shares and Wages-Contracts-Effects and Appraisal.     |      |
| Combined Effects of The Two Laws.   |      |
| CONCLUSION . . . . .  | 78   |
| LITERATURE CITED . . . . .  | 83   |

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

After each of the two great wars, the world witnessed a deep and widespread phenomenon which is called "land reform". We could call the 1950's the decade of land tenure and reform. A series of international conferences started even before the Second World War ended. The first was held in Puerto Rico in August, 1944, to discuss the land tenure problems of the Caribbean area. In February, 1946, a "Conference on Family Farm Policy" was held and sponsored by the Farm Foundation and the University of Chicago. An "International Conference on The Rural Church and Farm Land Tenure" was called three months later and held in New York City.<sup>1</sup> The 1950's have been characterized by feverish activities relating to the land reform question; a "Conference on World Land Tenure Problem" was held in Madison, Wisconsin, in the fall of 1951 under the sponsorship of Wisconsin University and certain American government organizations; the United Nations' General Assembly with its various specialized organizations showed serious concern reflected by many resolutions, studies, and programs; and various countries have undertaken measures concerning land problems ranging from partial solutions to comprehensive programs.

---

<sup>1</sup>Philip Raup, "The Wisconsin Conference on World Land Tenure Problems: Background and Setting", Land Economics, Vol. 27 (Aug. 1951), PP. 207-8.

## The Problem

Coverage of Terms: To proceed on sound and clear ground, it is necessary to define and distinguish terms. Two terms have been used: land reform and agrarian reform, to give the same meaning. While there are two conceptions both terms have been, and still are, used to indicate the old and the new concepts. For instance, the traditional, old concept means the breaking up of large estates and distributing them among landless and small farmers, whereas the new, American concept has been formulated to cover a wider field of change. Mr. Hope expressed this view when he declared " . . . our concept of agrarian reform becomes something much more than mere breaking up of large estates. Our concept of agrarian reform is a whole series of measures looking toward improving the situation of the man who actually tills the soil."<sup>1</sup> He regarded the opportunity of the cultivator to own the land he tills "a key part of the concept"; but other measures to improve his status and to enable him to continue as a successful owner-operator, such as availability of credit on reasonable terms, marketing facilities, unburdensome farm taxes, technical advice, and other improving measures, are equally important. Mr. Thorp and others used the term "land reform" to indicate the same meaning. He stated that:

"In some parts of the world, the term "land reform" has been

---

<sup>1</sup>C. R. Hope, "U.S. Concept of Agrarian Reform as a Foundation for World Peace", US. Dept. of State Bul. No. 25, PP. 998-1000 (Dec. 951) (P. 999).

widely used as a cover for the ruthless confiscation of the land by the State . . . Nothing can be called land reform which does not have as its basic and primary concern the improved welfare of the man who works the land."<sup>1</sup>

Furthermore, he widened the new concept by adding "efficient size of farm units, security of tenure on the land, . . . clear titles to land and water, . . ."

However, both terms stem from the basic definition which states that land reform is an organized change in the existing land tenure institutions to improve the farmer's situation.<sup>2</sup> The difference in coverage is due to the difference in interpretation of the term "land tenure". If it is interpreted as including ownership and tenancy rights to land, with the other measures such as credit, tax, as supplements, then we have the old concept, which will be called henceforth "land reform". But if it is interpreted as comprising relationships among men by which they hold, control, use, or occupy land, including ownership and tenancy as well as land rents, agricultural credit, farm taxation on land or income from land, etc., then we have the new concept which will be called in this report "agrarian reform". This latter concept comprises also such programs as land reclamation and settlement, consolidation of fragmented farms, title registration, cooperatives, rural health, and education. This is the

---

<sup>1</sup>W. L. Thorp, "Land and The Future", Land Economics, Vol. 27, (Aug. 1951) PP. 367-72 (P. 368).

<sup>2</sup>Dennis A. Fitzgerald, "Land Reform and Economic Development", Land Economics, Vol. 27, (Aug. 1951) (P. 385); cf. Walter Froehlich, edit. "Land Tenure, Industrialization and Social Stability: Experience and Prospects in Asia", The Marquette Univ., Press, Milwaukee 3, Wisconsin, 1961, P. 8.

sense in which the United Nations conceived of the term and carried out its studies and programs.

Nature of The Problem: Land reform, as changing the existing land tenure system, represents an integrated phenomenon having legal, political, social and economic aspects. The economist discusses the problem from the economic point of view and offers a part of a general study treating all aspects of the case. But, as Mr. T. F. Carroll observed, it is misleading to make a simultaneous discussion from every angle.<sup>1</sup>

From the economic angle, a land tenure system is viewed as the framework within which agricultural production takes place. Hence, tenure is one of the most important factors determining the efficiency of production as well as the pattern of distribution and consumption of farm income. In many underdeveloped countries, where badly managed large estates exist side by side with inefficient small farms, there is the problem of a particular social and political system, a definite method of production, backward in general, and a certain pattern of consumption, saving and investment, that are by no means helpful for the attainment of development objectives. Where the population of a nation is largely rural with majority of these being landless small tenants or sharecroppers, one can imagine the social order of this nation as well as the national income and

---

<sup>1</sup>K. H. Parsons, R. J. Penn, and P. M. Raup, edit., "Land Tenure: Conference on Land Tenure Problems", Madison, Wisconsin, The Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1956, P. 583.

level of living it enjoys.

Locality is a characteristic of every tenure system. It is the product of compound factors affecting the social development of the country or the region. Although the basic elements of tenure are the same everywhere, the relationships connecting these elements reflect the particular conditions of the location. In an advanced, industrialized country, for example, land tenure system is more flexible and adjustable to social development than that in a backward country.

Four principal elements or forms can be visualized under any system of land tenure, but the legal and political base differs among various sovereignties (states). These elements are: ownership, tenancy, sharecropping, and hired worker. the distinction between these forms depends on the amount and kind of land rights held under each of them.

Significance: Land reform is of concern in most countries of the world; but it is of much more concern in the heavily populated, underdeveloped countries where land is something more than a production factor. In such countries, land is a source of prestige as well as income, therefore the economic and social, if not political, position of the individual depends on whether he owns land or not. The struggle to own land, and hence to acquire income and prestige, was an attribute of the countries which had not yet adjusted the feudal system to the new conditions. What course of action, and what values and beliefs were involved in that struggle will be discussed later.

Our concern, now, is to point out the significance of the land problem on the national and international levels.

In a world where the ideological struggle between two big blocs will affect every group or nation, the land reform issue occupies a prominent place. This issue has been behind many conditions of political unrest, revolutions and international splits.<sup>1</sup> While the communist propaganda promises to give landless peasants the dreamed of land if they become supporters of communist parties, the Western Bloc endeavors to establish reform programs and new land institutions to prevent unrest and weaken the influence of communism "because reform both meets the needs of the fellahin [peasants] and fills the social vacuum by giving the bureaucracy a social function".<sup>2</sup> The "attainment of peace and stability depends to a considerable degree on immediate and positive steps to correct systems of land tenure. . . ." <sup>3</sup> stated an American representative in the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations. Likewise, Mr. Raup believed that improper land reform was the fundamental reason for China's fall.<sup>4</sup>

Whatever the view of the two blocs about the problem, however, the peoples concerned attempt in land reform programs

---

<sup>1</sup>The Egyptian Revolution of 1952 and the split between Russia and Yugoslavia are examples.

<sup>2</sup>Doreen Warriner, "Land Reform and Development in The Middle East", London and New York, Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1957, P. 184.

<sup>3</sup>A. M. Sakolski, "Land Tenure and Land Taxation in America", New York, Rebert Schalkenbach Foundation. Inc., 1957, P. 281.

<sup>4</sup>P. M. Raup, op. cit., P. 209.

to take away a large barrier to economic development and to raise their standards of living as well as to realize social justice.

### The Objective

The ultimate objective of this study is to analyze the foundations and effects of the Syrian land tenure reform measures of 1958, in the light of the Syrian agrarian structure that existed prior to the application of the 1958 laws, using criteria to be developed later. First, the necessity of these measures will be examined and then their economic effects. The investigation of the general economic settings of the problem is an associated objective. The function of these settings is to guide the analysis leading to the main or ultimate objective.

### Scope of The Study

This analysis will deal primarily with the economic aspect of the problem. The study will also cover the measures previously defined as "land reform", with little attention to other issues.

During the four years since the Agrarian Reform Laws have been in effect, there have been some new economic measures and some natural accidents. Dry weather for three successive years has affected production; measures related to import prohibition and duties have influenced consumption. For these factors, as well as for the short period since the passing of the laws, one cannot rely on actual data to analyze the effects of such laws. Therefore, this study is based on theoretical procedure, on



observations consistent with similar undertakings in other areas and approved by economic theory. This, however, does not mean that accurate leading data or figures will not be exploited whenever they find a place.

The course of analysis and the criteria of judgment are based on the premise of private enterprise and free market-price system. This premise is not necessarily one of laissez-faire, for private enterprise can be controlled and directed, and free market-price system may be interfered with when necessary to realize certain objectives imposed as a consequence of society's development of values and beliefs.

#### Procedure

The main body of the study has been divided into two chapters. First, exposition of the Syrian agrarian structure and land tenure system is started with the physical and economic conditions of the country before 1958. Consideration has been given to the social values and beliefs accompanying the system and supporting its existence, then to the change of these values which called for further change in the current relations. Second, presentation of the laws related to agrarian reform is associated and followed by discussion of the effects of these laws. Theoretical setting of the problem is developed side by side with the actual situation in order to give a simultaneous application. Similar procedure is followed in the conclusion of the study.

---

CHAPTER II

AGRARIAN STRUCTURE AND TENURE SYSTEM

PRIOR 1958

Before proceeding to the exposition of the main subject, it is necessary to describe the local environment under which the land tenure system developed. The content of the agricultural environment, as presented here, will help in the understanding and appraisal of the provisions of the reform laws.

The Background

Syria is a small country in the Middle East. Its people form a part of the Arab Nation. The area is about 18.5 million hectares, of which about 5.5 million are cultivated. Most of this area is under dry farming where the annual precipitation does not exceed 500 m.m. (about 20 inches).<sup>1</sup> Irrigation covers only about one-half million hectares; the main water sources are the rivers of Euphrates, Khabour, Orontes, and Barada. Deep wells are another source. Government irrigation schemes supply water to 48,000 hectares, while the rest of the area is irrigated through private enterprises which utilized a good portion of Euphrates' flow and the whole of El-Khabour, Orontes and Barada. In the irrigated farms, cotton is the major crop, and it is the Syrian cash crop beside wheat; other crops such as sugar beet,

---

<sup>1</sup>Syrian Government, Ministry of Agriculture, "Agricultural Statistics, 1960", Damascus, Syria, 1961, PP. 18, 22, and 24 (Arabic).

potato and cereals are grown in the proper areas. The rainfall season extends over Autumn, Winter, and part of Spring; the precipitation is unevenly distributed as to time and place. As a consequence, the principal crops are wheat and barley which are grown during the rainfall season and need less moisture. Other crops occupy an important position either in area and production or in value; they are lentils, sorghum and other legumes. Orchards and vegetables are planted around the cities and on the river banks.

A distinguished feature of Syrian agriculture is its rapid expansion in the years after World War II. The area planted in wheat and barley in 1958 has been three fold the average of 1934-38; the cotton area has been eight fold.<sup>1</sup> As expected, wheat and barley production relates to the rainfall more than to the area, therefore annual wheat production oscillates between 400,000 tons in the dry years and 1,300,000 tons in the good years (blessed years). Barley production ranges in the same proportion. Cotton production, due to irrigation, has shown steady increase; it was twentyfold for the same period. The yield per area unit, however, increased twice between 1951 and 1958.<sup>2</sup> The irrigated area also doubled between 1946 and 1953.<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup>Ibid., P. 36, and Warriner, op. cit., P. 72.

<sup>2</sup>"Agricultural Statistics", op. cit., P. 54.

<sup>3</sup>International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, "The Economic Development of Syria", Baltimore, The Johns Hopkins Press, 1955, P. 18; cf. "Agricultural Statistics, 1960", op. cit., P. 140.

It should be mentioned here, that this expansion in area and production was carried out by private enterprise without any government interference or planning, except what was done for cotton by the establishment of the Cotton Bureau which offered a valuable service in this field. This policy is certainly not one of laissez-faire, as D. Warriner thought, for laissez-faire means an intended non-interference, and not a failure on the part of the government to interfere, as was the case. Particularly, the expansion toward the eastern virgin fertile lands has been carried out, not by the landlord class, but by the city merchants who invest their savings and borrowings in farming the new territories by means of heavy machinery and equipment.<sup>1</sup> The average gross investment for the expansion period, 1950-1953, amounts to 13-14% of the Gross National Product. Certainly it is not a low figure. In addition to past saving, a substantial part of the profits earned in this expansion has been reinvested.<sup>2</sup> Syrian private enterprise seized the opportunity of good economic conditions and could raise the national income by 36% between 1950 and 1954, from LS 1,187 million to 1,617 million (at 1950 prices).<sup>3</sup>

Rural population is estimated to be about 65-70% of the

---

<sup>1</sup>For interesting description of this expansion, see the valuable study made by D. Warriner, op. cit., PP. 71-111.

<sup>2</sup>"The Economic Development of Syria", op. cit., P. 18.

<sup>3</sup>U. N. Bureau of Economic Affairs, "Economic Development in The Middle East, 1958-1959, Supplement to World Economic Survey, 1959", New York, 1960, P. 48.

whole population of 4.5 million, i.e., about 3 million, of which 55% are productive.<sup>1</sup> If it is true, as it was estimated, that the cultivable land extends to 8 million hectares, then the density is 2.66 hectares of cultivable land per rural inhabitant, or about 5 hectares of the same land per productive rural person.

The village is the unit of settlement. Most villagers are cultivators; though in the relatively big villages, there are a few craftsmen who service the simple and immediate needs of the majority. Cultivators, with their draft animals, go out daily to work in the surrounding fields and come back before sunset. The stages of transition from "the nomadic tribe to the sub-agricultural group, to the semi-permanent village, to the permanent village settlement"<sup>2</sup> can be seen, in our day, in Syria. Location of the village was determined by many factors, most important of which are availability of water supply, the matter of defense, and fertility of the soil.<sup>3</sup>

The village type of settlement fosters the strong tie between the peasant and his land. Sentiment and memories shape the relationship between the villager and the land in general. Its being inherited from generation to generation, a final shelter and support, and monopolized by a small number of families, made

---

<sup>1</sup>"Agricultural Statistics", op. cit., P. 14.

<sup>2</sup>Afif I. Tannous, "The Arab Village Community of The Middle East", Annual Report of The Smithsonian Institution, 1943, Washington, D. C., US. Government Printing Office, 1944, P. 526.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., P. 527.

the peasant refer to it with reverence as "the blessed earth". The villagers are inclined to give proper names to various plots of the village territory as they would to living creatures.

The rural population depends directly on agriculture; and the urban inhabitants depend on it indirectly by handling or processing the farm products. Agricultural production, plant and animal, forms the major part of exports and accounts for 45% to 50% of the national income.<sup>1</sup> A good organization and method of existing agricultural resource utilization provide for a higher level of national as well as per capita income. If consideration is given to potential agricultural resources, a still higher income can be provided. These potential resources could be grouped in four principal categories: (1) land, (2) water, (3) manpower, and (4) risk taking. Government officials estimate that the existing irrigated area can be doubled, while the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development's mission considered this an underestimation.

Finally, it should be borne in mind that there is nothing homogenous in Syria, from the physical conditions to the behavioral characteristics, among them the land tenure systems. Most patterns of soil, climate, and topography exist in this small country, and more than fifty systems of land tenure are known in different parts of it, even in the same district. This has been one important reason for deferment and amendment of some legal measures.

---

<sup>1</sup>"The Economic Development of Syria", op. cit., P. 9.

### Land Tenure System

The various forms of tenure most known in Syria can be grouped under three heads:

1. The capitalistic tenure, where the land is cultivated by hired labor under the management of the landowner himself or tenant, exists mainly in the new regions of the northeast. As a result of less density of population and large area of land, labor conditions are relatively better than in other regions, especially for the skilled labor. Large amounts of capital have been invested in tractors, combines, and pumps. Cotton (for export) is the major crop under irrigation, and wheat is the major dry land crop. Most cultivation is done by machinery.

2. Share tenancy is the wide-spread type of tenancy. The cash type is very rare. That system exists in the old regions of the country, where small share-croppers cultivate small lots of large estates or other farms. It is similar, to a certain extent, to the "Metayage system" known in France and other parts of Europe and the southeastern United States.

3. Individual peasant proprietorship, or the family farm, where land, capital, labor, and management are supplied and utilized by the farm family, spreads over the whole country. Smallness of size and subsistence level of living characterize this type of tenure. The peasant enjoys the full return of his farm firm, as he assumes the full risk of the enterprise.

Two observations should be made.<sup>1</sup> First, a combination of these systems exists side by side with pure types. Second, except for capitalistic tenure, size of operating unit is small even on the large estates where the farm area is divided into small units cultivated by share-croppers using their labor and draft animals. However, tractors have been used on some of these estates, especially after 1954, and are widely used in Hama and Aleppo districts.

The general, local characteristics of these tenure systems will be discussed under the principal elements of tenure, namely, ownership of land, tenancy, and hired labor.

Land Ownership: The origin of the legal rights held in land goes back toward the seventh century when the Moslems ousted the Romans, and Islam became the dominant religion in the country. As a rule, the native cultivators were left unmolested,<sup>2</sup> and their property were called mulk or freeholds. All of the uncultivated or unowned area was declared the property of all Moslems, or State property.<sup>3</sup> However, the legal concept of property and state domain has seen gradual change and development through the successive political periods of Syria: Ottoman, French Mandate, and Independence. Under the Ottoman State, the

---

<sup>1</sup>George Hakim, "Land Tenure Reform", Middle East Economic Papers, (American University of Beirut), Vol. 1, (1954), P. 77.

<sup>2</sup>Tannous, "The Arab Village . . . ", op. cit., P. 531.

<sup>3</sup>Paul J. Klat, "Whether Land Tenure in The Arab World", Middle East Economic Papers, (American University of Beirut), Vol. 2, 1955, P. 49.



idea of state domain was abused by a tax system shaped by military regulations. A large area was registered in the name of such a Sultan as Abdul Hamid. The Ottoman law extended the Islamic teaching that whoever cultivates unowned land, gains it as property. The government did not attempt to register these lands in official records. The result was confused titles and uncertainty of ownership. Moreover, the tax farmers, who were appointed to collect the tax on land and pay a fixed amount to the state, have claimed a right over some land in cases of failure to pay on the part of the cultivators. City money-lenders acquired land in the same way from their debtors. Consequently large estates were created on a basis other than feudal proper. The relation between the landlord class and the state was absolutely not feudal in nature, but the relation between this class and the peasants was semi-feudal.<sup>1</sup>

In the French mandatory period, the authorities pacified the tribal sheikhs by granting them huge tracts of state domain.<sup>2</sup> These tracts, which sometimes exceed thousands of hectares, were either cultivated by the tribesmen in common, who pay a share of the product to the shiekh, or rented to city investors for a fixed payment or a share of the produce. Under this same period, cadastral survey and registration work began. Registered titles conferred absolute rights of ownership on the individual. State

---

<sup>1</sup>D. Warriner, op. cit., P. 62.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., P. 88; cf. Akram El-Ricaby, "Land Tenure in Syria", Land Tenure, Conference . . ., op. cit., P. 89.

land is registered as the property of the state as juridical person. As a result of this registration, state domain included two categories: the registered land in the name of the state and all occupied or unoccupied land to which title was not registered. The state claimed the second category according to the Islamic conception. An area of 3,544,883 hectares is surveyed and registered.<sup>1</sup>

The Syrian Civil Code of 1949, four years after the independence, maintained the legal categories of land used in the Ottoman Land Code, with some modifications. These categories are:<sup>2</sup>

1. Mulk Land: It is the actual private property, held in absolute or fee simple ownership.
2. Miri Land: It is held by a type of hereditary leasehold; the title is vested in the state. The latter can recover amiri land if it is left without cultivation for five successive years. The latter right is never exercised.<sup>3</sup> Difference exists between miri land and mulk land as to inheritance rule and dedication.
3. Matrouka: It is the property of the state left to be used by the public or a group enjoying a

---

<sup>1</sup>Ibid., P. 97; cf. A. El-Ricaby, op. cit., P. 93. He wrote a figure of 3,524,732.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., P. 100; cf. A. Tannous, op. cit., P. 531, and A. El-Ricaby, op. cit., P. 88.

<sup>3</sup>"The Economic Development of Syria", op. cit., P. 353.

usufruct right. Examples are grazing ground, threshing floors, community wood . . .etc., in addition to cultivated land. This category can be called Public State Domain.

4. Matrouka Mahmia (protected): It is the property of government branches and municipalities. It can be called Private State Domain.

5. Mubah or Mawat (deserted or dead): It is waste or uncultivated land owned by the state. Cadastral work and registration have not been extended to it. Each person is entitled to register mawat land as his property if he proves five year's cultivation. In 1952, this category has been put under state domain proper; and nobody can, henceforth, acquire mawat land by mere cultivation.

Although the holders of registered miri land are legally tenants of the state, they own the land absolutely. Therefore, the difference between the miri land and mulk land has no practical significance. Of the registered area of 3,5 million hectares, about 2.2 million are privately held, and the rest is state domain. The private registered lands have been classified by size of holding as follows:<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup>Ibid., P. 354. The word "holding" in this classification means a unit of ownership and not a unit of operation. Classification according to the latter unit has not been found.

| <u>Classification of Holding (ha.)</u> | <u>Percent of Area</u> |
|--|------------------------|
| Small holdings                         |                        |
| Less than 1                            | 1                      |
| 2-5                                    | 5                      |
| 5-10                                   | 7                      |
| Sub-total                              | <u>13</u>              |
| Medium holding                         |                        |
| 10-25                                  | 17                     |
| 25-50                                  | 11                     |
| 50-100                                 | 10                     |
| Sub-total                              | <u>38</u>              |
| Large holding                          |                        |
| 100-500                                | 24                     |
| 500-1,000                              | 9                      |
| over 1000                              | 16                     |
| Sub-total                              | <u>49</u>              |
| Total                                  | 100%                   |

It is clear that large holdings or estates occupy almost one-half of the registered land. For all private land, registered or not, and state domain, table (1) shows the distribution of holding size.<sup>1</sup>

This table gives only a general indication of the percentage distribution of holding size. It carries with it two defects.

---

<sup>1</sup>Ibid., PP. 36, 354, A. El-Ricaby, op. cit., P. 93, and D. Warriner, op. cit., P. 83.

Table (1) Land Ownership By Size of Holding in Syria  
(Percentage)

| Class              | Small<br>( -10ha) | Medium<br>(10-100ha) | Large<br>(100- ha) | State | Total |
|--------------------|-------------------|----------------------|--------------------|-------|-------|
| Registered private | 13                | 38                   | 49                 | -     | 100   |
| All private        | 19                | 43                   | 38                 | -     | 100   |
| Private and State  | 15                | 33                   | 29                 | 23    | 100   |

The first pertains to the classification itself as to small, medium and large. Difference in soil, climate, and irrigation is wide among various provinces of the country. Hence, one thousand hectares of dry poor land cannot be compared with one hundred hectares of fertile irrigated land, as the first is large and the other is medium. To put it another way, it is misleading to put two areas of an equal size under the same category if they are different in every thing: fertility, precipitation, situation, and other qualities. In summary, real guidance for economic purposes cannot be obtained from such a table. The second is that the percentage distribution is greatly scattered among the different districts. It was reported, for example, that the proportion of small, medium, and large holdings for Hama district is 2,42, and 56 percent respectively, while it is just the opposite for Hauran district, namely, 47,46, and 7 percent.

However, not all private land is cultivated in individual holdings; a type of communal ownership exists in some parts of

the country. The land held in common is called masha'a land. Under this system of land holding, no one owns a specified plot of land; shares of land are owned by persons or families. The village territory is divided into sites; each site is, in turn, divided into strips. A number of strips is allocated to each cultivator according to his shares and to the fertility of the soil. One or more sites are left fallow for one or more years. This is the only way to cover the fertility of land in the dry large fields. Opinions differ as to the origin of masha'a system. While Mr. A. El-Ricaby sees that frequent fragmentation, population pressure, and the "insecurity which prevailed at that time"<sup>1</sup> are sources of such a system, Mr. A. Tannous says that masha'a system is possibly the only step between the nomadic communal grazing and settled agriculture.<sup>2</sup> Masha'a holding represents two great problems which are the principal deterrents to agricultural advance, the intensive fragmentation and the absence of incentive for improvement and development. Mr. El-Ricaby has mentioned a person "as having owned shares in sixty-seven masha' plots, the width of each not exceeding one and one-half meters"<sup>3</sup>. The owners of such a holding could apply for settlement and development operations which aim at individualization of the land and at fair distribution and parcellation. That person mentioned

---

<sup>1</sup>A. El-Ricaby, op. cit., PP. 87-8.

<sup>2</sup>A. Tannous , op. cit., P. 532.

<sup>3</sup>A. El-Ricaby, op. cit., P. 92.

above, for example, owned, after settlement operations, three fields which could be managed easily.

The landlord group is composed of a mixture of varieties. It ranges from full absentees to full owner-operator. The size of the holding, however, bears no relation to the type of landlord. Large estates may be operated by their owners just as small farms may be cultivated by tenants. As a rule, however, the owner of a large or medium estate does not do the physical labor required in farming; his task is primarily confined to management in its various levels. Generally, owners of the large estates in the new regions of the northeast undertake the day-to-day management and control of the farm operations. In the old regions of the country, most landlords participate by making the annual decisions with respect to the crops and area of the rotation. The daily decisions are made by agents residing in the village. Dwellings of landlords are in the cities; even those who virtually participate in the farm work have urban dwellings. Apart from some owners of small holdings who work their own fields, the physical labor, manual and skilled, is accomplished by tenants or hired workers. Figures about the distribution of landowners according to their participation in, or devotion of time to actual farming are not available. With respect to their role in agriculture, it was principally, especially in the old regions, to receive their share of the produce, and to extend small loans to their share-croppers for consumption purposes. Nevertheless, most of them are debt-encumbered. There

are many reasons behind this indebtedness; some are due to the agricultural credit policy followed by the credit institutions, to be discussed later; and others pertain to the conspicuous consumption or luxury standard of living which is not consistent with their income from agriculture in most years.

Tenancy and Partnership: Cash tenancy and partnership are very rare in Syria; the first characterized mainly the arrangements between the owners of orchards around the cities and their tenants; the latter exists principally, not between landowner and farmer or between two farmers, but between landowner on one hand and pump owner or capital supplier on the other hand. Aside from these few cases, all arrangements between landowner and cultivators (peasants) are under share tenancy. Therefore, only this type of tenancy will be treated. For clarification of terminology, tenant, sharecropper, and peasant are given the same meaning in this study. In reality, there exists a difference between these terms, which stems from the extent of the relationship between the landlord and the cultivator. All the situations covered by these terms find a place in Syrian farming where the tenant receives only land and perhaps dwelling from the landlord; the sharecropper offers his, and his family's, labor and draft animals and receives land, dwelling and working capital; and the peasant supplies his labor only. Sharecroppers and peasants are the majority of the villagers who live on land and cultivate it.

Sharecropping and absenteeism are linked together as being two aspects of one system. It is said that sharecropping is



developed and maintained to make absenteeism possible. In the tenure literature, moreover, they are given the same origin. Several hypotheses have been offered to explain the sources of this two-facet system. First, with the transition of the bedouins from the nomadic grazing to sedentary agriculture, the shiekh "assigns certain portions of the land to individual families, who contribute to him a part of the produce."<sup>1</sup> With the passage of time he becomes an absentee landlord and "they sink to the level of tenancy". The second hypothesis relates to the first, but it says that the share of the produce was offered originally to the shiekh as a payment for certain political and judicial functions, and later has taken the form of rent.<sup>2</sup> A third hypothesis states that in cases where land is acquired by city merchants, money lenders, or tax farmers, granted by the state to notables for special services, or transferred by its owners to influential landlords seeking security and other purposes, payments for debt or protection developed later into share rent.<sup>3</sup>

With certain exception, the conditions under which the cultivator lives and work can be generalized as follows:

1. Share: The division of the crop between the landowner and the peasant differs according to the contribution of each and to the general conditions of the locality such as scarcity

---

<sup>1</sup>A. Tannous, op. cit., P. 534.

<sup>2</sup>D. Warriner, op. cit., P. 60.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., P. 60, and A. Tannous, "Land Tenure in The Middle East", Foreign Agriculture, US. Dept. of Agriculture, August, 1943, P. 176.

of the factor contributed, bargaining power, and custom and tradition inherited. However, in the dry farming, if the cultivator offered his labor only, he would get 20 to 25%. If the labor and draft animal are supplied by the sharecropper, he could get up to 50%; if in addition, he provided working capital such as seed, his share would be 70 to 80% of the crop. The latter case is rare. In the irrigated area, the sharecropper's share, when he offer his labor and draft animal, ranges from one-fourth to one-third of the crop. Fertilizer is contributed by the two parties according to the shares. The livestock enterprises are mostly characterized by partnership nature rather than tenancy. The produce is divided 50-50 under certain arrangements.

2. Area of Cultivation: In my openion, the poverty and the extremely low standard of living of the cultivator class are not principally due to the smallness of his share as percentage; instead they are explained by the fact that the area devoted to each peasant is small and inadequate to provide him with adequate income or to provide a full-time job. He is unemployed most of the time during winter and spring.

3. Employment and Income: An off-farm job is not available in most cases; hence, he depends solely on his seasonal share. This is a major reason for the indebtedness suffered by this group of people, and that indebtedness works to increase their poverty, with the many economic, social and political consequences. The cultivator is exploited, not by the diminution of his share, but by the decreasing of his efficiency relative to land.

4. Security: The peasant's vocabulary does not contain the word "security". "Usually, he may be evicted by the landlord without notice."<sup>1</sup> The landlord is not obliged to pay him compensation for eviction. Apart from the share, everything is left to the kind of relationship and to mutual understanding. No contract is written, and oral, moral agreement is the rule.

Hired Labor: Wage-paid labor is a new phenomenon in Syrian agriculture. It was primarily confined to fruit-tree and livestock enterprises around the large towns and cities. With the opening of new lands, the raising of new crops needing longer-time work, and the introduction of new methods of farming, i.e., mechanization and pump-irrigation, traditional sharecropping could not fill the requirements. City merchants who used to pay and receive in cash, found it more convenient to hire workers to carry out their new business in agriculture. Consequently, a characteristic feature of "the agrarian structure of the new regions . . . is that the new farmers employ wage-paid labour, either as skilled workers in tractor and combine work, or as seasonal labour for cotton-picking."<sup>2</sup> For economic reasons, i.e., scarcity and specialization, wages are relatively high; and the worker's standard of living is much better than in the old region. Resource mobility needs its classical long-run to show its effect. By contrast, in the old regions, except for mechanized areas,

---

<sup>1</sup>A. Tannous, "Land Tenure . . . ", op. cit., P. 176.

<sup>2</sup>D. Warriner, op. cit., P. 83.

farm workers do not enjoy better living conditions than peasants, if not worse. In this region, a farm worker is one who failed to find an urban job or sharecropping. He has less security, a lower income, and less stable employment, and a lower social status.

### Supplements

This chapter is divided into two sections; the first, previously discussed, includes what has been called land tenure proper, consisting of landownership, tenancy, and other rights and relationships. This section is composed of supplementary measures such as agricultural credit, tax on land and its product, and settlement and reclamation, which effect, directly and indirectly, the land use and holding.

Credit: A study of the agricultural credit in Syria reveals the type of agrarian structure and the risk and instability surrounding the farm business. Both landowners and tenants are subject to the risk coming from weather conditions, characterized by extreme inconsistency, and price oscillation. But the tenant group alone lacks the collateral for getting loans.

Three sources supply credit: The Agricultural Bank of Syria established and financed by the state; the commercial banks; and the non-institutional sources composed of landlords, merchants and professional money-lenders (so-called usurers). The experts estimate that the portions of the LS 100 millions-LS 120 millions of agricultural credit outstanding in 1953 furnished by these sources are as follows: 10-15% by the private commercial banks,

35-40% by The Agricultural Bank of Syria, and 50% by money lenders and merchants.<sup>1</sup>

While The Agricultural Bank of Syria makes loans, in practice, against real estate mortgages and joint guarantees, the commercial bank advances credit "to larger farmers with a good credit standing, . . ."<sup>2</sup> Loans against warehouse receipts or on crops or chattels are not granted. The volume of credit made by The Agricultural Bank of Syria according to the two types of security is shown in table (2).

Table (2) Loans Made by The Agricultural Bank of Syria  
According to Type of Security, 1947-53

| Year    | Real Estate Mortgage |                |         | Joint Guarantee |                |         |
|---------|----------------------|----------------|---------|-----------------|----------------|---------|
|         | Number               | Value (000 LS) |         | Number          | Value (000 LS) |         |
|         |                      | Total          | Average |                 | Total          | Average |
| 1947    | 4,484                | 3,684          | .821    | 9,000           | 2,124          | .236    |
| 1948    | 2,240                | 1,664          | .743    | 2,556           | 473            | .185    |
| 1949    | 1,982                | 1,577          | .796    | 2,216           | 350            | .158    |
| 1950-51 | 5,057                | 3,980          | .787    | 7,960           | 1347           | .169    |
| 1951-52 | 7,213                | 6,398          | .887    | 10,344          | 1880           | .182    |
| 1953    | 4,922                | 4,149          | .841    | 8,541           | 1483           | .174    |

Source: IBRD's mission "The Economic Development of Syria", P. 343.

Until 1950, the loans extended by The Agricultural Bank of Syria were of two types; long-term loans, from 3-15 years, for buying small machinery and equipment. After 1950, the bank started to make short-term or seasonal loans, up to 12

<sup>1</sup>"The Economic Development of Syria", op. cit., P. 340.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., P. 89.

months, for acquiring working capital such as seeds, fertilizers, feeds, tools, etc. Commercial banks, however, extend only seasonal loans up to 100 days. The activities of the banks in the farm sector are not confined to short-term loans; they participate indirectly in financing agriculture by discounting the commercial papers drawn by the dealers of machinery and pumps upon the farmers who buy this equipment on credit at higher interest rates.

During the period from 1947 to 1953, the value of The Agricultural Bank of Syria' long-term loans increased by about seven million Syrian pounds, from LS 13.3 to LS 20.4. The value of all loans increased in the same period by LS 25.7, from LS 16.4 to LS 42.1.<sup>1</sup> Table (3) shows the volume of short-term credit extended by The Agricultural Bank of Syria and the commercial banks from 1952 to 1958. The apparent point in this table is the stable increase in the value of loans made by the commercial banks in contrast to those made by The Agricultural Bank.

The maximum limit on loans granted by The Agricultural Bank of Syria is LS 7,500; and for loan of more than LS 3000, approval from the Directorate-General at Damascus is required. Loans are made on 60% of the value of the land.<sup>2</sup> From these provisions, it is clear that only large and medium landowners can get loans from the bank. This group of borrowers is not in general interested in developing its farm business, and loans are, therefore, spent

---

<sup>1</sup>Ibid., P. 344.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., P. 344.

Table (3) Short-Term Loans Made by The Agricultural Bank of Syria and The Commercial Banks to The Farmers 1952-58(a) (million LS.)

| Year | Agricultural Bank of Syria | Commercial Bank <sup>(b)</sup> | Total |
|------|----------------------------|--------------------------------|-------|
| 1952 | 10..6                      |                                |       |
| 1953 | 8.3                        |                                |       |
| 1954 | 12.9                       | 32.4                           | 45.3  |
| 1955 | 26.2                       | 39.9                           | 66.1  |
| 1956 | 31.6                       | 47.8                           | 79.4  |
| 1957 | 29.2                       | 57.6                           | 86.8  |
| 1958 | 17.1                       | 67.8                           | 84.9  |

a. Source: Mohamad Said Futayyeh, "Comperative Study of Agricultural Credit in the U. A. R. and Syria", University of Cairo, Unpublished Master's Thesis, 1962, (Arabic).

b. Figures on loans made by the commercial banks for 1952 and 1953 are not available.

on consumption purposes and extending loans to sharecroppers.

One can expect, moreover, that areas characterized by small holdings operated by their owners, or by large holdings operated by tenants, are not benefited by the bank's services.

The rates charged by the various sources differ widely depending on the purpose and nature of the lender. For example, The Agricultural Bank of Syria's rate is 5-6%, while the commercial bank's is 6-7%. The largest group of farmers who actually till the land and are in urgent need of credit can get it only from non-institutional sources. These lenders often charge interest rates as high as 50-100% or more. The very high rates of interest or usury paid by the sharecroppers and very small owners express three things: (1) the great risk surrounding the loan, (2) the urgent need on the part of the borrowers of these loans, and

(3) their failure to acquire credit from other sources. The dealers in machinery and farm equipment, however, charge relatively reasonable rate ranging from 9% to 12%.

It should be pointed out that some landowners, who are submissive to the Islamic teachings, extend free-interest loans to their tenants. Others grant the same type of loan on other than Islamic basis. Exact figures on such loans, as well as on total agricultural indebtedness, are unknown.

Taxation: In all the Islamic period, land tax was called "the tithe", for one tenth of the produce was paid as tax. Abuse-ment of land taxation by the state and the political leaders was a major cause of the creation of large estates and semi-feudal relations. Under the French Mandate and Independence, the tithe was abolished and a new tax has not been imposed on agricultural land itself. But the farm products, coming to the market, have been subject to a tax of 7% of their value. All products consumed on farms or villages were not subject to any kind of tax. Mr. El-Ricaby has reported that the Agricultural Production Tax collection of 1950 amounted to approximately \$8 million.<sup>1</sup>

Nevertheless even this tax has been abolished in the late 1950's, and therefore agricultural land is not taxed in any form, directly or indirectly. It may be useful to note that urban properties are taxed at 7% of their value.

---

<sup>1</sup>El-Ricaby, op. cit., P. 94. The rate of exchange, that time, has been \$1=LS 3.5.



Reclamation and Settlement: No reclamation and settlement projects were carried out until the French Mandatory period, when the small, but important, Homs-Hama irrigation project was worked. This project, which utilized the Orontes water to irrigate 22,000 hectares, was the only one achieved during that period, which lasted for about 25 years.

Private enterprise has developed large projects of reclamation in both old and new regions. Because water is the limiting factor in Syrian agriculture, the most serious development has been the transferring of dry land to irrigated farms. The next in importance was the plowing of the virgin fertile state land in the Jezirah and other districts.

Further expansion in dry farming and opening new land, however, had to come to an end, and private reclamation investments have in mind their own profits rather than the public interest. The investor, equipped with large tractors and combines, pays the shiekh 10-15% of the crop as rent, while the poor tribesmen lose their grazing land and herds, and are not compensated or settled in other areas. Hence, government came to play its role in protecting the public interest and the general welfare.

In the field of settlement, the Constitution of 1950, in Article 22, stipulates that "the state shall distribute among landless peasants, at a small cost to be paid by installments, sufficient land to secure their livelihood." Nothing was done until 1952 and 1953 when a number of decrees were issued, "invalidating all unregistered titles to land acquired by prescription

and providing for the sale of government land in allotment of 10 to 50 hectares, depending upon irrigation facilities."<sup>1</sup> In accordance with these measures, 150,000 hectares in the Radd area of the Jezirah have been divided into allotments.<sup>2</sup> Sale and leasing of state land in other areas have been affected within narrow limits.

In the field of reclamation, table (4) shows the irrigation projects completed or started before 1958.

Table (4) Irrigation Projects Completed or Started Before 1958 in Syria (Thousands hectares)<sub>a</sub>

| Irrigated Area |         |       | Project | Location           | Function <sub>b</sub> |
|----------------|---------|-------|---------|--------------------|-----------------------|
| New            | Already | Total |         |                    |                       |
| 43.0           | 22.0    | 65.0  | El-Ghab | Hama-Idlib-Latakia | D + GI                |
| 4.0            | 0.5     | 4.5   | Roudj   | Idlib              | D + GI                |
| 4.5            | 0.5     | 5.0   | El-Senn | Latakia            | GI + PI               |
| 51.5           | 23.0    | 74.5  |         |                    |                       |

a. Source: "The Economic Development of Syria", P. 336.

b. D means drainage, GI means gravity irrigation, and PI means pump irrigation.

This table indicates that 23,000 hectares, irrigated already by pumps, are now irrigated by gravity flow. The new 15,500 hectares are in addition to existing state projects and irrigate 48,000 hectares. Hence, the government projects are to supply

<sup>1</sup>Adnan Mahhouk, "Recent Agricultural Development and Bedouin Settlement in Syria", Middle East Jour., Vol. 10, (Spring 1956), P. 173; cf., "The Economic Development of Syria", op. cit., P. 58.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., P. 175.

water to 122,500 hectares. Approximately half the total area brought to irrigation belongs to state domain and is planned to be distributed to landless peasants. More than 30,000 farm families can be settled in this area, for one hectare of the Ghab land could provide a farm family with a relatively good living.

The biggest reclamation and settlement project, which was planned and is waiting execution, is the Euphrates dam. This dam and other smaller related projects are expected to bring to irrigation about 430,000 hectares, and to substitute gravity flow for pump irrigation on about 235,000 hectares.<sup>1</sup>

#### The Whole Economic Situation

In the last sections of this chapter, the Syrian agrarian structure has been merely described without any reference to economic effects or value judgment. Now, the various elements of the structure are to be called to mind, simultaneously, while the economic situation resulting from the combined effects will be discussed. Social value development cannot be ignored in this respect, for we study a phenomenon of change, and value judgment is the basis of any social change.

Economic considerations have been divided classically into three headings: production, consumption, and distribution. This, in other than theoretical, systematic study can hardly be done. Consumption behavior determines the pattern of production and its volume; hence, the amount of investment and saving required. The

---

<sup>1</sup>"The Economic Development of Syria", op. cit., P. 339.

manner in which means of production are possessed by the individuals, and income is distributed among the owners of the means, defines the consumption behavior, etc. For these reasons, I have attempted a general presentation of the economic picture.

Although land resource cannot be used alone, but requires labor, capital and management, it is the limiting factor, for it cannot be reproduced. Hence, the land tenure system, the manner in which land is held, is regarded as the frame of agricultural production. In Syria, where agriculture is the principal industry, the land tenure system determines the whole interrelated economic, aside from social and political considerations. The main systems of land tenure in Syria are three: sharecropping, the capitalistic system, and the family farm. Each of these systems is discussed separately with regard to its economic effects and value development.

Capitalistic System<sup>1</sup>: Even though a relatively small cultivated area is under a capitalistic system, it was rapidly spreading from the new to the old regions. The check has not been coming from economic measures, but from legal and social movements.

Unless sets of new values and beliefs have dominated old

---

<sup>1</sup>It resembles that of plantation, but it is not so called for fundamental reasons. The area forming a unit of operation is not necessarily large. Labor conditions and wages may not be low. The entrepreneur may be native, or even from the same village. The main characteristic of this system is that the entrepreneur, owning or renting the land, conducts the daily management and control of the farm operations and invests a sufficient amount of capital.

sets, a large amount of capital, accumulated outside the farm sector, could not find access to traditional large estates or new lands. Familiar methods of cultivation, crops, and standards of living, either of the landlord or of the peasants, are consistent with an established set of values held by the landowner, namely, freedom, economic independence, and social esteem. These values are maintained by a corresponding set held by the peasants; the landowner or his representative has the right to conduct his business as he likes, and to establish rules he finds suitable. Nobility and ancestral claims of the landlord were given great respect. He inherited the social and political leadership of the community. With the passage of time, the products of Western civilization and industry have become a non-separated part of city life and well-known in the far-side of the desert. This communication has been strengthened by the spreading of knowledge and education, the development of transportation, and the general improvement in prices and incomes. It is common to hear a radio in the bedouin's tent, and to see cars or pickups in front of the tents of the shiek's family and relatives. A new set of values has been found, competing with the old. Enjoyment of the comforts of life and of a higher standard of living, and regard to material views have been heavily weighted. The latter values require higher incomes on the part of landholders. This cannot be attained except by capital investment in the form of mechanization, pump irrigation, etc., to which the landowner, in general, has no access. If his land was operated under share tenancy,

there is no incentive to invest on the part of either landlord or tenant. If it was possessed by the sheikh by means of prescription, there is no reliable title for credit purposes, and, moreover, the sheikhs are not prepared to operate such investments as mechanized or irrigated farming. Consequently, city merchants have proceeded to initiate a new land tenure system, to replace the landowner in his relationship with the peasants or hired workers, and to enable him to enjoy his new value and a certain portion of his old set.

As a result of this change, possession of capital, management, and land are represented by the entrepreneur, whose motive is a large profit in the shortest period. An improved technique was introduced and yield per hectare was raised. Cash crops were grown for export, and there was no interest in the long-run type of production such as livestock enterprise or fruit-tree plantation. The capitalistic system resembled the sharecropping system in this respect. Soil fertility was not maintained and soil erosion was threatening. Extensive, mechanized cultivation of large areas in the semi-arid zones has not increased the grain yield; it remains low or becomes lower.

Although the wages in the new regions are relatively higher than those in the old regions, the lion's share of the production goes to the entrepreneur. The cultivators' income does not enable them to save, and furthermore, they have no incentive to save. The entrepreneur consumes the luxury commodities and highly nutritional foods which are imported. Grain, fat, some meat, vegetables

and other necessities are available to farm workers. Hence, the general purchasing power is lacking for better national industry.

The most serious effect of such a system, in a country in which land is monopolized by a few families and opportunity for industrial employment is poor, is the concentration of the means of production and wealth in a few hands and the resulting class conflict. This conflict is often strengthened and exploited by the communist agents.

Sharecropping System: Under the most common system of land tenure, sharecropping, the land is owned by an absentee owner, cultivated by poor peasants, managed by waged deputy, and financed by nobody.

The mass of the peasants believed that land is a grant from God to a special group of individuals or families; hence, it must be respected and protected. High values surrounded nobility; the landowner had the right to evict any cultivator and bring another one whenever he liked. The relationship between the two was certainly not slavery, but it was more than an economic or landlord-tenant relationship.

Under such a situation, land is poorly cultivated, for neither landowner nor cultivator is interested in improvement or soil fertility maintenance. The first, owning a large area of land, is able to obtain a relatively sufficient income; or, in other cases, his budget is supported by other sources. The absentee landlord "tries to get from his land and his tenants as much as he can, with the least exertion of effort."<sup>1</sup> Furthermore,

---

<sup>1</sup>A. Tannous, "Land Tenure . . . ", op. cit., P. 176.



he is engrossed by such activities as politics, travel, or amusements. Some landowners are, instead, concerned with acquiring new lands. They used their political influence to lay their hands on the state domain.<sup>1</sup> The second, lacking the security of tenure, does not have both the incentive to improve and the means or capital required. The peasant is not assured that he will get the result of such improvement. His trifling share does not enable him to provide even the short-term investment such as fertilizers or improved seeds, and the biggest share of its produce goes to the landlord. He is not entitled to get credit from sources other than moneylenders at an exorbitant rate, and he uses these loans to meet his emergencies, rather than productive needs. The way in which money-lenders and some of the commercial banks helped farmers was expressed by Louis XIV of France when he observed that "credit supports agriculture, as the cord supports the hanged."<sup>2</sup> Capital, under the unsupervised-loans policy of the Agricultural Bank of Syria, is not efficiently used. Even though capital is a critical factor, it is wasted at the same time that many farms are in great need of it. The productivity of other resources, correspondingly, is diminished. Consequently, the yield is very low; coupled with the economically small size of the operation unit, the depressed living standard of the peasant is obvious. He consumes most of the farm output, and a negligible amount of cash remains in his hand to buy other

---

<sup>1</sup>A. Mahhouk, op. cit., P. 173.

<sup>2</sup>Quotation in C. S. Johnson and others, "The Collapse of Cotton Tenancy", Chapel Hill, The University of North Carolina Press, 1935, P. 25.



necessities. It is estimated that only 30% to 40% of the farm output is sold.<sup>1</sup>

What has been said under the capitalistic system about consumption behavior and wealth concentration can be mentioned here also. But in that system, the enterprise spirit drives the capitalist to save and to reinvest in his farming, while in contrast the absentee landlord loses ground; his income from land is not adequate to meet the requirements of modern life. Hence, most of the large and medium estates of the absentees are mortgaged by the banks. The proceeds are spent outside the land, and the annual payment of the loan is somehow made. The unique result is the debt chain connecting the peasant, the landlord and the ultimate lender. Who can see, then, any possibility of developing the primitive agriculture and improving the peasant situation?

"The general hopelessness of the conditions of the peasant produces a mentality which is incompatible with agricultural improvement; he sees little chance of improving his lot and has no faith in the future, and as a result, he is apathetic and indifferent to new ideas and new methods of cultivation."<sup>2</sup>

In the last few years, a great deal of change has taken place, bringing the system into a crisis. Due to the factors cited earlier, namely, the spreading of knowledge and education, contact with Western civilization and technology, and general income improvement, society readjusted its values. It has given

---

<sup>1</sup>"The Economic Development of Syria", op. cit., P. 10.

<sup>2</sup>G. Hakim, op. cit., P. 84.

more importance to the value of positive freedom, that the whole subscribe to establish the rules which insure the whole's welfare, and connected it with the idea of equal opportunities for all. It has given less weight to the idea that the entrepreneur has the absolute right to conduct his enterprise as he likes, especially when this right leads to the creation of trouble for the society as a whole. Moreover, it minimized the value of nobility given to the landlords' families. The public found that most of them live in the cities, gaining more than they render.

In this period, a social problem has been created. It has ensued as a result of the conflict of the new values with the current social and economic conditions, which were consistent with the old values. The problem became magnified and acute when the public was persuaded to hold these new values. The apparent aspect of the conflict has been the fall of the relationship between some landowners and peasants into a deep chasm of enmity and spite. Whereas landlords were asking the government to protect their rights based on the old set of values, the peasant's representatives insisted that it carry the new set into action.

Family Farm System: Small farms owned and operated by their owners exist side by side with the other two systems. The independence, productivity, and relative prosperity characterizing this type of farm made them the model set by all the peasants of the country. With all its advantages over the other systems, recognized by the constitution of 1950, little or nothing practical was done to encourage and establish such a system before 1958.

The powerful sense of ownership drives the farmer to invest his labor, capital and time to make his farm prosper; he enjoys all the fruits of his resources. He does not know seasonal unemployment or underemployment, so he adds to agricultural production with little cost. He has the incentive to make both short-run investments such as the use of good seeds and insecticides, and long-run improvements including complete rotation with green forage, drainage, irrigation, building, etc. The responsibility to improve and manage the land makes the family farm owner more ready to accept new methods and techniques and more anxious to conserve and develop the soil fertility. The ability to save is enhanced by his reasonable income and productivity, and his strong incentive to invest. He could consume more and better food and clothing than the peasants. All these factors are behind the better health and mentality of the farmer, in comparison with the sharecropper.

The theoretical objection raised against the small size of the family farm has no sound ground in the Syrian conditions. The large holdings are cultivated in small units by several tenants; hence the advantage of scale economics does not accrue. The size of the farm is a function of the population density and depends on many factors, namely, land conditions, ability of the management, level of prices, state of technique, kind of crop, etc. The disadvantage of inability to use indivisible units of capital goods can be overcome by establishing machine service stations or cooperatives to handle tractors and other farm machinery. In

the final analysis, "any disadvantage which the system of peasant proprietorship [family farm] may have by virtue of the small size of the farm should be balanced by the advantages of the system [as a whole]".<sup>1</sup>

Reclamation projects could do very much for this system, by providing equipped farms of family size and cooperative machine stations. Apart from relieving the rural population pressure and labor conditions in the old regions, these projects offer modern models of the market type of production. The crops planned for planting in the Ghab valley, for example, are cotton, sugar beets, wheat, green forage and other crops in an organized crop rotation. The major crops are for the external or internal markets. Cotton is for export, sugar beets are for replacing imports. Animal husbandary is a principal category in the schedule. Such a project represents a partial solution of the land tenure problem, adds about LS 63 annually to the Gross National Product, and improves the balance of payments.

#### Reform Attempts and Proposals Before 1958

A stage of attempts and proposals intermediates the two stages of developing new values and transferring them into action. This stage occupied the period between 1950 and 1958, during which opinions and proposals of foreign and native thinkers have been offered, as well as attempts made by politicians inside and outside the parliament. But "Institutional reform usually lags behind

---

<sup>1</sup>Ibid., P. 87.

economic change," as D. Warriner stated, and she rightly predicted that before reform measures could be carried out, a government should be "detached from the old social structure" and exercise "functions beyond the needs of the established order."<sup>1</sup> She explicitly questioned the possibility of solving the social problem "through the mechanism of parliamentary democracy."<sup>2</sup>

Attempts: It was previously mentioned that the Constitution of 1950 stipulated that the state domain should be distributed among landless peasants. It declared that an upper limit should be imposed on ownership of unregistered properties. This measure pertains to state land acquired by the shiekhs and influential leaders. The maxima vary according to the local conditions. In accordance with the provisions of this constitution, laws should be passed to encourage small and medium ownerships of land, and to protect the peasant and raise his standard of living.<sup>3</sup> One year later, the possibility of heavy progressive taxation on agricultural land was considered by the parliament. The object was to apply an automatic ownership limitation.<sup>4</sup>

In 1955, a draft Law for the Protection of the Fellah (peasant) was submitted to the parliament. It aimed at increasing the security of the sharecroppers as well as of the farm worker,

---

<sup>1</sup>D. Warriner, op. cit., P. 111.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., P. 110.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., P. 101; cf. A. El-Ricaby, op. cit., PP. 89-90.

<sup>4</sup>A. El-Ricaby, op. cit., P. 94.

and improving their living conditions. Contracts between landowners and cultivators should be written; the latter's eviction should be illegal; and they should be entitled to receive loans from the Agricultural Bank. The landlord's share of the produce should not exceed one-fourth on the rain-fed land and one-third on the irrigated land. An extension of the Labor Law of 1946 was proposed by the draft law to cover the farm workers; and they should have the right to form trade unions.<sup>1</sup>

Except for distribution of a small area of state domain in the Jezirah district, all attempts at reform based on the constitution did not have a chance to be accepted by the parliament of that period.

Proposals: Opinions before 1958 relating to the optimum solution for the land tenure problem may be divided into two trends. The first declares that imposing a maximum limit on ownership and redistribution measures, under the Syrian conditions, is neither practicable nor necessary. There is no shortage of land over the whole country. In the new region, where monopoly of landownership does not exist, restriction on the size of newly registered land means deterring development and settlement of that region, and "killing the plant where it grows, . . ." <sup>2</sup> It has been suggested that the best way to prevent the raising of new great inequalities in landownership is to retain the state land in public ownership and lease it in large units under flexible

---

<sup>1</sup>D. Warriner, op. cit., P. 109.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., P. 105.

long-term arrangements. In the old regions, there are great differences in the agrarian structures and the physical conditions between the different provinces. For example, in the Ghouta, 100 hectares form a large farm, while in the Jezira 1000 hectares are a small farm. To solve the problem of inequality of income and landownership monopoly in the old region, a system of progressive taxation according to the size of the property, allowing rebates for new development and exemption for small holdings, along with legislation to increase the share and security of the tenants are the right methods. Resettlement programs are necessary to achieve improvement. Other complementary suggestions recommended "for serious consideration" include prohibiting individual families from increasing their holding above certain a amount of land; reverting to the state land not tilled for five years; depriving the owner of his land if he did not utilize it in accordance with the standard prevailing in Syria; and making the tenant less dependent on the landlord as a source of credit and supply.<sup>1</sup>

The second trend insists that the problem of land tenure reform "is a problem of incentives."<sup>2</sup> The family farm system is the one that gives the strongest incentives for the investment in labor, land, and capital. Land tenure reform should aim at creating this system by redistribution of large states or state land. Supporting measures such as providing credit to the new owners, technical assistance, cooperatives, and machine stations

---

<sup>1</sup>"The Economic Development of Syria", op. cit., P. 86.

<sup>2</sup>G. Hakim, op. cit., P. 89.

are necessary to the success of the system.

The merits of these trends as an actual solution for the Syrian land tenure problem will be discussed in following pages.

---



## CHAPTER III

## AGRARIAN REFORM LAWS OF 1958

In February 1958 the Syrian Republic and the Republic of Egypt merged into one United Arab Republic. A direct consequence of this unity was the extension of the Egyption reform program, applied after the 1952 Revolution, to the Syrian Region. This extension has offered "a most interesting example of adaptation of ideas to different conditions and circumstances."<sup>1</sup>

The Egyption Decree-Law No. 178 of 1952 on Agrarian Reform has dealt with the problem as a unit, including land tenure reform proper such as requisition and redistribution of land, relationship of landowners and tenants, and the rights of agricultural workers as well as supplementary measures such as fragmentation and land tax. On the other hand, Law No. 161 of 1958 on Agrarian Reform in the Syrian Region has handled the first question only, namely, landownership redistribution, while it left the tenancy relationship and farm labor conditions to be dealt with in another law, i.e. Law No. 134 of 1958 on the Agricultural Relationships. The new Law No. 130 of 1958 of the Agricultural Bank of Syria has attempted to reform the agricultural credit situation. Law No. 252 of 1959 has laid down the provisions of administration and distribution of State Domain. The Larger Projects Organization

---

<sup>1</sup>K. H. Parson, "Land Reform in U. A. R.", Land Economics, Vol. 35 (May 1953), P. 319.

has been constituted to undertake and complete the land reclamation programs. Land tax, fragmentation and other supplementary measures remain untouched.

This chapter is confined to an analysis of the main provisions of the two laws dealing with landownership redistribution, tenancy, and farm labor conditions.

### Agrarian Reform Law

As was previously stated the title of the law is much wider than its contents. The law has two parts; the first, consisting of 27 articles, discusses the upper limits of agricultural landownership and the requisition of the excess for distribution among landless and very small holder peasants. The second, composed of 6 articles, deals with the forming of agricultural cooperative societies on the land requisitioned.

Land Requisition: All private land exceeding the limit set by the law shall be requisitioned by the state during the five years after its enactment.<sup>1</sup> The maximum acreage which a person may possess is 80 hectares (200 acres) of irrigated and orchard land. In the bali land (rain-fed), the upper limit is 300 hectares. The proprietor has been given the right to select either type. He can, also, delimit the lands he wishes to keep from his holding, as well as his transfer for his wife and children. The law defined irrigated land as that which receives water from

---

<sup>1</sup>Syrian Government, "Agrarian Reform Law and Its Statutes in The Syrian Region", Damascus, Syria, Ministry of Agrarian Reform, 1959, P. 10. (Article 5) (Arabic).

any source other than rain. A capacity of half a litre for one hectare per second has been regarded as a measure for estimation of the irrigated area.<sup>1</sup> The owner may, however, transfer, in excess of the maximum limit, 10 hectares of irrigated land, 40 hectares of bali land, or an area equal to both types to his children and spouse. Total area transferred may not exceed 40 hectares of irrigated land and 100 hectares of bali land.<sup>2</sup> The legislator, taking into account the reform measures laid down in the constitution of 1950 and the successive attempts, considered invalid the disposal of the owner in favor of his issue, spouse, etc. not effected before 1 st January 1950.<sup>3</sup> Article 7 of this law allowed companies and cooperative societies, industrial companies, agricultural scientific societies, and benevolent societies to own more than the maximum limit of land for reclamation, industrial development, and research work. However, if the private proprietor transferred his cultivated bali land to orchard, irrigated his farm by underground water, or irrigated his orchard by river water or state irrigation schemes, after the application of this law, he might retain the maximum limit allowed for bali land, i. e., 300 hectares. Benefiting from river water or irrigation schemes to transfer bali land to irrigated cropland (non orchard), the owner is entitled to keep the maximum allowed for irrigated land, i.e., 80 hectares.<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup>Ibid., Article 1, and Article 4 of the Statutes.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., Article 2.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., Article 6-b.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., Article 22.

Indemnity to previous private owners is in form of state bonds bearing 1.5% interest redeemable in forty years. The use of such bonds is specified for payment for agricultural land purchased from the state, for payment of agricultural land tax if such existed, and for payment of death duties.<sup>1</sup> The valuation of the requisitioned land is based on the rent as fixed by the provisions of the Law No. 134 of 1958 on the Agricultural relations. The value of the land is equivalent to ten times the average of such rent for a crop rotation of a three-year period at most.<sup>2</sup> Other provisions aimed at protecting the creditors and substituting the government for the debtor by means of bonds bearing an interest not exceeding 7%, provided that the proceeds of the loans have been invested in the owner's land and improvements requisitioned.

Landownership Redistribution: The Land Reform Organization is charged with the administration and distribution of state land as well as private acquired land in excess of the specified limits.

Article 13 of the law defined the maximum acreage which can be allotted to each beneficiary, the conditions which he must satisfy to be entitled to such allotment, and the priority of distribution. Requisitioned land shall be divided for redistribution into units of not more than 8 hectares of irrigated or orchard land and not more than 30 hectares of bali land. The same proportion between these two kinds of land, applied in

---

<sup>1</sup>Ibid., Article 10.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., Article 9.

requisitioning, has been maintained in distribution. The new owner should be a Syrian working in agriculture or a bedouin to be settled; and should not own, before or after distribution, more than the maximum allotment. Those who actually cultivate the land have priority to acquire land; second priority is given to the inhabitants of the village having the largest families and then to those of smaller means. Non-inhabitants could be given land after the satisfaction of all inhabitants.

The government sells the land to the cultivator at cost plus an overall charge of 10% to cover the additional cost.

"The total price shall be paid by equal instalments, within a period of 40 years."<sup>1</sup>

The farmer receives his new land free of any debt or claim; and he is required to "cultivate it himself with due care and attention." Failure to do so may result in the annulment of his new ownership after due investigation.<sup>2</sup>

Before full payment is made, land cannot be disposed of except to heirs; and it shall not be expropriated for settlement of private debt.<sup>3</sup> This means that land newly distributed may not be sold, rented, or mortgaged, until after forty years.

Parts of the requisitioned land may be kept for public construction or any project of common interest. Postponement of land distribution is allowed in certain zones if it is "needed

---

<sup>1</sup>Ibid., Article 14.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., Article 20.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., Article 25.

on behalf of national production."<sup>1</sup>

The distribution procedure has been based on two criteria. The first is the productive capacity of the land unit in every soil type. The second criterion is the size of the family and its cost of living.<sup>2</sup> Family size is, however, regarded as a flexible measure; if its share of land according to these criteria exceeds the maximum limit of distribution, it may be divided into a number of subfamilies so that a family can get its complete due.<sup>3</sup> The family is defined as a group of individuals supported by a common source, that is the land cultivated by the family. In view of the differences in age, capacity, and living cost of different individuals, a device of Social Unit is offered to fix the family size. Table (5) shows the classification of ages according to their equivalent of social units.<sup>4</sup>

Table (5) Determination of Family Size by Its Equivalent of Social Units As a Basis For Land Disistribution

| Age in Years                | Social Units |
|-----------------------------|--------------|
| Up to 6                     | 1/4          |
| Between 6 and 12 inclusive  | 1/2          |
| Between 12 and 17 inclusive | 3/4          |
| 18 and more                 | 1            |
| The head of the family      | 1 1/4        |
| The wife                    | 1            |

<sup>1</sup>Ibid., Article 26.

<sup>2</sup>Decree of the Minister of Agrarian Reform No. 201-T of 1961, Article 14. (Arabic).

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., Article 21.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., Article 19.

Other provisions allowed the disregard of the second criteria in case of populated areas, and land is distributed to all accepted beneficiaries. This depends on the conditions of the village.<sup>1</sup> A communal ownership by all beneficiaries of such areas is another way of distribution of requisitioned or state land. The reason is the "impossibility of specifying sufficient area for each family according to the yield per hectare and living cost."<sup>2</sup>

It may be useful to present, in this respect, an actual case of distribution.<sup>3</sup> The procedure has been divided into four steps:

First: Area information-Total cultivable area of the village of Oum-Traikeyiah is 661.23 hectares. All land is of bali (rain-irrigated) type; composed of three classes according to its productivity measured by the yield related to quantity of seeds. The first class is four-fold, the second and the third are three-fold and two-fold respectively. The area of every class has been shown, as well as the area and classes of non-cultivable land.

Second: Social investigation-The social investigation, in this village, has involved 28 families of resident tenants, 3 families of resident farm workers, and one non-resident investor.

Third: Landownership distribution-The 28 tenant families

---

<sup>1</sup>Ibid., Article 47-2.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., Article 48-5.

<sup>3</sup>Document sent by the Ministry of Agrarian Reform to the author.

have satisfied the due conditions of distribution and priority. Three social units have been regarded as minimum for deserving an allotment. Seven sub-families have been formed from families whose social units exceed six. The total number of beneficiaries has become 35 families; they total 143 social units. Land distribution has not been based upon land productivity and living cost; instead the 143 deserving families have shared the total area according to size, i.e., contents of social units. Seven hectares have been left out for the cooperative society of the village. The share of the social unit is about 4.6 hectares, of which .9 hectare is first class, 1.1 hectares second class, and 2.6 hectares third class.

Fourth: Land division procedure-It is recommended that every beneficiary's share be located on two pieces in two-year rotation, provided that just distribution is accomplished and all share in the first and second class; the land is as near as possible to the dwelling place and a good neighborhood is attempted.

The legislation stipulates that title to land be recorded in the notary register in the new owner's name after payment of all instalments and interests, "and realization that he fulfilled the due conditions."<sup>1</sup> After his death, the deed will be endorsed in the name of one heir, selected by, and representing, all heirs. This is to prevent land fragmentation and its harmful

---

<sup>1</sup>Decree No. 201-T of 1961, op. cit., Article 37.



effects on production.<sup>1</sup> Lands requisitioned for one village or for bordering villages are to be accumulated and brought together with state land in one distribution program, as local conditions allow.<sup>2</sup>

Cooperative Societies: As a necessary requirement for every program creating small holdings, "an Agricultural Cooperative society shall be constituted from among the farmers who acquired the requisitioned land" as well as the small farmers who do not own more than the maximum limits of distribution. These cooperatives are charged with multi-purpose functions. Advancing agricultural credit of all kinds, providing farmers with the necessary requisites for carrying out and improving farm production, marketing the members' principal crops, and "rendering all other agricultural and social services required by the members" are among these functions. The cooperatives established on the reformed land are subject to the same provisions covering other cooperative societies in the country.<sup>3</sup>

A cooperative supervisor is appointed to control and help the work of the society and its board of management. The supervised system of credit and marketing has made possible two things. The farmer is able to acquire loans not exceeding 80% of the value of the products delivered to the society's warehouses.

---

<sup>1</sup>Ibid., Article 32.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., Article 36.

<sup>3</sup>"Agrarian Reform Law . . .", op. cit., Articles 28 and 29.

Even before harvesting and delivering the crops, loans may be advanced in cases of sickness or indigence. The second thing is that production loans, in cash or kind, are available to the farmer at the suitable time, and their use for the purpose for which they are granted is assured.<sup>1</sup>

Effects and Appraisal: A direct result of the application of the law was the availability of about 1,294,000 hectares of bali land, 94,000 hectares of irrigated land, and 156,000 hectares of uncultivated land, already owned by about 3,200 large landlords, for redistribution to landless peasants and sharecroppers. The irrigated and bali area amount to 18% and 24% of the total area of the country respectively. The exact figures on the implementation of the program in the field of requisition and distribution of private and state land are indicated in table (6). Only one-tenth of the total area subject expropriation had been distributed by September, 1962. According to the trend shown in the table, the benefiting families may total 87,000 or 435,000 individuals, while based on the maximum allotment fixed in the law, the figure is around 55,000 families or 275,000 individuals. This means that the total beneficiaries affected by the law are about 15% of the rural population of the country in 1960, and each family acquires between one-half and two-thirds of the upper limit of distribution.

If we added the result of state domain and Ghab valley land

---

<sup>1</sup>Decree of the Minister of Agrarian Reform No. 358-T of 1962, Articles No. 37, 19, and 20 respectively.

Table (6)

Implementation of The Agrarian Reform Law in Syria  
 September 27, 1958-September 26,  
 1962 (1)

|  | Irrigated<br>or Orchard<br>Land | Rain-Fed<br>Land | Unculti-<br>vated<br>Land | Beneficiaries   |                   |
|--|---------------------------------|------------------|---------------------------|-----------------|-------------------|
|  |                                 |                  |                           | No.<br>Families | No.<br>Individual |
| Total area subject to requisition  | 94,109                          | 1,293,631        | 155,898                   | -               | -                 |
| Requisitioned area, until Jan. 9, 1962   | 28,489                          | 718,890          | 56,095                    | -               | -                 |
| Distributed area of requisitioned land<br>until Sept. 26, 1962.                          | 9,55                            | 109,175          | -                         | 8,725           | 46,455            |
| Distributed area of state domain land<br>until Sept. 30, 1961                            | 11,885                          | 19,647           | 16,627                    | 3,602           | 20,015            |
| Leased area of requisitioned land for the<br>crop year 1961-62                           | 9,662                           | 28,735           | -                         |                 |                   |
| Leased area of state domain land for the<br>crop year 1961-62                            | 547,021                         |                  |                           | 30,810          | (154,050)         |
| Leased area of Ghab public land to expected<br>beneficiaries for the crop year 1961-1962 | 72,055                          | -                | -                         | 10,002          | (50,010)          |

Source: Ministry of Agrarian Reform, Publication No. 3, 4, 7, and 9.

(1) Area in hectares.

distribution, a total number of 639,000 new owners, or 21% of the rural population, could be expected. As a consequence, a drastic change in the rural structure has been made, with repercussions in the whole economy. The comprehensive economic change caused by such laws will be discussed in the last section of this chapter; at the moment, the concern is with an appraisal and evaluation.

First of all, it should be pointed out that whatever the imperfections of the program and the defects in its application, the ownership-transfer type of reform is the most efficient and desirable alternative for the Syrian land tenure system. The necessity of such a type derives from more than one factor. In short, the new land, being in the arid zone, cannot be brought into cultivation for settlement programs except by very long-run expensive irrigation projects, and they are surrounded by many problems. In the new region, large areas of state land were prescribed by few shiekhs and political leaders, and should be returned to the state and distributed to the tillers. Alternatives such as a progressive tax on agricultural land and tenant rights legislation alone could be feasible and workable to provide security, freedom, and a good share of the produce only in economically highly developed areas. But where "landownership has become a symbol for security on the land, for social status, and for greater well-being,"<sup>1</sup> and where the ownership of large areas

---

<sup>1</sup>"Conference on World Land Tenure Problems", op. cit., P. 576.

of land means monopolization of the wealth and power, such partial solutions may lead to partial improvement in the economic conditions of the peasants and others, but cannot lead to any significant change in the economic, social, political, and educational environment of the country. Moreover, the continuity of these partial measures is not guaranteed so long as the land and power is owned by few, and political instability exists.

The emotional value of land, as well as other political considerations, which are the important factors behind the reform program, has unfortunately been carried to its extreme in the setting up of the land size limit of both expropriation and distribution. They have been "determined by political expediency and population pressure, with insufficient regard to physical characteristics of the land and economic conditions of production."<sup>1</sup>

On the expropriation side, land size, as such, has been taken as an absolute measure for setting up the maximum acreage that can be privately owned by one person. Even the interested foreigners are acquainted with the fact that "In the Syrian region, however, soil, geography, and land use practices are more varied. As a minimum it was necessary to take account of the difference in the productivity of irrigated and non-irrigated land, evaluated at a ratio of 1 to 2.75."<sup>2</sup> Mr. Parsons was aware and conservative in this statement, for, as he may or may not know, there may be

---

<sup>1</sup>Ibid., P. 577.

<sup>2</sup>K. H. Parsons, op. cit., P. 322.

considerably more difference in productivity between two bali lands than between some irrigated and non-irrigated lands. A deep brown soil in the western zone of Hama district, under 20 to 24 inches of precipitation, is certainly better than stony grey soil in the eastern zone of the same district, under 8 to 10 inches of rain, even if irrigated with a "regular source of water supply for cultivating a summer crop, with a capacity of half a litre irrigating one hectare per second." The first land gives a gross return per hectare of LS 250, while the second produces LS about 70 under dry farming, and about LS 250 if irrigated, in the crop rotation consistent with each zone. But when we consider the net income, that produced on the second land under irrigation will show tangible reduction, because of the high cost of irrigation.

In this respect, the Syrian program did not try to avail itself of the experience of other countries such as of Italy and India, where the limit after which land is expropriated has been based on the market value of the land, which was based in turn upon its productivity. So this limit differs from one region to another according to the local conditions.

Not only is the productivity of the land disregarded in the current program, but also the living cost and the size of family whose land is requisitioned were factors not taken into account. Hence, as we have seen, the distribution procedure was more just and reasonable, at least theoretically.

Economically speaking, land size alone, even based on market

value, does not offer a sound justification for expropriation of private land. Large holdings are not a measure of inefficient or bad tenure system; some of them are well-managed by their owner-operators, who invest their capital in the land and offer a high level of security to the sharecroppers or hired workers. On the other hand many of the small and medium holdings are owned by absentees whose function is just to receive their share as rent. Such small and medium properties "could be usefully included in the land redistribution."<sup>1</sup> Many of them are owned by city merchants, by the government, or by self-employees who acquired the land either as a result of inheritance or as a way of saving.

While the full compensation based on the market value of the land has resulted in a good influence on the common feeling and on prospective investments in general, an opposite effect has been produced by making this compensation in form of bonds payable over 40 years and restricting its circulation for payments to the government. The purpose of such restriction has been conceived of as "to purchase 'fallow' land for reclamation and development . . . stopping the flow of funds into the speculative bidding up of already developed agricultural lands."<sup>2</sup> In Syria, there has not been such "bidding up;" land is almost always offered at a reasonable price for rent or sale. State "'fallow'

---

<sup>1</sup>G. Gaetani D'aragona, "A Critical Evaluation of Land Reform in Italy", Land Economics, Vol. 30 (Feb. 1954), P. 18.

<sup>2</sup>K. H. Parsons, op. cit., P. 320 (Footnote 3).

land for reclamation and development", in the Syrian region, is of one of two types: cultivable land with sufficient rainfall which should be distributed to the landless peasant, and land uncultivable because of dry conditions, not desired by anybody and in need public irrigation projects. Sandy or salty lands with sufficient water supply, needing "reclamation and development," does not exist in Syria.

Moreover, the limited convertibility of the bonds may be viewed as a compulsory saving imposed on certain groups of citizens, and may have the effect of preventing would-be inflation. But perhaps good investments in agriculture or in other sectors such as urban building or industry would occur in the absence of this limited convertibility.

The law has protected agricultural and industrial development specifically by giving a special exemption, as to the maximum limit, to companies and scientific societies, and by granting the person who develops and transfers bali land into irrigated or orchard land, the maximum limit allowed for that land. The writer knows farmers who have actually availed themselves of this provision and kept 300 hectares irrigated by underground water after the application of the law. Forestation and the planting of fruit trees have been strongly encouraged by allowing the owner to possess the upper limit of bali land if he plants it to trees utilizing river water or government irrigation schemes.

On the distribution side, what has been said about the



reliance exclusively on land size respect to expropriation, can be said here. In most cases, local population pressure and short-run considerations have been used as a basis for redistribution. In the actual procedure followed, productivity of land and living cost of the new owner's family have been regarded as criteria for fair and just distribution of the given land among the given beneficiaries. No attempt has been made to establish an economic unit of allotment, considering the land productivity, intensity of farming, level of living, outside employment opportunity, etc.<sup>1</sup> It is certain that the piece of land given to the farmer assures him his security and freedom, but it is doubtful that it could raise his living above the subsistence level. Hence, the effect of the law is social more than economic.

Prohibiting the disposition of the new owner's land, except for inheritance in a whole unit, before payment of the full price, the period of which is fixed at forty years, has guaranteed its staying in his hand. This provision is necessary to prevent reversion to tenancy, "thereby undoing what the land reform was intended to achieve."<sup>2</sup>

However, the legislative decree No. 2 of 1962, amending Law No. 161 of 1958 under discussion, has eliminated many defects of the current program. But it has one negative aspect which

---

<sup>1</sup>"Conference on World Land Tenure Problems", op. cit., PP. 577-8.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., P. 578.

could blow up the actual provisions of the law. The former owner is compensated during 10 to 15 years according to the indemnity size. The annual payment should be at least LS 10,000. The bonds are made discountable by the banks. The land is, at once, registered in the new owner farmer's name, who can dispose of it after payment of the full value. This payment could be made any time before the specified forty years.

Finally, the Syrian program recognized the private property with limits to its extension in the interest of the public welfare. It reacted to the values developed and held by the mass of the people. It can be contrasted to the communist Chinese program which confiscated the whole property of the feudalists, as they are the enemies of the people.<sup>1</sup> With respect to supporting measures such as cooperatives, supervised credit, and technical assistance, the Syrian program could be contrasted to the Eastern European countries' programs after the First World War. The latter programs have been based on the old concept of the agrarian reform, namely, the expropriation and redistribution of land.

#### Agricultural Relation Law

The preamble of the law, after describing the peasant's situation in all the pre-unity of the 1958 periods, his struggle with the landlords for bread and freedom, and his victories reflected in the 1950 Constitution and the 1954 general election,

---

<sup>1</sup>Liu Shao-Chi, "The Agrarian Reform Law of the People's Republic of China", Foreign Languages Press, Peking, China, PP. 1, 63

pointed out that all these achievements did not produce real results, and that the country remained without any legislation regulating the relations between landlords and peasants.

The objective of the law is "not only to strengthen friendship and cooperation among the citizens, to abolish the exploitation of one another, and to develop the agricultural investment and the national economy, but . . . to give the opportunity to the majority of the people, the peasants and farm workers, to feel strongly toward land and home, and to bear their national responsibility as free citizens . . ."<sup>1</sup>

The law is divided into five chapters. The first is concerned with definitions and agricultural unions. The second discusses labor contracts, wages, and conditions. The third includes provisions related to tenancy and sharecropping. The fourth and fifth regulate the settlement of disagreements, farm labor inspection, and punishments.

Definitions: The groups brought under the regulation of the law are three: the entrepreneur (owner or tenant), the farmer (cash or share tenant-cultivator), and the agricultural worker. Agricultural relations are arrangements among these groups and stemming from the farm business. The entrepreneur is any person employing one or more workers in farm business. The sharecropper is a farmer working for an entrepreneur under a written contract

---

<sup>1</sup>Syrian Government, "Agricultural Relations Law No. 134 of 1958 in The Syrian Region", Damascus, Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs, 1958, (Arabic), P. 12.

which gives him a specified share of the produce as a reward for his and his family's labor, and for other duties assigned to him in the contract. The cash tenant is a farmer given the right to use and hold the entrepreneur's land against a fixed rent, in cash or kind. The agricultural laborer is any man or woman involved in farm work for a wage paid by the agricultural entrepreneur or farmer.<sup>1</sup>

Agricultural land is classified according to its effect on agricultural relations as:

1. Bali land is that fed by rain-water, whatever its conditions or crops.
2. Irrigated land is that fed by other than rain-water, whether flow or underground, brought to land by gravity or by other means.
3. Orchard land includes all types of land planted with fruit trees.
4. Forest land includes all types of land planted with non-fruit trees.<sup>2</sup>

Rights and Duties: Each aforementioned group, namely, entrepreneurs, farmers, and farm workers, has been given the right to form unions, with the purpose of protecting the interests of the group and benefiting the members. These unions are forbidden to participate in political affairs. The minister of Labor and Social Affairs has the authority to permit or reject

---

<sup>1</sup>Ibid., Articles 2, 4, 161, and 5.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., Article 168.

the establishment of a union.<sup>1</sup>

Contracts cannot be cancelled except for a proper cause. A worker should be notified a month before eviction. He is entitled to eviction compensation equal to monthly wages for each year of service. Notice and compensation are, however, not required if "serious reason or gross negligence" is committed by the worker. Some of these reasons are listed as examples.<sup>2</sup> Other reasons are listed for cancellation of tenancy contracts. Most important of these reasons are the failure of the share tenant to realize a yield similar to that of neighboring land, the delay of payment of fixed rent or the share of the produce until after the specified dates, and/or have it operated by his son(s). The tenant, however, has the right to cultivate a part of the land if its area allows; and to get the land back if the land is not operated by the entrepreneur himself or by his son(s), or remains uncultivated for one year after the removal of the tenant. Landownership transfer, by any means, does not affect the position of the tenant or the conditions of the contract. The heirs of the tenant replace him as to the contract provisions, if they do the farm work or live on the land contracted.<sup>3</sup>

Improvements on the land made by the entrepreneur give him access to a larger share or rent in accordance with the

---

<sup>1</sup>Ibid., Article 168.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., Articles 127, 136, 132, 137, 138.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., Articles 173, 182, and 164.

productivity added. On the other hand, the tenant can make the improvements specified in the law or contract as the duty of the entrepreneur if they are not made by the latter. He can, further, claim compensation for improvements not specified in the contract, made on the approval of the entrepreneur, if he leaves the land in less than <sup>1</sup>six years.

Tenants and workers are expected to utilize the land properly and to take proper care of the animals, implements, and inhabitation owned by the entrepreneur. When they fall short of their duties, the entrepreneur can do the undone work on their accounts.<sup>2</sup>

Other provisions secure more rights to the workers with respect to work hours, holydays, housing and sanitary services.

Shares and Wages: Articles 198 to 210 have been devoted to fixing the shares of the produce going to one group or the other. Maxima have been set for the share going to the landlords, and minima for that going to laborers. Shares of the working capital have been left to be determined in individual cases in the light of these maxima and minima and the other changing conditions such as kinds and prices of the materials used. Shares of land and labor under different circumstances are indicated in table (7). The tenant's fixed return, in cash or kind, should not be less than the value of the shares assigned to him by the law.

Wages of farm workers are determined by two criteria: (a)

<sup>1</sup>Ibid., Articles 186, 189 and 193.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., Articles 45, 190 and 192.

Table (7) Shares of Land and Labor in The Farm Production According to The Kind of Production and Type of Water Supply As Fixed in The Agricultural Relations Law No. 134 of 1958. (Percentage)

|                        | Rain-Fed | Pump-Irri. | Gravity-Irri. |
|------------------------|----------|------------|---------------|
| Land only.             | 20       | 20         | 33            |
| Labor:                 |          |            |               |
| Cotton                 |          | 25         | 25            |
| Vegetables and Tobacco | 60       | 33(65)*    | 33(65)*       |
| Orchard                | 25       | (20)*      | (20)*         |

\*These figures indicate the minimum share of the tenant, who contributes all expenses other than land and water. This special case is confined, in the law, to the orchard planted with a mixture of fruit-trees and vegetables.

local costs of living, including food, clothing, health and housing needs, and (b) efficiency of the labor and amount of production. Unpaid wages are considered as excellent debts, and have priority over the whole indebtedness of the entrepreneur. Local committees are formed to fix the minimum level of farm wages. A delegate of the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs presides over the committee; the members are representatives of the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Agriculture, the entrepreneurs, and the farm workers. The decisions of these committees become final after the approval of the proper minister.<sup>1</sup>

Contracts: All contracts between entrepreneurs on one hand and tenants or permanent farm workers on the other hand should be in writing. Contracts with workers for more than five years are illegal; those with tenants are for one crop rotation and are

<sup>1</sup>Ibid., Articles 86, 98, 18, and 88.

automatically renewed.<sup>1</sup>

Any disagreements resulting from the misunderstanding or breaking of the contracts or law are settled by a local committee composed of three arbitrators selected by the concerned parties. Reconciliation decisions are final; otherwise an appeal could be made to the aforementioned committee for Determination of Agricultural Labor Wages. The committee is charged also with the reconciliation of the existing contracts with the provisions of the law. Decisions of this committee could be appealed to the Higher Arbitrament Council in Damascus as a court of cassation. The conditions of the contract, provisions of the law, local custom, and principles of justice are the documents on which decisions of these three levels of arbitrament depend. A representative of the tenants (farmers) replaces that of the farm workers when a tenant is involved.<sup>2</sup>

The law provides for a system of inspection and education to be extended by the officials of the ministry.

Effects and Appraisal: As far as the actual provisions are concerned, the law does not show any bias to one side or the other. It certainly introduced a revolutionary measure into the Syrian farm and urban environment. It is by no means an absolute reaction to past events and enmities. Nevertheless many landowners have spoken of it as a "veritable derogation of property rights."

---

<sup>1</sup>Ibid., Articles 36, 169, 37, 170.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., Articles 217, 218, 219, 226, 227, 229, 225, 231.



Judged from an economic point of view, the legislation has realized three main objectives:

1. The produce of the land has been fairly divided among the contributors. The word "fairly" here implies that even "some deviation in rent from the marginal productivity principle should be made within the short run to provide families on the land with reasonable levels of living in keeping with the general economic development of the country concerned."<sup>1</sup>

2. The peasant, as a citizen in a democratic society, is guaranteed security on the farm, and is expected to improve his practices and methods of cultivation, contributing to his and his country's welfare. The landowner did not lose his security; rather his rights were protected and legally ratified.

3. Both entrepreneur and farmer are assured the benefit of improvements made by them. Moreover, such necessary improvements should be made by one of them, no matter whether the other approves or not. Compensation gives him another incentive to improve.

It is obvious that these objectives were not realized to their full extent; and the goals of production efficiency are still in the horizon. But the way has been paved, and the law represents a first strong push. It was clear that everything was surprising to the landowners; their background did not allow them to imagine such things. The prevention of eviction, determination of labor hours and wages, and presentation before the

---

<sup>1</sup>"Conference on the World Land Tenure Problems", op. cit., P. 533.

Committee side by side with "his peasant" are new things to the Syrian landlord; but they are definitely not new in the rest of the developed world.

In the absence of social control regulating the relations between the landowner on the one hand and the tenant or peasant on the other hand, legislation should proceed to fill the gap and prevent a powerful party from dominating another party in the community.

The subject of human relations is a critical and sensitive one, the practical manipulation of which involves more than merely prescribing rules and provisions. Successful avoidance of bias in forming the text does not guarantee the prevention of such bias in the application.

#### Combined Effects of The Two Laws

The Syrian land tenure system and agrarian structure was, as we have seen, inconsistent with the objective of social and economic development of the country. The next few pages attempt to answer the question, to what extent can the 1958 program help in attaining this objective?

The ultimate purpose of the program was to spread the family farm system over a larger area, and to make it a prevailing one. The comparative social and economic advantage of this system over the other systems, under the Syrian conditions, has been discussed earlier. The crucial point was to provide security and freedom, either by landownership distribution or by protecting the tenants' and workers' rights on the land, as a means of creating strong

incentives to better living and a more efficient mode of investment and production. The energy of the new owner-cultivator or tenant will be devoted to improving his technique and conserving his soil, and not merely striving for bread and shelter. Thus the political institution and climate were prepared and became favorable to economic activities and progress.

The first result of the program is to transfer income from the landlord class to the peasant class through distribution of the principal means of production, i.e., land, or through reduction of rent, which represents a direct transfer of income. "The additional income, whether spent for supplies and production equipment or for consumption items, may help to stimulate industrial production and economic development."<sup>1</sup> Land will be undervaluated; hence wages will improve and the emigration of workers from agriculture will be stopped. The emigration of tenants will be prevented to a considerable extent through new ownerships and tenancy legislation.

In regard to the established size of new farms, two effects on production could be traced. In the irrigated and fertile bali land, there is the possibility of increasing the economic size of the farm by intensive cultivation and by adding more capital, and so of increasing production and utilizing economically the transferred income. The small size of the new bali farm, especially in the semi-arid zone and less-fertile soil, will not

---

<sup>1</sup>R. Barlowe, "Land Reform and Economic Development", Jour. Farm Econ. Vol. 35 (May 1953), P. 182.

lead to an appreciable increase in production. The spirit of ownership and freedom with strong incentives may persuade the farmer to practice better methods, such as deeper plowing and careful harvesting and threshing. The effect of these practices in such lands should not be over-emphasized. Here, the program produces a mere transfer of income. In either case, the land will be managed better than by the absentee, whether unemployed landlord, city merchant, or civil servant.

In summary, the actual effect of the land tenure reform program on production and capital formation depends on the type of tenure before reform and after. When inefficient large estates are divided into small units of operation and the landlords spend their income from land on "luxurious mansions, jewelry, works of art, and many other non-productive items," the abolition of such a system will not decrease the volume of production and rate of capital formation; rather, if the new system spreads the agricultural income over large numbers of thrifty people and is supported by sufficient credit and technical guidance, a positive difference will occur. The "rate of reinvestment of land income into agriculture on the part of the landowners has usually been quite small indeed; otherwise agricultural production techniques would not have remained so primitive over such vast areas of the globe."<sup>1</sup> In such cases, the investment function, after reform, will shift to the new owners and tenants. The net rate of capital formation will be larger after the allowance of

---

<sup>1</sup>"Conference on World Land Tenure Problems", op. cit., P. 581.

time for the rearrangement of the method of production and habits of consumption.

Within a few years after the launching of the program, the reduction in rent or the difference between past rent and payment to the government will be consumed on the farm. Both disposable income and marginal propensity to consume will rise tangibly. With the increase in rural purchasing power, the volume of market delivery of agricultural products will be reduced. Hence, a mild inflation may be expected. But if measures to stimulate the production of new farmers and tenants are not successful, the program will have an adverse effect. This effect is accentuated where the large estates were producing for the internal and external market, and the new farmers were left to produce first for their consumption needs. In the Syrian program, the cooperative organization of new farms associated with heavy credit assistance and supervised crop rotation plans are likely to bring about an increase in production and a steady stream of products to the markets. The exemption of the new landowners from paying one-half of the unpaid land price may support this result.<sup>1</sup> The reduction represents the financial participation of the public treasury in the land tenure reform program, based on its advantages to the whole country, and not to any special group. In the final analysis, the reallocation of capital resource contributes to the enhancement of the productivity of both labor

---

<sup>1</sup>Amendment No. 128 of 1961 to the Law No. 161 of 1958.

and land, and hence to the betterment of the living standard of the mass of the rural people.

---

## CONCLUSION

The land tenure system is recognized as the relationships among men with respect to land. It is a part of the institutional framework of agricultural production. As a consequence of historical social value development, different systems of land tenure were set up in different parts of the world. In the industrially advanced countries, the system is adjusted to production requirements, while in predominantly primitive agricultural countries, it is characterized by rigidity, standing as an obstacle to improved technique and social development.

The most important feature of these rigid systems is the unique value attached to land. It is a principal source of income and prestige. A few people own the land, and the majority cultivate it at a high price or rent. Hence inequality of property ownership and income prevails. Social and political systems are based on landownership. This in turn assures the way in which land is held.

Every tenure system is consistent with a certain set of values and beliefs held by the public. Its existence depends on the continuity of these values. In the last few decades, many factors were responsible for starting a change in the attitude of the people in underdeveloped countries and in their views toward the existing tenure systems. They began to discuss equality in income and a better way of living. The Western mode

set an example for new methods as well as new objectives. The country should be developed; land and the income from it should not be monopolized by a special group. Therefore the land tenure system must be change.

The change in the land tenure system designed to improve the living conditions of the rural community was called "land tenure reform," and sometimes called "agrarian reform." Up until the 1950's, land reform meant expropriation and distribution of land to landless peasants. Expropriation was replaced by confiscation in some areas. The method of reform is determined according to the intensity of the conflict between the new values and the prevailing conditions. Rigid systems cannot stand in the way of such dynamic issues as values related to income and production.

In recent years, the land tenure reform issue became the subject of many international conferences and United Nations activities. The issue had experts and a lot of literature. The unsuccessful reforms based merely on land expropriation and distribution caused the American delegations to introduce a new concept of reform. It called for complementary measures to support the newly formed institutions. The new concept covered a broad variety of undertakings, including reform of agricultural credit, land tax, marketing facilities, land settlement and reclamation, land and water right registration, and educational programs.

Syria was one of the less-developed countries, having a semi-feudal system. Large estates formed 49% of the private



registered land, and 38% of all privately owned land. Land was cultivated under different degrees of tenancy. Sharecropping is the major type of tenure, with the peasant representing a kind of servant-worker who takes his wages in the form of share of the produce. Large estates were not cultivated as a single unit in a large scale operation; instead they were divided into small units tilled by many peasant-families. The miserable level of living characteristic of this group was not due to their small share as such, but to the small income derived from the little piece of land operated by them, and to their sole dependence on this small income, which is not secure. They could be evicted without notice. Outside employment was not available, and their training did not render them fit for such employment if it did exist.

This absenteeism type of land ownership together with a communal system of land-holding produced in some areas the primitive agricultural production and the low rate of investment in agriculture. The landlord's function was to receive rent and to spend it on a luxurious type of living, leaving his farms to operate themselves by themselves under the direction of a rural agent.

State credit as well as state land was absorbed by the landowner group, to be utilized unproductively. Only recently have some city merchants come to rent or purchase some of the state land prescribed by a few shiekhs and to undertake large scale farming in the new regions of the country. Waged labor

existed side by side with sharecropping in these new mechanically operated farms. Professional money-lenders were available to peasants and small farmers to provide loans at 50 to 100% interest.

Under these conditions, land tenure reform was inevitable sooner or later. In 1958, two laws were issued, the first on expropriation and distribution of large estates, the other on tenancy and farm labor regulations. The necessity of these measures stands on a sound economic base. According to the neo-classical school of economic thought, the inertia of the stagnant economy characteristic of the old region of the country should be overcome by a strong push on the part of the government. A laissez-faire policy irrelevant to both regions; in the old one, the land market is imperfect and self-interest did not push the resource owners to maximize their returns and hence to benefit the whole. In the new region, the discrepancy between immediate self-interest and long-run public welfare is wide. High margins, similar to those obtained in the early 1950's, are not available to urge new risk-takers outside the farm sector.

In such a case, planning does not represent an economic system in itself; it is a scientific mean, by which a program can realize its targets in the shortest period and at a minimum cost. In a democratic society, and in our field of study, the first function of planning is to help the private sector bear its responsibility to carry out the agricultural development programs. Credit, storage and marketing facilities are functions to be performed by private enterprise.

The government, however, should play its role in the supervision and guidance of the transactions carried out by the private sector, in accordance with well-studied regulations and utilizing an experienced and well-trained staff. By doing this, the government achieves a two-fold aim: (1) encouraging the investment of private capital in successful projects, and (2) protecting the small farmer and providing him with a just return and useful services.

Finally, in regard to the landownership and production function, the society may tolerate a small portion of absenteeism and tenancy, but it is harmfully affected when most of the land is cultivated by poor sharecroppers. The fusion of landownership and use is viewed as the proper way to utilize land resources and to encourage new investments. This could be done only by developing the talents of the peasant and enabling him to be manager, for it is impossible to convert the city owner into a cultivator or even into a real manager.

The conclusion of this study is that the current land tenure reform program might be more efficiently designed if the expropriation of land were based on its productive value and on the way in which it is operated, regardless of its size. This is in addition to the setting of a maximum limit on landownership, with taxation of land and of the income derived from land identical to the taxation of any income in other sectors of the economy.

---

## LITERATURE CITED

Books:

1. El-Ricaby, Akram, "Land Tenure in Syria", Conference on World Land Tenure Problems, Madison, Wisconsin, The University of Wisconsin Press, 1956.
2. Froehlich, Walter, Edit., "Land Tenure, Industrialization and Social Stability: Experience and Prospects in Asia", Milwaukee 3, Wisconsin, The Marquette University Press, 1961.
3. Futayyeh, M. S., "Comperative Study of Agricultural Credit in The UAR and Syria", Cairo University, Unpublished Master's Thesis (Arabic), 1962.
4. International Bank For Reconstruction and Development, "The Economic Development of Syria", Baltimore, The Johns Hopkins Press, 1955.
5. Johnson, C. S. and Others, "The Collapse of Cotton Tenancy", Chapel Hill, The University of North Carolina Press, 1935.
6. Parsons, K. H., Penn, R. J., Raup, P. M., "Land Tenure: Conference on Land Tenure Problems", Madison, Wisconsin, The University of Wisconsin Press, 1956.
7. Sakolski, A. M., "Land Tenure and Land Taxation in America", New York, Robert Schalkenbach Foundation, Inc., 1957.
8. Shao-chi, Liu, "The Agrarian Reform Law of The People's Republic of China", Peking, China, Foreign Languages Press.
9. Syrian Government, "Agricultural Statistics, 1960", Damascus, Syria, Ministry of Agriculture, 1961. (Arabic)
10. \_\_\_\_\_. "Agrarian Reform Law No. 161 of 1958 in The Syrian Region", Damascus, Ministry of Agrarian Reform, 1959. (Arabic)
11. \_\_\_\_\_. "Agricultural Relations Law No. 134 of 1958 in The Syrian Region", Damascus, Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs, 1958. (Arabic)
12. United Nations, "Economic Development in The Middle East, 1958-1959, Supplement to World Economic Survey, 1959",

New York, Bureau of Economic Affairs, 1960.

13. Warriner, Doreen, "Land Reform and Development in The Middle East", London and N. Y., Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1967.

Periodicals:

14. Barlowe, Raleigh, "Land Reform and Economic Development", Jour. Farm Econ. Vol. 35 (May 1953), PP. 173-87.
15. D'Aragona, G. Gaetani, "A Critical Evaluation of Land Reform in Italy", Land Economics, Vol. 30 (Feb. 1954), PP. 12-20.
16. Fitzgerald, D. A., "Land Reform and Economic Development", Land Economics, Vol. 27 (Nov. 1951), PP. 385-8.
17. Hakim, George, "Land Tenure Reform", Middle East Economic Papers, (American University of Beirut) Vol. 1 (1954), PP. 76-90.
18. Hope, C. R., "US Concept of Agrarian Reform As A Foundation For World Peace", Washington, D. C., US Department of State, Bull. No. 25 (Dec. 1951), PP. 998-1000.
19. Klat, P. J., "Whither Land Tenure in The Arab World", Middle East Economic Papers, (American University of Beirut), Vol. 2 (1955), PP. 47-61.
20. Mahhouk, Adnan, "Recent Agricultural Development and Bedouin Settlement in Syria", Middle East Jour. Vol. 10 (Spring 1956), PP. 167-76.
21. Parsons, K. H., "Land Reform in The United Arab Republic", Land Economics, Vol. 35 (Nov. 1959), PP. 319-26.
22. Raup, Philip M., "The Wisconsin Conference on World Land Tenure Problems: Background and Setting", Land Economics, Vol. 27 (August 1951), PP. 205-12.
23. Tannous, Afif I., "The Arab Village Community of The Middle East", Annual Report of The Smithsonian Institution, 1943, Washington, D. C., US Government Printing Office, 1944, PP. 523-543.
24. ———, "Land Tenure in The Middle East", Foreign Agriculture, Washington, D. C., USDA, August 1943, PP. 171-7.
25. Thorp, W. L., "Land and The Future", Land Economics, Vol. 27 (Nov. 1951), PP. 373-78.

LAND TENURE REFORM  
IN SYRIA

by

HISHAM EL-AKHRASS  
B. S., Cairo University, 1956

---

AN ABSTRACT OF A MASTER'S REPORT

submitted in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree

MASTER OF SCIENCE

Department of Economics and Sociology

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY  
Manhattan, Kansas

1963

The purpose of this study is to describe the Syrian agrarian structure prior to 1958 and to show the need for change. This is followed by critical analysis of the land tenure reform program of 1958.

Two terms, i.e., agrarian reform and land reform, were utilized to denote the change in current land tenure systems to improve the land tiller's situation.

The economic aspect of the tenure problem stems from its influence on agricultural production, as well as on the pattern of distribution and consumption of farm income.

Syrian agrarian structure before 1958 could be described as a semi-feudal one. Large estates formed about one half of the privately held land. They were mostly cultivated under a sharecropping system, with an absentee landlordship. These estates were divided into small units tilled by many poor peasant-families. Primitive methods and techniques were prevailing, and crop yields were relatively low. The peasant did not have the security of tenancy, and was dependent solely on his little income from land.

Agricultural credit was extended by three sources: The Agricultural Bank of Syria, commercial banks, and non-institutional sources composed of landlords, merchants, and money-lenders. The latter sources contributed to one half of the agricultural indebtedness of the country. They charged an interest rate as high as 100 percent. Sharecroppers and small landowners were the principal borrowers at these rates.

Inequality in landownership and income resulted in dual social structure reflected economically in the general consumption pattern of the rural sector. The peasant group lacked the purchasing power required to develop the necessary industry and market. Another result of the situation was the low rate of investment in agriculture. Long-term type of investment in orchard and animal husbandry was very rare.

Small family farms existed side by side with other systems over all of the country. They were examples of more secure and productive farming. The farmer invested in his labor, capital and land, and he received the entire product.

The existence and development of Syrian land tenure systems involved social values. A change in values held by the public was responsible for creating a problem of conflict between the current conditions and the new values. Until 1958, all parliamentary attempts have failed.

It was possible after the merging of Syria and Egypt in one United Arab Republic in 1958 to extend the Egyptian land reform program to the Syrian Region. The Syrian program is composed of two laws. The Agrarian Reform Law dealt with the problem of land requisition and distribution and the establishment of cooperative societies from among the new farmers. It recognized private property and set limits on landownership. It took into account the difference between rain-fed land and irrigated land, but it disregarded other important differences in soil quality. The land size as such was taken as measure for the limitation



rather than the productive value of the property. In the distribution process the program was concerned with short-run problems such as political matters and local population pressure. Although the maximum limit set on the distributed farm size might be considered an economic necessity under the current condition, the actual farms did not have the size which could provide the farm family with a better living. In general, the program encouraged long-term agricultural investment, especially in irrigation works and orchard planting.

The second law is the Agricultural Relations Law. It regulated the tenancy conditions and the farm workers rights. It fixed the shares of the produce going to landlords and tenants. Minimum wages were to be set by proper committees. The peasant and farm worker could not be evicted except by proper cause. The law gave security to both landlord and tenant in a way no one can exploit the other's rights. It paid attention to the conditions under which necessary improvements would be made without delay. With regard to the Syrian circumstances, this law introduced revolutionary measures, and its full effects may occur after sufficient time has passed.

The necessity of the first law was challenged in view of the many alternatives for improving the tiller's situation. The establishment of family farms by breaking up of large estates and distribution of state domain was better than other alternatives. This alone cannot cure the complex problems of Syrian land tenure.

---