

Why biased for the poor peasants and not the big farmers? And why a union for them?

How to differentiate between peasant and the big farmer?

Why biased for the former and not the latter?

To answer both questions, we have to identify each of them.

The farmer is the one who implants land in his own hand and does not use labor force of others (i.e. hiring farm workers) to finish the work, except in some very special seasons and usually have them in harvesting operations picking fruits and few other cases.

The harvest season does not last only for a few days because the crop at the time requires to be collected quickly so as not scattered, spoiled in the soil neither to be of less quality. For utilization of the field once again it is needed to evacuating the land from the current crop quickly in order to prepare it for implanting a new crop; so it has to do wheat harvest process or picking cotton breaking sugar cane or tomato collection very quickly. Had those operations to be carried out at the same slow pace of doing the rest of the agricultural operations the farmer has not ever needed to hire workers or use others to help him do it. In the past, the peasantry friendly worked for each other in picking collecting and harvesting operations rather than hire workers. But times have changed.

On the other hand peasant who works at his land -whether owner or tenant- implants only what his own strength and the efforts of his family can afford to do. Both in terms of land cultivated area or in terms of the nature of the crop which he chooses to cultivate, the family usually does not grow (ie, the farmer himself, his wife and children) more than a few acres usually ranging from a few carats to five acres.

On the third hand, this farmer usually implants his land for three combined purposes perhaps only two of them could be met. the First purpose is to get the food for his family; and the second is to provide his cattle with food; and the third is to have some money - if anything left after expenses of food for his family and his cattle) to be able to meet some of the daily needs (clothing, treatment, transportation, and perhaps some of incidental expenses for his land (land preparation for planting, hoeing, irrigation and harvesting). Faced with this latter purpose, the needs of farmers vary depending on the area they grow and the nature of the crop. Some of them do not have a surplus while some others have limited surplus, and others have a surplus which may enable them to spend partly on the needs of his or her household and some agricultural operations; and is determined based on the land return, which depends in turn on the volume of production and price and so on.

Farmer usually raises some sheep cattle or poultry and implants some vegetables in a limited area (carat or two) of land, and perhaps gets some milk of his cattle which he may convert a share of it to cheese or butter. By the return of the sale of these vegetables or milk or eggs he can spend on incidental daily expenses.

Peasants' situation is not going smoothly as some people imagine, because the situation of a farmer who owns half an acre is not parallel to the situation of someone who has two or five acres. So the example that we presented above talks about the

farmer owns between two and four acres and it even represents an end to those who are below this level and who are above it.

If we knew that the peasants who own five acres or less represent the overwhelming majority of the farmers of Egypt, or about 80% at least we realized that this is the

category that produce food and clothing for two-thirds of Egyptian society. As well as this category are feeding the livestock of not less than two-thirds of cattle in Egypt and this in turn produces meat, eggs and dairy products, wool and leather that covers the needs of more than half of the population. For many reasons - out of the will of this class and its energy - these farmers are not producing all that people need from food and clothing. Which would be completed in two ways: import from abroad and produced by landlords or investors in the field of agriculture.

This category of farmers who cultivate the land in their hand (the direct producers) do not stop farming only in two cases: the first is a strip of land and the second is the high land rents to the overstretched, so that these two factors push him to stop agriculture craft and often had to leave the countryside to the slums of cities.

This category of farmers is the producer of food and clothing (cotton, wool) and not proficient in another profession only agriculture. regarding individuals of this category they do not have a shelter but the countryside; hence there is no force pushing them out of agriculture and out of the countryside except when they lack the only source of livelihood and the tool of production (land) or even what is due them from the ground with what they spend on agriculture. The bottom line is that this coveted category does not only have to live in safety and no more.

On the other hand, the other part of these who are working in agriculture, planting tens or hundreds of acres (big farmers) differs completely from the previous category as follows:

1. They do not work with their hands in the earth, but they manage and oversee the operations of production so that they are indirect producers - starting from sowing process to harvest. Some even hires who would assume this task on his behalf if his property was wide or he was active in more than one business.

2. They use wage labor (agricultural workers or poor peasants) in the completion of all agricultural operations.

3. Crops that they prefer to cultivate are what return to them the maximum profit; and that does not mean they do not devote a part of the land for their food, but it does mean that the grain of traditional fodder crops cultivation - which is the main activity of common farmers - is not the goal, but as far as they bring the profits. Because the cultivation vegetables and fruits, flowers, medicinal and aromatic plants is what they focused on, which means on the other hand that the bulk of their production and perhaps the whole is for selling in local markets or for export.

4. some of them Usually specialize after a period of experimenting cultivation of different crops, particularly of the kinds mentioned above; and expand in their agricultural activity; but the others convert their accumulated funds to other branches of business, may be in the agricultural field such as agricultural industry; or may be in quite different branch of business such as manufacturing, domestic commerce or real estate. This confirms that the profit and revenue alone is what determines the survival of these big farmers in agriculture or leave it.

These are the most important differences in Egypt among big farmers and the poor and small farmers; the latter does not know how to craft only agriculture and have no shelter only village. The aspirations they have only to get day food, raise their

children and live in tranquility; while big farmers can change their activity and leave agriculture at all; mostly living in cities, and no end to their aspirations and desires; they usually or their children are senior current or former officials in government or influential in the countryside as parliamentarians or judges or Police officers.

Because these capitalists (big farmers) do not have an expansion in profits only through the acquisition of more land and in use patterns of production relying on extensive farms and intensive farming or seeking for it; they do not find opportunities to expand only in two directions:

1. Choking on and siege of poor small farmers; pushing them to stop farming or sell the land they own and thus big farmers obtained more lands. There are many and varied evidences on this.

2. The acquisition of new reclaimed land.

The poor small farmers have almost no accessibility to the new reclaimed lands, as they cannot afford growing it. As these farmers exist in the ancient land, they are exposed to wild campaigns of aggression and forced evictions of land with all the violent methods and varied legal ploys by many forces, including landlords, big farmers, agricultural capitalists and investors, the heirs of feudal landlords with their guerrilla organizations. The small farmer does not have support in face of his land robbery (State has not only abandoned them but it even collude against them and often lead the process of their stripping of land).

On the other hand, big players want to get rid of small farmers in ancient land, because they use small farming production pattern representing an obstacle for the dealers of agricultural supplies who are seeking to dominate the market with their products. But being "lowest wall (i.e. defenseless prey)" in the countryside, and they make up a coveted target for several big predator players.

Because the second category (big farmers) are not interested in anything but only to get the profit and not interested in providing food for population- that is not even one of their objectives- nor even interested in continuing in agriculture only if it returns to them the highest profits, and in contrast, the first category of the poor and small peasants plays the role of the producer of population food and clothing; and its aspirations are not more than to work in agriculture, "subsistence" and permanently residing in the countryside and not abandoning it unless no longer farming or stripped of their land; and they pay taxes. So it is natural that we are biased to the latter category (the poor small farmer), because all their dreams are focused on request to life, while senior farmers living in a state of ease and comfort are focused mainly on profit-taking.

In summary we biased to these who provide the people with food, not to those whose their real interests are not concerned with the people food; to those who pay taxes and not to those who evade them, and to those who do not aspire but only in the right to life against those who deny them this right. It is more worthy to bias for the right to life than to the false right of individual ownership and profit-taking. Therefore, we believe that small poor farmers are the segment of laborers most worthy of a "Syndicate" which they have never realized throughout their history; real syndicate and not a warehouse to be stored in until times of political festivals demand.

Beshir Sakr

Member of Peasant Solidarity Committee- Egypt

Saturday 24th, December 2011

Arabic article: posted in "Modern Discussion" site,
issue No. 3594. Dated: 1 January 2012

