

# THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF LAND REFORMS IN KARNATAKA, A SOUTH INDIAN STATE

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Land reform measures have been in operation in India for nearly three decades, but according to reports have not achieved significant results, particularly with regard to the redistributive objective of land reforms. For instance, an Asian Development Bank study found that "During the 1960's, land reform programmes in India . . . were not adequately implemented. . . . In the 16 Indian States which implemented land ceilings legislation between 1958 and 1971, only 0.99 million hectares had been declared surplus by 1971, representing 0.7 per cent of the net cropped area. Less than 0.49 million hectares had been distributed to poor farm holders and landless workers."<sup>1</sup> It would be interesting to know why land reforms have not been successful. The explanations offered for this unimpressive performance have been mainly in terms of some vague but catchy phrases like "the vested interest of politicians," "corrupt bureaucracy," "economic and political domination of the landlords," etc. However, these explanations have not been articulated within the framework of an empirical analysis comparable to those which were advanced for justifying land reforms. The purpose of this article is to explain the failure of land reforms and to analyze these explanations within the terms of the politics of group interests.

For illustrative purposes we will present the case of Karnataka (formerly Mysore state). According to the Indian Constitution, the state governments are responsible for the formulation and implementation of land reform

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policy measures, but in view of the national importance of land reforms, the central government has been "advising" the state governments in the matter with a view to securing uniformity in land legislation throughout the country. However, there are wide variations in both the legislation and the degree of implementation among the states in India. Karnataka has been one of the few states in the Indian union to have evolved radical land reforms. It is the only state to have abolished tenancy by law and to have provided for the conferring of ownership rights on the tenants, but even then doubts have been expressed about the actual results.<sup>2</sup> It is in this context that we wish to discuss the question of why land reforms have not been effectively implemented.

We will give a brief introduction to Karnataka's economy, review land reform legislation adopted in Karnataka since independence in 1947, and analyze why these legislative measures have not been effectively implemented. Finally, we will present some broad policy recommendations.

### Background to the Karnataka Economy

Karnataka, one of the four states in South India, has 19 administrative districts and an area of 191,791 square kilometers, 5.2% of the country. Geographically, Karnataka can be divided into four regions: the coastal region on the west is a low-lying area receiving much rain and therefore suitable for growing paddy, coconut, and arecanut; the *malnad*, which covers the region of the Western Ghats, was once dreaded for its high incidence of malaria but is now becoming densely populated with a rapid increase in the area under paddy; the northern *maidan*, a high plateau with black soil, is suitable for the cultivation of cotton and the chief cereal of the region, jowar; and the southern *maidan* with its red soils raises ragi, the staple cereal of the region, in the dry areas, and paddy and sugarcane in the irrigated areas.

According to the 1981 census (provisional), the population of Karnataka is 37.04 million, or 5.41% of the population of the country. The people of Karnataka belong to four major religious groups—Hindus, Muslims, Christians, and Jains—but Hindus constitute an 86% majority. As elsewhere in India, the Hindu population of Karnataka is composed of different caste groups of which the most important are Brahmans, Lingayats, Vokkaligas, and Harijans and other minority "backward" communities. Brahmans, about 4% of the state's population, are considered a dominant minority because of their leading role in education and public service. Vokkaligas and Lingayats

make up about 27% of the population but own most of the cultivated land. By virtue of their numerical strength and land ownership they have been the major contenders for political power<sup>3</sup> and are considered a dominant majority. Other backward castes like Kurubas, Naiks and Yadavas, Goldsmiths, Blacksmiths, Barbers, Washermen, and Carpenters constitute about 39% and are considered non-dominant minority groups because of their social and economic backwardness. Harijans form about 16% of the population; they do not own much land and have been economically depressed and socially suppressed. Muslims account for about 11% of the population and are considered economically and educationally backward. Christians and Jains together constitute about 3% and are considered religious minorities.

The Karnataka economy is basically agricultural; agriculture and allied activities provide a livelihood for 65.12% of the population and account for 68.40% of the state domestic product. Endowed with environmental and geophysical advantages, Karnataka has been able to produce a diversified cropping pattern with roughly 60 different agricultural and horticultural crops.<sup>4</sup> Of these, jowar, paddy, cotton, ragi, and groundnuts are the major crops and account for about 57% of the gross cropped area.<sup>5</sup> It is proposed to further diversify the rural economic activities with World Bank aid by popularizing and developing dairy activities, mulberry cultivation, and sericulture industry. Efforts are being made to expand the use of high yielding variety seeds through a massive extension service and, as part of this, to exploit the irrigation potential by undertaking major and minor (wells and tanks) irrigation projects to increase the proportion of gross cropped area that is irrigated from 17.5% in 1977-78 to 29.4% in 1982-83.

Attempts are also being made to exploit mineral resources such as iron ore, manganese, and copper by setting up factories near deposit sites of these minerals. Both the state and the central government have set up a number of modern industrial enterprises which manufacture aircraft, machine tools, telephones, rail coaches, watches, and electronic and engineering goods in Bangalore, the sprawling state capital with a population of 2.91 million. In addition, a number of private entrepreneurs have moved in recently to produce a variety of consumer durables.<sup>6</sup>

In spite of such efforts to exploit natural resources, the per capita income of the state has been (marginally) less than the country average, and the problems of unemployment and underemployment, poverty, and inequalities continue.<sup>7</sup> With a view to alleviating poverty and unemployment, particularly in the rural areas, the planning machinery has developed a new

strategy. A component of this strategy is to decentralize planning to smaller regions such as districts, blocks, and so on to utilize local resources fully and maximize output and employment.<sup>8</sup> Land reform measures with a special emphasis on fixing ceilings on land holdings and distribution of surplus land to the landless and to marginal and small farmers are considered part of the anti-poverty program.

### Land Reform Legislation

It is customary to trace the land revenue system and laws in modern Karnataka to the time of the *poligars* and through them to the pre-British and British periods,<sup>9</sup> but it is not intended here to evaluate the laws and regulations brought in at this time. For one thing, land regulation of the type attempted during this period cannot be regarded as land reforms in the strict sense of the term because it consisted chiefly of reorganizing the land system for maintaining land records and collecting revenues. In addition, this period does not provide full scope for the analysis of group behavior since there was no democratically elected government in power which could allow groups to assert their self-interest in government policy formulation and decision making.

It was only after independence and the installation of a democratically elected government that the scope for the operation of group interests was created. For convenience of analysis, the whole period of post-independence land reform legislation is divided into four sub-periods, each representing a phase in the land reform movement in Karnataka: (1) 1947 to 1956; (2) 1956 to 1971; (3) 1971 to 1977; and (4) the post-1977 period.

#### *FROM 1947 TO 1956—INAM ABOLITION*

With an elected government in power in the state, group interests came into their own and began to play the game in accordance with their objectives. It may be noted that land was held mostly by three communities—Vokkaligas, Lingayats, and Brahmans. Brahmans held mostly *Inam* lands— i.e., lands granted to those who belonged to the priestly caste by the erstwhile rulers in appreciation of their services. By tradition and also because they had taken up government service and moved to towns and cities, Brahmans were the absentee landlords. The *Inam* lands and the non-*Inam* lands were cultivated by tenants who belonged to the cultivating castes such as Vokkaligas and Lingayats, and to the landless castes like the Backward minority communities and Harijans. The tenants and the landless, numerically large groups,

constituted the "vote banks." The non-Brahman landed interests, Vokkaligas, Lingayats, and other Hindus, controlled the state government, heading a majority of the ministries in the state government including the chief ministership.

Soon after the achievement of independence, the more radical among the elected representatives were pressing for eliminating the vestiges of the feudal system. The Congress Party, which was in power in the country, had committed itself to the abolition of *Zamindari* (landlord/land revenue collector system) and to other radical land reform measures. In Karnataka, the *Inamdars* attracted the attention of the reformist politicians. The ruling party had to contend with the left political parties which were going about wooing the electorate by promising radical reforms. In response, the Congress Party began its radical socioeconomic measures. *Inam* abolition was a convenient choice because, first, the number of *Inamdars* in the state was numerically too small to wield much political power, and, second, they belonged to a community which had aroused jealousy among the members of other land-owning communities, evident from the anti-Brahman movement in the state. Therefore, the state government did not see any political risk in undertaking to abolish *Inams*. However, the Brahmans controlled the state bureaucracy, whose cooperation was necessary for implementing any such legislation. Since *Inam* abolition was intended to dislodge this community from its lands, the role of the bureaucracy in implementing the legislation could be predicted. This was evident from the undue delay in making the legislation itself operative.

The Legislative Assembly passed a resolution in December 1947 seeking abolition of *Inam* tenure. But this resolution could not be transformed into law until 1954, although as early as 1950 the Mysore Alienated Villages (Protection of Tenants and Miscellaneous Provisions) Act was passed regulating tenancy and protecting tenants from *Inamdars*. The Mysore (Personal and Miscellaneous) *Inams* Abolition Act was passed in 1954, and it took another year to achieve legislation abolishing the religious *Inams*. Only in 1955 did the government pass the Mysore (Religious and Charitable) *Inams* Abolition Act, covering even the Sringeri *Jabgir*. The delay in passing legislation to abolish *Inams* points to the self-interest role played by the state bureaucracy. The difficulties involved in bringing the religious *Inams* under the general *Inams* Abolition Act and the fact that the Act abolishing these *Inams* came much later than the general *Inams* Abolition Act is clear testimony to the powerful resistance from the self-interest groups who had some influence over the state bureaucracy. This is further evident from the fact

that the 1955 *Inam* Abolition Act was never implemented through formal administrative channels, but only through court decisions on the claims of the tenants of *Inam* lands.

#### FROM 1956 TO 1971—THE 1961 ACT

After the reorganization of the state in 1956, the landed interest group was strengthened because the new Mysore area brought with it the strong land-owning caste, the Lingayats, who also ruled the state for 15 years. The bureaucracy continued to be controlled by the Brahmans, and the land was mainly in the hands of the Lingayat and Vokkaliga communities. But the majority of voters were poor cultivators, tenants, and the landless. Hence, as a fall-out of national policy, the state government could not long resist the demand for a redistributive land reforms policy.

It was in this setting that a Land Reforms Committee, popularly known as the Jatti Committee, was appointed in May 1957 to recommend appropriate land reform policy measures. The Committee submitted its report in September 1958 and, based on its recommendations, a bill was presented in the same year to the state legislature. The bill was finally passed in 1961 and received the assent of the President in 1962. However, the Act was put into effect only in October 1965.

This long delay provides a typical example of the manner in which group interests operate through political pressures. It may be noted that the legislative measures adopted by the state government during the 1940s and the early 1950s made the landlords somewhat wiser. As a follow-up, attempts were made to develop a strong lobby at all levels of decision making. The modus operandi of the landed interests was first to send their own representatives to the Legislature and even to capture important portfolios in the state cabinet so that their hold over the policy-making apparatus of the state government was strengthened. Table 1 presents the composition by caste of the state legislature from 1952 to 1972 and shows that the Lingayat and the Vokkaliga communities, the traditional landowners in the state, held the majority in the legislature. The political party membership by caste (particularly the ruling party) conforms to the same pattern (see Table 4). That the members of the Legislative Assembly and the Parliament (representing Karnataka) mostly came from the landed interests is evident from Tables 2 and 3, which present the occupational breakdown of the membership. The occupation of the majority of these members was agriculture. It is interesting to note that among the land-owning castes, the Vokkaliga and the Lingayat

TABLE 1 *Composition of the Legislative Assembly by Caste, 1952-1972 Elections*

<i>Caste/Community</i>	1952		1957		1962		1967		1972	
	<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>
Brahman	14	11	9	6.75	8	6	8	6	11	6
Lingayat	45	35	47	33	45	34	49	36	43	24
Vokkaliga	33	26	35	25	35	27	36	26	52	29
Other Hindus	12	9	22	15	20	14	17	12	37	22
Scheduled Castes	20	16	22	15	21	16	24	17	23	12.5
Scheduled Tribes	—	—	2	1.50	1	1	—	—	2	1
Christian	—	—	1	0.75	—	—	1	0.75	5	3
Jain	2	2	3	2.25	1	1	1	0.75	1	0.5
Muslim	1	1	1	0.75	1	1	2	1.50	4	2
TOTAL	127	100	142	100	132	100	138	100	178	100

SOURCE: *Karnataka Backward Classes Commission Report*, Vol. IV (Bangalore: Government of Karnataka, 1975), pp. 822-823.

communities dominated not only the rural scene but also, as Table 5 shows, those households owning lands over and above ten acres. And this position continued until the early 1970s—a fact of great interest from the point of view of our analysis. Given this composition of the legislature, what outcome may one expect on land reforms? To answer this, let us look at the provisions of the 1961 Act.

In the first place, the landed interests managed to get a high ceiling on land holdings—as high as 27 standard acres per family of five members. Further, differences in soil fertility, irrigation facilities, and land use patterns were considered in fixing differential ceilings. Thus in terms of dry land, the 27 standard acres were declared equivalent to 216 acres. To top this, there was a provision for granting extra acreage for each additional member over and above the standard family of five to a maximum of 432 acres of dry land for a family of just 10 members. It is evident that the landed interests managed to wrest concessions on ceiling limitations. In fact, attempts were also made to take full advantage of the exemptions allowed for widows, the physically handicapped, and the provision to treat each adult son as an

TABLE 2 *Composition of the Legislative Assembly by Occupation, 1972 Election*

<i>Occupation</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>
Agriculture	99	56
Legal practice	51	29
Business	6	3
Other	22	12
TOTAL	178	100

SOURCE: *Karnataka Backward Class Commission Report*, Vol. IV, pp. 822-823.

independent unit for purposes of fixing land ceilings—and thereby to defeat the objectives of land reform legislation.

While the landed interests managed to dilute the land ceiling provisions, it is surprising that they did not offer much resistance to the tenancy regulations. These regulations consisted chiefly of regulated rents (a fourth of the gross produce in the case of irrigated lands and a fifth in the case of other lands), and regulated tenures. In respect to the latter, some restrictions were imposed on the practice hitherto followed by landlords to evict tenants on grounds of resuming lands for self-cultivation. However, this provision of the 1961 Act was not enforced effectively. As a result, the number of tenants evicted by the landlords under the pretext of self-cultivation increased phenomenally.

In the context of these seemingly stiff tenancy regulations on the one hand and the diluted provisions for land ceilings on the other, two questions arise: (1) Was this some sort of trade-off (strict tenancy regulations in exchange for diluted ceiling provisions) agreed to by the landed interests to assuage the feelings of the more radical members among the legislators?; (2) Was this the consequence of the interplay of several group interests? The second hypothesis appears to be more plausible. It may be noted that the absentee landlords by and large belonged to the upper stratum of the society (Brahmans) who, having taken up jobs in government and private business establishments, had moved to urban areas, leasing their lands to the tenants. The tenants, who mostly belonged to the dominant communities (Lingayat and Vokkaliga castes), had the sympathies of the policy makers in the state government, which was controlled by political leaders belonging to these

TABLE 3 *Composition of the Legislative Assembly by Occupation, 1952-1971 Elections*

Occupation	1952		1957		1962		1965		1967		1968		1969		1971	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Agriculture	5	33	6	26	4	34	—	—	7	23	—	—	1	100	7	15
Trade and business	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	3	9	—	—	—	—	12	25
Legal practice	1	7	2	9	1	8	—	—	2	6	—	—	—	—	4	8
Social work	1	7	—	—	—	—	—	—	2	6	—	—	—	—	1	2
Unspecified	8	53	15	65	7	58	3	100	18	56	5	100	—	—	24	50
TOTAL	15	100	23	100	12	100	3	100	32	100	5	100	1	100	48	100

SOURCE: *Karnataka Backward Classes Commission Report*, Vol. IV, p. 829.

TABLE 4 Composition by Caste of Various Political Parties in Karnataka, 1972

Caste/Tribe/ Community	Congress (R)		Congress (D)		Socialist Party		CPI		CPM		Jana Sangh		Republican Party		Other Parties	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Brahman	44	6	20	7	3	6	—	—	—	—	3	11	6	75	4	36
Lingayat	94	13	91	33	8	16	—	—	—	—	2	7	—	—	4	36
Vokkaliga	85	12	50	18	—	—	—	—	—	—	3	11	—	—	1	10
Other																
Hindus	210	29	74	27	37	73	3	100	6	100	14	50	2	25	2	18
Scheduled Castes	90	12	8	3	2	4	—	—	—	—	4	14	—	—	—	—
Scheduled Tribes	—	—	1	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	4	—	—	—	—
Christian	12	2	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Jain	3	—	5	2	1	1	—	—	—	—	1	3	—	—	—	—
Muslim	185	26	25	9	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
TOTAL	723	100	274	100	51	100	3	100	6	100	28	100	8	100	11	100

SOURCE: Karnataka Backward Classes Commission Report, Vol. IV, pp. 717-725

TABLE 5 Number of Households by Caste and Size of Operational Holdings, 1961

Caste/Tribe/ Community	Less than 1.00	Size of Holdings (acres)				10.00	Total Households	No. of households in each caste as percentage of total households
		1.00- 2.50	2.50- 5.00	5.00- 10.00	10.00			
Vokkaliga	9 (1.18)	87 (11.43)	178 (23.38)	244 (32.06)	243 (31.94)	761 (100)	15.18	
Lingayat	10 (0.80)	87 (6.88)	176 (13.94)	263 (20.82)	727 (57.56)	1263 (100)	25.19	
Kuruba	8 (1.50)	72 (13.44)	145 (27.05)	161 (30.00)	150 (27.98)	536 (100)	10.69	
Scheduled Castes	41 (7.26)	201 (35.64)	184 (32.64)	102 (18.08)	36 (6.38)	564 (100)	11.25	

Scheduled Tribes	—	1	4	—	1	6	0.12
		(16.67)	(66.67)		(16.67)	(100)	
Brahman	19 (6.80)	25 (8.92)	40 (14.28)	63 (22.50)	133 (47.50)	280 (100)	5.59
Other	82 (8.20)	209 (20.90)	251 (25.10)	247 (24.70)	211 (21.10)	1000 (100)	19.95
Hindus	50 (9.16)	105 (19.24)	121 (22.16)	119 (21.79)	151 (27.65)	546 (100)	10.89
Muslims	4	7	8	9	2	30	0.60
Christians	—	4	3	10	10	27	0.54
Jains	223	798	1110	1218	1664	5013	100.00
TOTAL							

SOURCE: S. Seshiah, *Levels of Living in Karnataka: As Seen Through Village Survey Monographs of 1961 Census* (mimeo), Bangalore: ISEC, 1976).

NOTE: Figures in parentheses are percentages.

communities. The land ceiling measures were obviously diluted so as to give the landlords living in the rural areas both "time" and "loopholes" to rearrange their land records in such a way as to keep their lands intact, whereas the stiff tenancy legislation was introduced to enable the tenants who belonged to the same dominant communities to divest the absentee landlords living in urban areas of their land ownership. But the landlords living in the rural areas had an escape provision introduced under which they could resume their leased lands on grounds of self-cultivation. This was mainly intended to help the landlords belonging to the Vokkaliga and Lingayat communities to take possession of their leased-out lands, since the Brahman absentee landlords were not expected to leave their secure jobs in urban areas to return to the troublesome rural areas. Thus, through legislative and administrative maneuvers, the self-interest of the dominant communities in power were protected.

#### *FROM 1971 TO 1977—THE 1974 ACT*

While the landed interests thus succeeded in wresting concessions for themselves under the 1961 Act, events after 1971 brought a different spectrum of interest groups into the arena. The split in the Congress Party in 1969, and the subsequent political events in Karnataka leading to the installation of a government dominated by the "backward" minority communities which did not have such extensive landed interests, provided the necessary ground for more radical land reforms. In addition, the bureaucracy, now also dominated by a community that had limited landed interests (see Tables 6 and 7), provided the much-needed administrative support base for a radical land reform policy. The guidelines proposed by the National Planning Commission in 1969 for stringent land reform measures and their adoption by the ruling Congress (R) Party therefore were not surprising. According to these guidelines, the standard family was to consist of five members—father, mother, and three minor children; the ceiling range was to be 10 to 18 acres of irrigated land, yielding two crops a year. Conversion ratios for other types of land were also given. The Fourth Plan suggested that tenants or sharecroppers should have effective security of tenure on the land they cultivated and that existing tenancies should be declared non-resumable and permanent.<sup>10</sup>

On the basis of the guidelines circulated by the central government, the Karnataka government moved to amend the 1961 Act. A comprehensive Bill was drafted and referred to a Joint Select Committee in 1971. The Bill was also thoroughly examined and debated in a seminar held under the

TABLE 6 *Representation of Communities in Government Service as of March 31, 1959*

<i>Caste/Tribe/ Community</i>	<i>No. of Gazetted Employees</i>	<i>% of Total</i>
Brahman	1012	30.84
Lingayat	488	14.87
Vokkaliga	316	9.63
Other Hindus	846	25.78
Scheduled Castes	101	3.08
Scheduled Tribes	4	0.12
Christians	148	4.51
Jains	53	1.62
Muslims	313	9.54
TOTAL	3281	100.00

SOURCE: *Mysore Backward Classes Committee, Final Report* (Bangalore: Government of Mysore, 1960), p. 45.

auspices of Mysore University, which was attended by the members of the Select Committee in addition to some select academicians.<sup>11</sup> Taking into account the recommendations of the Joint Select Committee,<sup>12</sup> the state government passed the Land Reforms (Amendment) Act in 1973 which received the assent of the President in March 1974.

Some notable features of this Act are: a total ban on the resumption of leased land by the landlords; abolition of tenancy except in the case of soldiers and seamen; reduction of land ceilings to ten standard acres; and the constitution of Land Tribunals in each taluk (with the Assistant Commissioner serving as chairman, the Tahsildar as secretary, and including the local MLA and three non-official members, one of whom should belong to a Scheduled Caste or Scheduled Tribe) to decide on the claims of the tenants on the land cultivated by them.

No doubt the provisions of the 1974 Act<sup>13</sup> are more radical than those passed by any other state in India in that the ceilings were fixed at the minimum level suggested by the central government, and the law provided for non-resumption of leased land and the abolition of tenancy. Obviously, the noose was tightened around the necks of the landed interests both on the tenancy and on the land ceiling issues. Obviously, in the interplay of

TABLE 7 Caste/Community Representation in the Bureaucracy

Caste/Tribe/ Community	Class I Officers				Class II Officers				Class I & II Total			
	P	%	T	%	Total	%	P	%	T	%	Total	%
Brahman	54	34.6	4	44.4	58	35.1	94	30.2	7	43.7	101	30.8
Lingayat	20	12.8	—	—	20	12.1	37	11.8	1	6.2	38	11.6
Vokkaliga	11	7.0	2	22.2	13	7.8	26	8.3	1	6.2	27	8.2
Other Hindus	33	21.1	—	—	33	20.0	90	28.9	2	12.5	92	28.1
Scheduled Castes	14	8.9	2	22.2	16	9.6	18	5.7	1	6.2	19	5.8
Scheduled Tribes	1	0.6	—	—	1	0.6	2	0.6	1	6.2	3	0.9
Christian	5	3.2	1	11.1	6	3.6	13	4.1	—	—	13	3.9
Jain	4	2.5	—	—	4	2.4	2	0.6	—	—	2	0.6
Muslim	14	8.9	—	—	14	8.4	29	9.3	3	18.7	32	9.7
TOTAL	156		9		165		311		16		327	

SOURCE: Compiled from *Karnataka Backward Classes Commissions Report*, Vol. IV.

NOTE: The bureaucracy includes the Government Secretariat and the Offices of Divisional, Deputy, and Assistant Commissioners and Tahsildars. P = permanent; T = temporary.

group interests, the landlords had lost their traditional hold on the policy-making apparatus. This was not unexpected considering the changes that occurred in the composition of the state legislature in 1972 (see Table 1). The traditional Karnataka landowning castes—Vokkaligas and Lingayats—together had dominated the legislature before the 1972 election (having captured well over 60% of the seats in the Assembly). Their strength was reduced somewhat in the 1972 election while the hitherto non-articulate Scheduled groups and minority “Backward” classes had gained and captured positions of political power. These caste groups, aligning themselves with the tenants and the landless, made a major issue of land acquisition (by fixing very low ceilings) and land distribution to the landless as part of their strategy to continue in power. This objective of the new ruling class also coincided with that of the dominant section in the bureaucracy who by 1972 had lost their land either because of land sales on their own or because of the earlier land reform legislation. The stiff land legislation provisions are thus the result of a rare alliance struck between the state government dominated by non-landed interests and the bureaucracy.

Table 8 presents a comparison of the implementation of the 1974 Land Reforms Act during the emergency (1975–77) and post-emergency (1978–80) periods. These coincide with the pre-1977 period during which the 1974 Act was forcibly implemented and post-1977 period during which the new phase emerged. The data presented in Table 8 on tenancy applications refer to the state as a whole, but those on ceiling declarations refer to only five districts of northern Karnataka—Belgaum, Bijapur, Dharwar, Gulbarga, and Raichur. Since these five districts together account for a major part of the overall ceiling declarations, our findings based on these data do not involve substantial underestimation. Because of the widespread peasant-proprietor land system and the passing of the earlier tenancy legislation in other parts of the state, the number of large land holdings was small.

The progress in implementing land reforms during the period after 1977 was not as spectacular as it had been earlier. The trend on ceiling declarations during 1975–77 and 1978–80 clearly indicates that those received by the Land Tribunals were substantially greater in the earlier period and that disposals constituted about 60% of the total declarations received. In the post-1977 period, the ceiling declarations received suddenly declined, but the disposals remained substantial as declarations accumulated during the previous period were also cleared. In the case of tenancy applications, it is again clear that they were substantially higher during the pre-1977 period than thereafter.

TABLE 8 *Comparison of the Implementation of the Land Reforms Act of 1974 in Karnataka, pre-1977 and post-1977 periods*

Year	Ceiling Declarations*		Tenancy Applications	
	Received	Disposed	Received	Disposed
1975	86,337	12,792	573,190	61,285
1976	4,263	26,009	145,923	160,754
1977	130	12,610	29,603	131,653
Total pre-1977	90,730	51,411	748,716	353,692
1978	9	2,388	2,058	47,257
1979	258	6,171	65,976	131,751
1980	75	2,082	—	43,503
Total post-1977	342	10,641	68,034	222,511

SOURCE: Revenue Secretariat, Government of Karnataka, compiled by MAS Rajan, "An Analysis of Land Reforms statistics of Karnataka," a seminar paper (Mimeo), ISEC, Bangalore, 1982.

NOTE: Ceiling declarations and tenancy applications received by the Land Tribunals refer, respectively, to the declarations required to be made under 1974 Act by those who had surplus land to declare, and applications by tenants of land owned by others to claim ownership of that land. The ceiling declarations and tenancy applications disposed refer, respectively, to the cases decided by the Land Tribunals.

\*Refer only to Belgaum, Bijapur, Dharwar, Gulbarga, and Raichur districts.

The number of ceiling declarations and tenancy applications received by the Land Tribunals taper off as we move away from the year 1975. But what is surprising is the decline in the number of disposals. It is true that during the pre-1977 period roughly 40,000 ceiling cases and 400,000 tenancy cases were carried forward to the post-1977 period, to which 342 new ceiling declarations and 68,034 new tenancy applications were added. But what is glaringly evident is the lower level of disposals during the later period than during the earlier. This is so in spite of an increase from 175 in 1976 to 194 by 1980 in the number of Land Tribunals set up for the disposal of cases.

What is more, complaints against the functioning of the Land Tribunals came to be voiced from different quarters, particularly about the style of functioning of the non-official members nominated by the state government. In fact, press reports highlighted the slow pace of disposals in later years because of political interference by the landed interests. Thus it is clear that implementation of land reforms suffered a set-back after 1977 as compared to the pre-1977 period.

*THE POST-1977 PERIOD—A NEW PHASE*

The foregoing analysis of the evolution of land reform legislation and its implementation in Karnataka suggests that though land reforms were initially conceived as policy measures for socioeconomic change in the rural agrarian structure, this objective could not be achieved in actual practice because those who formulated the policies were either themselves landlords or their representatives. Naturally delay tactics were resorted to, and loopholes in policies and legislation intended to implement land reforms were also created by these vested interests. But the land reform legislation introduced after the 1972 election became effective mainly because the legislature was freed from the dominance of the landed interests (i.e., Vokkaligas and Lingayats), and the bureaucracy had decided to support the new ruling group composed of minority communities and Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.

But this change of government and also in the attitude of the bureaucracy toward implementation of the land reform legislation did not last long. The political upheaval in the state after the declaration of a National Emergency in 1975 created an awareness among the former dominant majority communities that they should struggle for power to protect their own interests. The dominant majority communities began to infiltrate through political defection whichever political party was in power. Such defections to the ruling party have now become widespread from the village panchayat level to the central government level. Once in the ruling party, it is easy for these groups to resort to pressure tactics in order to delay the effective implementation of the stringent land reform measures. What is more, the bureaucracy, which had remained mainly in the hands of Brahmans in the 1960s, lost its monolithic character with the entry of a large number of persons belonging to the landed interests and the "Backward" communities. Both these factors rendered the alliance between the new bureaucracy and the government somewhat ineffective. The functioning of the Land Tribunals, consisting of the nonofficial representatives and two representatives from the heterogenous bureaucracy with only a single representative from the oppressed castes, bears evidence to this.

Thus there appears to be some degree of credence in our hypothesis that the government, the bureaucracy, the landed interests, and tenants and landless laborers are all motivated by their own self-interests and that in order to serve their own interests, they tend to formulate such policies and implement them in such a way as to maximize their own interests. Whenever such group interests conflict with the interests of other groups, they enter into alliances to achieve their own goals.

## Policy Implications

The policy implication of this study is that in a country like India, which is ridden with social and economic inequalities, the political parties and the bureaucracy must be broad based if radical socioeconomic policies are to be implemented in such a democracy. It is naive to advocate secularism in political parties when the society itself is divided into so many religious and caste groups, quite apart from occupational and economic groupings. So long as the political parties, and particularly the ruling party, do not screen members before admitting them, the free play of economic and social self interests of these members will continue to thwart the measures intended for socioeconomic change, making a mockery of political ideologies and declared radical policies. On the same grounds, the composition of the bureaucracy must also be broad-based in terms of both economic and social groups so that its manipulative power is weakened. The broad-based composition of the political parties and the bureaucracy will enable the weaker sections of the society to have a voice in policy making at the political party level and also in policy implementation at the bureaucratic level.

## Notes

1. *Rural Asia: Challenge and Opportunity* (London: Praeger, 1977), p. 101.
2. A recent study of land reforms in Karnataka brings out the point that the implementation of land reform measures, particularly with respect to land ceilings, has been unimpressive. See Narendar Pani, *Reforms to Pre-employment Change: Land Legislation in Karnataka* (Mimeo), (Bangalore: Indian Institute of Management, 1981), p. 150.
3. Of course, the "backward" communities and minorities have also been in the race for power in recent years. For a detailed account of the power politics of the state, see James Manor, "Pragmatic Progressives in Regional Politics: The Case of Devaraj Urs," *Economic and Political Weekly*, XV:5, 6, and 7, Annual Number, February 1980. Also see Glynn Wood and Robert Hammond, "Electoral Politics in a Congress-Dominant State: Mysore 1956-1972," in Myron Weiner and John Osgood Field (eds.), *Electoral Politics in the Indian States: Party Systems and Cleavages* (Delhi: Manohar Book Service, 1975).
4. Government of Karnataka, Planning Department, *Development Perspective for Agriculture and Irrigation: Karnataka—1978 to 1988*, Bangalore, 1978, p. 2.
5. Compiled from Bureau of Economics and Statistics, Government of Karnataka, *Annual Season and Crop Report, 1971-72 to 1977-78*, Bangalore.
6. For a detailed account of the State's attempts to exploit the natural resources and to build the economy on sound lines, see V.K.R.V. Rao (ed.), *Planning in Perspective: Policy Choices in Planning for Karnataka, 1973-74 to 1988-89* (Bombay: Allied Publishers, 1978).
7. See Government of Karnataka, Planning Department, *Draft Sixth Five-Year Plan, 1980-85*, Bangalore, 1980; F.C.S. Vivekananda, *Unemployment in Karnataka: South India* (Uppsala: Acta Universitatis upsaliensis, 1979); and G. Thimmaiah, *Inequality and Poverty in Karnataka* (Bombay: Himalaya Publishing Company, 1982).
8. See *Draft Sixth Five-Year Plan 1980-85*.
9. For a detailed account of this, see P. T. George, "Land System and Laws in Mysore State," *Artha Vijjana*, March-June 1970.

10. The Planning Commission, *The Fourth Five-Year Plan* (New Delhi: Government of India, 1969).
11. For the papers on the subject and discussion on various provisions of the Bill, see R. P. Mishra and V. K. Natraj (eds.), *Land Reforms in Mysore State* (Mysore: Institute of Development Studies, Mysore University, 1972).
12. The caste composition and land ownership of the members of this Joint Select Committee are worth examining. However, our efforts in this direction were not successful.
13. For details see M. A. S. Rajan, *The Land Reform Law in Karnataka* (Bangalore: Government of Karnataka, 1979).