

The Agrarian Policy of the Young Turks 1908-1918

The Young Turk revolution of July 1908 aroused great hopes in town and country as revolutions, or radical changes of régime are apt to do. In both cases these hopes were largely disappointed as the governments of the new régime did little to satisfy the expectations of the urban poor or the peasantry. Not that the peasants were particularly demanding, judging by their complaints to Ahmed Şerif, a journalist who toured Anatolia during 1909-1910. He does not even mention any signs of peasant militancy, except indirectly when he relates incidents of banditry which were quite widespread in Anatolia during this period.¹ A year after the restoration of the Constitution, nothing seemed to have changed for the better. The reply of an old peasant, responding to Ahmed Şerif's questions as to how the State treated the peasantry, and whether they were happy with the newly restored liberty, deserves to be quoted at length as an illustration of the prevailing situation in the countryside:

1 Ahmed Şerif, *Anadolu'da Tanin*, 1977, pp. 25-6, 156, 217 et 321. Originally published as articles in *Tanin*, an İstanbul daily, these articles were collected and published in 1910. Çetin Börekçi's 1977 edition is more complete as some articles were left out of the first edition.

Liberty [he said] was a word we only began to hear recently. But from what we have heard, and from some activities, we understand that it is something worthwhile... But we thought that everything could be rectified; taxes would be collected justly and peacefully [i.e. without coercion]; murderers and thieves in the village would be reformed; our children who go to military service would not be kept hungry and naked for years, but would be discharged in time; officials would not do things as they pleased and everything would be changed. But so far nothing has happened. In the past some things used to even function better; today everything is in a mess. If we go to a government office we do not know who is in charge... The government still does not look into our problems... Several people hold the deed for a particular field and we are not sure whether the ground we till belongs to us or not. Because of that there are fights everyday and sometimes people are killed. We go to the state office and the court but we cannot explain our problem. They only think of collecting taxes when they are due... We work all year round and we pay our taxes annually; if we don't they take them by force, even selling our pots and bedding. Thus we are always in debt. During the past few years there have been many peasants in the village who have not had seed to sow. Since there is no help from anywhere else we have to buy seed from the *ağa* at either 100-125 *kuruş* per *kile* or return him three *kile* for one. Those *ağas* became a menace; they can have the peasant beaten by their toughs, have him jailed, or sometimes have him intimidated by the intervention of the state. In this way they collect their debt from those who cannot pay. As a matter of fact the Agricultural Bank is giving loans but that does not help us. That money runs out before it reaches our village.²

The passage, one of many in which Ahmed Şerif describes the problem of the peasantry as well as its expectations, reflects the situa-

2 *Ibid.*, pp. 46,7. Earlier, on p. 25, Ahmed Şerif commented: "What the peasant cannot understand is that even though he has been hearing a great many promises during the past year, he has not seen them kept, not even those which would have been easy to carry out. He wants to see the venal and corrupt official removed: he wants to know that there is no need to quake any longer with fear before the gendarmes whom he feeds free of charge, and provides food for his beasts. He wants to see those things change which seem unimportant to us but are very important to him."

tion in September 1909. But there was no change for the better during the rest of the decade, or indeed even in the generation that followed. In fact, the foundations of Republican rural policy may be said to have been firmly laid by the Young Turks.³ Not that they intended to maintain the status quo in the countryside and pursue a conservative agrarian policy,⁴ on the contrary, it was generally agreed that:

according to the rural policy of the day, it was vital to save the peasant from the feudal lords (*derebeys*) and their successors, the *ağas* and the notables (*eşraf*).

Nor was all the talk against feudalism (*derebeylik*) mere political rhetoric, the Unionist *vali* of Aleppo Hüseyin Kâzım issued a proclamation to the people of the province in which

he used strong language about the notables and the *ağas* announced that an end would be put to their oppression. There was a reaction to this proclamation from all sides. Because the *İstanbul paper Avvam* printed this proclamation, it received letters of congratulations from many of its readers in Anatolia and Rumelia.⁵

Despite such threats by prominent Unionists, the CUP as a body never seems to have envisioned changing the status quo in the countryside by ending the social, economic, and political domination of the landlords. Şanda has a point when he argues that the only way the Ottoman state could continue to pay its foreign debts and balance its budgets was by retaining the tithe, described by Namık Kemal as a curse on the peasantry. Moreover, exploitation of the peasantry had become the principal source of capital accumulation, especially, as we

3 The term 'Young Turks' describes all factions opposed to Abdülhamid's autocracy, while 'Unionists' refers only to members of the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP), who were also Young Turks.

4 Hüseyin Avni Şanda, *Reaya ve Köylü*, 1970 ed., p. 10. See also İsmail Hüsrev [Tokin], *Türkiye Köy İktisadîyatı*, 1934, pp. 154-72, 176ff. for a description and analysis of *derebeylik* in the late Ottoman Empire and the early Republic.

5 *Avvam*, 23 oct. 1910, cited by Şanda, *Reaya*, p. 10.

shall see, after the start of the war in 1914 when the demand for farm produce increased very sharply.⁶ However, apart from these practical reasons, there were also structural reasons which hampered an active policy against landed interests.

During the course of the nineteenth century, as the Ottoman economy was progressively penetrated by European enterprise, land was the last bastion to be threatened. The Porte stubbornly refused to allow foreigners to own land under the privileges of the capitulations because "... if Europeans were to come among us in that way, and to hold estates, [said a bureaucrat of the Sublime Porte to Charles MacFarlane] they would soon drive us out of the country."⁷ Meanwhile all Tanzimat legislation relating to land, especially the Land Code of 1858, seemed to be designed to strengthen the power of the landowning notables by legitimizing their holdings. At about the same time – in 1857 and 1864 – the laws on the reorganization of the municipalities and the province gave these notables representation on the various councils and they therefore emerged as communal leaders. The proclamation of the constitution in 1876 and the parliament that was elected the following year increased their political power for they could now actively lobby for their interests. The same was true after 1908 but they could now go a step further and organize themselves in political parties. Despite their political inexperience, the Unionists recognized the reality of the situation and abandoned all attempts – even the talk of eradicating feudalism. Before going any further, let us examine briefly how this controversial term may be used fruitfully to understand an important aspect of the late Ottoman Empire.⁸

6 *Ibid.*, p. 12-13, of course production fell dramatically, increasing prices even further.

7 Charles MacFarlane, *Turkey and Its Destiny*, 1850, vol. ii, pp. 171-7 quoted by Ali Tosun Arıcanlı, *The Role of the State in the Social and Economic Transformation of the Ottoman Empire 1807-1918*, unpublished Ph. D. Harvard University 1976, p. 111. See also Nasim Sousa, *The Capitulatory Régime of Turkey*, 1933.

8 Arıcanlı, "The State", chapter 1 and sections iii-v of ch. 3; Kemal Karpat, *An Inquiry into the Social Foundations of Nationalism in the Ottoman Empire*, 1973, p. 98; idem, "The Ottoman Parliament of 1877 and Its Social Significance", *Association Internationale d'Études de Sud-Est Européen*, 1969.

If we consider feudalism as a system of government then we must conclude that there was no feudalism in the Ottoman Empire after the abolition of the *timar* system. Thereafter the state was too centralized and bureaucratized to need personal ties, or to share power with the army. But if we are more generous with our criteria of feudalism and feudal society and include the question of the social organization of production, the forms that landed property took, or the methods of extracting surplus in our discussion, then elements of feudalism lived well into twentieth-century Turkey.⁹ In nineteenth-century Turkey there were two seemingly contradictory tendencies to be observed. On the one hand there was the transformation from overlordship based on traditional *timar* rights to the landlord's claim based on private ownership, in fact if not in theory. Claim to ownership became increasingly important as land values increased with improved communications and commercialized agriculture. With the formation of the Agricultural Bank in 1888 land was used as collateral against loans, and that implied ownership as a peasant proprietor or landlord could hardly mortgage his "feudal privileges" and claims. On the other hand, the landlord continued to exercise his traditional powers based on his right to demand service from his peasants, both in the form of labour and a share of his produce. The landlord's economic superiority gave him a social and political control over his peasants that went beyond his economic resources. He extracted services and surplus, if need be by illegal means and intimidation, using hired retainers or his links with the local state apparatus the *vali* or *kaymakam*, the judge or tax collector.¹⁰ This factor of coercion – common to feudalism in general – needs to be stressed, as well as the extra-market character of domination which prevailed in the social relationship. Thus, to repeat, the principal method of extracting surplus from the peasant continued to be labour – rent or *corvée* (*angarya*) as against

9 Hüsrev, *Köy*, pp. 154-73 and 176; Şanda, *Reaya*, pp. 40-41.

10 Ahmed Şerif, *Tanin*, passim; Ahmed Emin, *Turkey in the World War*, 1930, p. 80; Behice Boran, *Toplumsal Yapı Araştırmaları*, 1945, p. 40 and passim.

post-feudal wage labour. It is not that wage labour did not exist, it did in certain regions. But in such regions there was a shortage of labour and the prevailing high wages encouraged the landlord to continue using forced labour. Thus while land was rapidly taking the form of a commodity, labour was not.

The elements of feudalism are to be found in the relationship between lord and peasant at one level, and between lord and state at another. Political authority continued to be personal and decentralized even after the bureaucratisation of the Tanzimat reforms. While the power of the state was acknowledged by the lord it was not allowed to prevail in the local relationship for the notables exercised "seignorial jurisdiction" i.e. de facto judicial and sometimes administrative authority over the peasants. In such circumstances state authority did not go beyond the payment of taxes by the notables. Thus a relatively small group of people monopolized local power and they alone enjoyed political rights, especially under the constitution. To the peasant the existence of the state became virtually irrelevant even though he continued to pin great hopes on it as his saviour. Another reason why feudal relations continued to prevail into the twentieth century was the insecurity in the countryside during the long period of decline marked by rebellions, wars and banditry. The peasants met their need for protection by organizing their villages close together and seeking the patronage of local Beys. A sociologist reporting the findings of her fieldwork in the Manisa region in 1941, concluded that "Essentially, insecurity and the need for protection are prominent features of a feudal-type society, and the stories about the founding of the villages of Kepenekli and Sarı Çam reflect these elements explicitly."¹¹

Istanbul recognized reality by accepting the status quo, and a precarious social peace and stability continued to prevail in the countryside. Attempts to modify these feudal relationships tended to produce sharp reactions from both lord and peasant, dangerous to the

11 B. Boran, p. 61.

régime in the capital. The Unionists – like the Kemalists after them – understood the situation too well to attempt a “bourgeois revolution” by destroying the power of the anti-reformist landlords. Instead they compromised with them by giving them control over parliament, effectively tying their own hands and making legislation threatening to landed interests impossible. In return they were able to carry out some institutional reforms, thus modernizing the state structure.

After the restoration of the constitution, there was, nonetheless, apprehension and expectation in the countryside; apprehension among the landlords who feared a radical agrarian policy threatening to their position, and expectations from the oppressed peasantry which believed, naively as it turned out, that the new régime would introduce changes beneficial to their lives. In their first flush of glory and while they were at their most radical, the Unionists did propose measures intended to lighten the burden of the peasant. The land question was discussed at the 1908 Unionist congress in Salonica, and the Committee decided to ask the government to prepare conditions for distributing land to peasants provided that ownership of land legally held and protected by lawful possession was not violated; to facilitate this by providing loans at minimum interest; to reduce the tithe by half as a sound basis for taxation and to introduce this wherever possible. Later on a cadastral system would be introduced gradually. For the rest the CUP promised to encourage the development of agriculture in every way possible, especially by establishing agricultural schools throughout the empire in order to teach modern methods.¹²

This was Unionist land policy at its most radical. Never again would they officially propose land distribution or cheap loans for the peasantry. Not that there was pressure on land, there was not.¹³ But

12 T. Z. Tunaya, *Türkiye’de Siyasi Partiler, 1859-1952*, pp. 206-10.

13 Orhan Erinc, “Toprak Politika ve İnsanlar”, *Cumhuriyet*, 17 April 1971 gives the following breakdown for landownership in 1913: One per cent of the population, including feudal lords (*derebey tip ağalar*) occupied 39 per cent of the land; 87 per cent, including small and middle families, occupied 35 per cent of the land; 4 per cent, including large landowners (*toprak*

land distribution which enabled the peasantry to subsist independently of the landlords would have deprived the latter of forced labour. Ironically, that might have forced them to mechanize to compensate for expensive labour, thereby unwittingly modernizing agriculture. But as with landlords everywhere they preferred the old ways which required hardly any investment to a new system which would have needed considerable capital investment and also challenged their traditional domination.

The experiences of the first year of the constitution also made the Unionists cautious about reform. Austria-Hungary's annexation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria's declaration of independence, the Cretan question, and the generally unsympathetic attitude of Europe towards the CUP weakened their position. Domestically, the Unionists were confronted with the opposition of both the conservatives and the liberals which culminated in the reactionary rebellion of April 1909.¹⁴ As a result of all these setbacks, the Unionists reconsidered their already moderate agrarian policy and took the path of least resistance. They adopted the Tanzimat policy of strengthening the hold of the landlords through laws which further extended their control over the land. At the same time they encouraged the farmers to use modern methods and increase productivity for both home consumption and export. This policy was reflected in the decisions of the CUP congresses held before 1913 when Unionists were not in power but only influential behind the scene, and in 1913 after they had seized power. In 1909 Unionist delegates, having dropped all talk of land distribu-

ağaları) occupied 26 per cent of the land. 8 per cent were landless. A. D. Novichev, *Ekonomika Turtsii v period mirovoi vojn* (The Economy of Turkey during the World War), 1935, 8, writes: "The *métayage* system was all powerful in the Turkish village. Of all the cultivable land 65 per cent belonged to the big and average-scale landowner, while 35 per cent of this land consisted of farmsteads in possession of 95 per cent of the peasants'." A German, writing in 1916, noted that only about three-eighths of the cultivable soil was in use and the density of population was 11.5 per square kilometre compared to Germany's 120. He complained that the Turks were not permitting Germans to farm in Turkey. See Dr Kurt Zander's article in *Schwabischer Merkur*, 2 May 1916, in War Office, *Dail Review of the Foreign Press*, 12 May 1916 (hereafter DRFP).

¹⁴ For the politics of these years, see Feroz Ahmad, *The Young Turks*, 1969.

tion, agreed to encourage scientific agriculture by founding agricultural schools, and to eliminate all obstacles that stood in the way of agricultural, commercial, and industrial progress. They promised to give greater importance to agriculture, and to pass legislation to facilitate ownership and the right to transfer land.¹⁵ Nevertheless, once in power the Unionists again showed some concern for the welfare of the peasantry. They again spoke of halving the tithe "if the condition of the state treasury permits", as well as reforming its collection along cadastral lines. They proposed reducing the tax on farm animals and reforming its collection, and announced that a law would be promulgated which would regulate the relations between the farmer and reapers, those hired by the month, and sharecroppers.¹⁶ But these remained paper schemes and with the outbreak of war the following year the condition of the Turkish peasantry deteriorated dramatically.

Despite wavering Unionist policy, there was one change brought about by the 1908 Revolution that had a marked impact on all aspects of Ottoman life, including agriculture: the transformation in the character of the state and its ideology. The Hamidian state had been narrowly based, narrow in outlook, and concerned primarily about the interests of the dynasty. Its response to interests such as those of the landlords was pragmatic and manipulative, largely designed to co-opt. them. The state made no concerted effort to give direction and leadership to this class by guiding it towards progressive agriculture. If there was a tendency towards commercialization it resulted from the empire's absorption into the world capitalist market and existed mainly in regions close to ports or railways. The state did little to accelerate this process and without an active parliament the landlords, even if so inclined, were unable to act as a class on their own behalf.

All that changed in 1908. Not only did the constitution permit the various interest groups – economic and ethnic – to express their

¹⁵ Tunaya, *Partiler*, p. 211-12.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 216.

views in parliament and have the government act on their behalf, but the CUP went even further and adopted a statist policy of creating a class, the bourgeoisie, where none existed.¹⁷ Having abandoned the idea of carrying out a structural change in the countryside, the Unionists set about the task of hastening the process of commercialized agriculture. The state, too, was most receptive to the needs and demands of the landlords, who often found the provincial governors or Unionist members of parliament taking the lead in initiating modern farming methods, hoping that the local farmers would take note and follow. That, in short, became the agrarian policy of the Young Turks. But they found so much resistance to their schemes, that they came to regard agriculture as secondary, giving priority to commerce and industry in their endeavour to construct a modern national economy.

The behaviour of the farmers, far from being irrational and tradition bound, was based on their experience of competing in the world market against the agricultural produce of North America and nearer home, Russia and Rumania. With the advent of steamships foreign grain could be transported more economically to İstanbul than grain from the interior. The Porte could have protected Ottoman agriculture by raising tariffs but the capitulations did not permit that. Thus in the period after 1860 Ottoman agriculture declined, the farmers calculating that investments to modernize the methods of cultivation just were not worthwhile. "In the early 1880's [writes Engin Akarlı] the Ottomans were concerned about increasing exports, but by the mid-1890's they would be pleased if only domestic production could compete against imported crops."¹⁸ By the end of the nineteenth century, even while the trend in the world market was changing in favour of

17 Feroz Ahmad, "Vanguard of a Nascent Bourgeoisie: the Social and Economic Policy of the Young Turks 1908-1918", in Osman Okyar and Halil İnalçık (eds.), *Social and Economic History of Turkey (1071-1920)*, 1980, pp. 329-50.

18 Engin Akarlı, "Economic Problems of Abdülhamid's Reign (1876-1909)", paper presented at the Conference on Economy, Society, and Polity in the Magreb and Turkey, İstanbul, May 1975, p. 26.

Turkish grain, the area under cultivation remained stagnant, except for tobacco whose production continued to increase.¹⁹ The Ottoman farmer refused to take any initiative or risk while he was unable to rely on a state too weak to resist foreign manipulation. He preferred to obtain his income from rent, living as an absentee landlord in the town and letting his bailiff (*subaşı*) deal with the tenants who were usually share-croppers. Lucy Garnett, writing around 1904, noted:

The way in which an absentee proprietor spends his time when on an occasional visit to his estate naturally depends upon his pecuniary means and personal tastes... His duties as landlord are confined to regulating accounts with his agent, hearing and deciding cases between the functionary and the tenants, giving instructions for future farming operations, and, lastly, realizing the profits. As to improving the soil, introducing modern and labour-saving machinery, building model cottages, and otherwise ameliorating the moral and material conditions of his tenants – these are things that do not enter into the philosophy of a Turkish landed proprietor.²⁰

Such landlords, comfortable in their way of life, were unwilling to abandon it unless the state could guarantee a better future. Initially therefore they looked with alarm and suspicion at the schemes of the Young Turks and offered active opposition to them. But their opposition was not ostensibly caused by Unionist radicalism, which was their real fear, but rationalized by their social snobbery towards the CUP leadership. Consul Samson, reporting on the situation in Edirne in June 1910 wrote:

The view of the chief Turkish landowners, which I have gathered from conversations with certain of the more prominent amongst

19 *Ibid.*, p. 29; information based on Parvus, *Türkiye'nin Can Damarı*, 1914, p. 154-64. See also A. D. Novichev's essay translated in Charles Issawi (ed.), *The Economic History of the Middle East 1800-1914*, 1966, p. 66.

20 Lucy Garnett, *Turkish Life in Town and Country*, 1904, pp. 107-8. Her model is obviously the idealized enlightened English landlord.

them, is that the men at present responsible for the direction of affairs are unfitted for the task which they have undertaken.

Holders of these views contend that the higher officials of a country should possess at least one of two qualifications – either that of belonging by birth to a governing class, or the possession of exceptional administrative capacity. The party at present in power, it is stated, have no claims to it from either point of view. The Adrianople Beys reserve a special measure of scorn for the Minister of the Interior [Talât Bey, Paşa and grand vezir in 1917], whom they know as an official in the Telegraph Department here, and of whose qualifications they hold a very poor opinion.²¹

Another consul, writing from Diyarbakır, reported that local opposition was based on the protection of vested interests. In an earlier despatch he had informed his ambassador about reforms being carried out in the province. Following up this despatch he wrote:

... It is evident that a small but powerful class is daily becoming more and more enraged against what they consider as an attack upon their special privileges. These malcontents are the eshreffs of the town, and certain other tribal beys and aghas, who naturally look with loathing upon the democratic and, to their own interests, hostile intentions of the vali and the other reformers. Upto now they have, perforce, held their peace, but disturbances in the town fomented, it is generally admitted, by the eshreffs, have lately become more frequent.”

Acting Vice-Consul Rawlins then described how the *eşraf* undermined the position of an active reformer:

... One of the most energetic amongsts the local reformers is a certain Behjet Efendi, a captain in, but virtually commandant of, the gen-

²¹ Consul Samson to Lowther, Adrianople, 30 June 1910 in Lowther to Grey, no. 446, Constantinople, 4 July 1910, F.O. 371/999/24852. On the notables of Ayancık near Sinop, the Şükrüoğulları who were former *ayan* dating back to at least Mahmut II's reign see Rıza Nur, *Hayat ve Hatıratım*, i. 1967, pp. 255-8. Such families were to be found throughout Rumelia and Anatolia.

darmerie force of the vilayet. This man has brought down the anger of the eshreffs by his systematic patrolling of the neighbouring villages, and his fearless attacks upon, and intervention in, all cases of oppression and corruption. Under his leadership the gendarmerie has made good progress, and, instead of being as formerly a disorderly and corrupt body, it is rapidly becoming a well-trained force and an active agent for the preservation of law and order. All this is not at all to the liking of many of the local notables, who are beginning to understand that they must keep their places and cannot rule in the town and villages as heretofore. On the evening of the 10th instant matters came to a head when a large band of roughs, well known to be under the orders of some of the eshreffs, broke into some cafés and started a series of disturbances. Upon hearing of this, Behçet Efendi set out immediately for the scene of disorder, which appears was what the roughs wanted, and on his arrival was surrounded and severely beaten and mauled. Threats were also openly uttered by the roughs that the vali himself would shortly be treated in the same way if the "reforms" were persisted in. All this has made some stir in the town, and it is worthy of remark as being further evidence of the hostility of certain classes of the population to the methods of the new régime and the system of reforms...²²

The landlords operated on two fronts: locally where they had economic and political power they obstructed reform; and in parliament where they used their majority to either halt measures directed against them, or to introduce measures designed to further their interests. An example of the latter was a proposal by İsmail Sitki Bey, deputy for the grape-growing province of Aydın, to remove the tax on spirits. In his speech of 23 June 1909 he argued that this tax was the ruin of wine-growing districts and its removal would help discourage the rise of a new industry in harmless spirits. It was also necessary to take measures to prevent the import of foreign alcohols. As compensation for the loss of revenue by the state, the wine growers, he said, were even willing to pay a tithe on wines of up to 12 per cent. Finance

²² Acting Vice-Consul Rawlins to Lowther, Diyarbekir, 12 Jan. 1910, in Lowther to Grey, no. 45, Constantinople, 30 Jan. 1910, F.O. 371/1002/4225.

Minister Mehmed Cavid, one of the first Unionists in the cabinet, was sympathetic but observed that the suppression of the tax on spirits was impossible as it had been inserted in the Decree of Muharrem of 1881. That was an international engagement guaranteed by the capitulations and therefore inviolable. Moreover, its revenues were assigned to service the public debt and that too made it an international concern.²³

This example merely shows how foreign privileges had firmly tied the hands of the reformers and one may assume that this realization demoralized the progressive farmer, curbing his desire to modernise and innovate. Given the limitations imposed upon them by internal and external factors, the Young Turks could only hope to encourage agriculture by providing aid and incentives to the farmers. They wanted to create a market for rural goods by constructing a substantial network of roads and railways. Cavid's Salonica speech of 11 August 1910 sums up some of the aspirations of the reformers. He promised that 30,000 kilometres of roads would be constructed in the next five years not only suitable for pedestrians, horses, and wagons but also for motor traffic. That would be a great service for the rural population for in many provinces the cultivator was not able to transport his goods to market and was obliged to sell them locally at derisory prices; he sometimes even had to burn them. The construction of railways would also be accelerated; not only would existing projects, namely the Baghdad Railway, be completed, but new ones, opening up Anatolia and the Arab provinces, would be initiated. Turkey would have a further 9,000 kilometres of railways in addition to the 6,000 it already had.²⁴ But, as the correspondent of the *Deutsche Levante*

23 Enclosure of proceedings in parliament in Lowther to Grey, no. 624, *Therapia* 4 Aug. 1909, F.O. 371/761/29787.

24 *La Turquie and Tanin*, 12 Aug. 1910. The public works contracts were being parcelled to the Great Powers and E. G. Mears has noted that the parcelling out of special privileges to foreign nationals hindered the possibility of a unified transportation system and at the same time turned trade from its natural routes. After all, foreign concessionaries were more concerned with the commercial privileges which the railway concessions carried rather than the railway itself. See Mears, *Modern Turkey*, 1924, pp. 202 and 207.

Zeitung pointed out, roads and railways would now be built on an economic and not on a strategic basis as in the past.²⁵

If communications were going to create a new integrated market and demand, production would have to be stepped up to meet the challenge. The Young Turks intended to do that through ambitious irrigations projects in Anatolia and Iraq. The surveys to irrigate the plains of Konya and Cilicia were being carried out by the Deutsche Bank with the aim of irrigating 123,767 and 1,237,970 acres respectively. The irrigation of the Cilician plain would, it was thought, turn the country around Adana into another Egypt.²⁶ All these measures tended to increase land values with the result that the landlords were even more anxious to establish claim to lands which belonged to the peasantry. But the reformers seemed unconcerned about these injustices to the peasantry which they viewed as the price that had to be paid for modern agriculture, a price Europe, whose example they wished to emulate, had already extracted from her own peasants.

Side by side with these longer term schemes, the Porte also encouraged the farmer to mechanize. In some regions like western Anatolia and Adana, mechanization had already become a necessity on account of scarce and therefore expensive labour which could undermine production. In 1910, for example, there was an excellent harvest in the province of İzmir but a large portion of the crops was ruined because of a lack of labour at harvest time.²⁷ Mechanization was the answer and the state encouraged that by exempting farm machinery from import duties. It also appointed an official who directed an industrial exhibition which travelled throughout the province in 1910. A

25 Cited in *Levante Trade Review* (hereafter *LTR*) *V*iii, Dec. 1911, pp. 252-6.

26 *LTR*, *V*i, June 1911, 59-61. A later issue noted: "These irrigation improvements will greatly favor the raising of cotton and sugar cane. The Cilician plain is also traversed by the Baghdad Railway. There is also a railroad connecting Adana and Mersina. However it is intended also to render the Saihun and Jihan navigable. The rivers of Cilicia lend themselves to the generation of electric power, and the Turkish Government expects to develop an intense industrial life in that region." *LTR*, *vi*i, June 1916, p. 46.

27 *LTR*, *16*i, June 1911, pp. 59-61.

correspondent of the British monthly *The Near East* (20 Sept. 1911), vitally interested in the import of his country's machinery into the empire, noted that while farm machines were not in general use in Anatolia, the demand for ploughs, harvesters, and other farm tools was growing. According to his estimates for 1910 there were already 4,000 ploughs, 150 harrows, 50 cultivators, and 100 reapers in use in İzmir province. And among the reasons why many farmers were not mechanizing he listed insecurity of land tenure, the lack of land banks, and a lack of organizations of the peasants. This suggests that the middle peasant, who lacked security, was simply not willing to risk investing money on land he might lose at any time.²⁸

Despite all these measures to encourage agriculture, the question of property rights remained fundamental to progress in the countryside. An American observer of the Ottoman economic scene, noted that:

Throughout the Empire, especially in the rural districts, gold is hoarded in the form of jewelry and money. The present laws regarding real estate, while unduly restricting the mobility of invested capital, make for conservative dealings and solidity of position.

The passing of the proposed "Landed Property Code" by the incoming Parliament, which seems likely, will release wealth now tied up, accelerate industrial and commercial activity, increase land values, and generally contribute to the financial uplift of the country. This act will extend the right of inheritance, regulate the proprietorship (and transfer of land, render the ecclesiastical and

²⁸ Some landlords, anxious for more rapid progress and profits sought foreign collaboration. The correspondent for *The Near East*, 20 Sept. 1911, p. 477, reported: "Several large landowners in Asia Minor have asked me to say that they are prepared to offer good terms for British co-operation in fructifying their estates, which are well adapted for cotton growing and cereals as well as fruits..."

"The kind of proposition I have is one that cannot give any profit for a year or two, and possibly three, but which after that time may be expected to return a hundred per cent per annum of the capital expended for irrigation and for planting. Not only money is scarce in the country, but skill and machinery also."

Government property, (vakıf and miri lands) subject to mortgage, and enable corporation. Under present conditions, large areas, especially around the cities and towns, have become the property of pious foundations... Other areas are in effect rendered similarly unavailable, the title being vested in the Government, where it remains. While all such religious and public possession may be held by natives and foreigners alike, they are, in reality, only leasehold.²⁹

The Law of Transfer of Immovable Property was passed in 1913, marking an important step in the direction of establishing private property on land, and securing the confidence of the landed proprietors.³⁰ The law probably had the effect anticipated by Bie Ravndal and others, but that has yet to be confirmed. There is certainly evidence of capital accumulation in the countryside and that is manifested in the founding of agricultural companies formed to market and process regional produce. The Unionists actively encouraged this trend and on 8 June 1914 we find parliament authorizing the Agricultural Bank to aid the National Bank that was to be opened at Aydın by purchasing shares to the extent of half the proposed capital of TL 50,000.³¹ By the end of the year parliament began to debate amendments of the Agricultural Bank law so as to make its capital available not only for agriculture but agricultural industry referring to the processing and packaging of produce such as figs, tobacco, olive oil, etc. Not only would the bank merely participate in such ventures, it would, if necessary, become the major shareholder. That prompted Vartakes Efendi, the deputy for Erzurum, to say that "in that case it

29 Consul General g. Bie Ravndal, "Commercial Review of Turkey", *LTR*, II/6, Sept. 1912, pp. 138-51.

30 Gabriel Baer, "The Evolution of Private Landownership in Egypt and the Fertile Crescent" in Issawi (ed.), *Economic History*, pp. 85-6. For a detailed legal history of the evolution of private property in land in the Ottoman Empire see Halil Cin, *Miri Arazi ve Bu Arazinin Mülk Haline Dönüşümü*, 1969, pp. 148-53, and *passim* for the period under discussion.

31 Y. S. Atasagun, *Türkiye'de Zirai Borçlanma ve Zirai Kredi Politikası*, 1943, pp. 134-51; *The Orient*, VI/24, 17 June 1914, p. 233, and Ahmad, "Nascent Bourgeoisie", p. 342, n. 17 above.

would be the bank that would be doing business and not the people.” But the director of the bank was reassuring. He said that “the bank would withdraw completely from the venture after the companies had come into being.”³² Here surely is the early practice of the Kemalist economic philosophy of étatism as defined in the 1930s.

The war years proved most profitable for the new capitalist farmers. High prices were the best incentive to increase production, and prices rose sharply as the demand for country products grew. In another place I have noted that “the Unionists made it even more profitable for the farmers by preventing the German and Austro-Hungarian Purchasing Companies from buying directly from the producer. It was for this reason that many of the local companies were set up. They bought the produce from the farmer and sold it to one of the new export companies which in turn sold to the German and Austro-Hungarian Purchasing Companies at monopoly prices. In this way the Germans were forced to pay important result of this policy was to integrate the countryside into the growing national economy, inducing the farmers to produce for the market.”³³ This policy may be said to mark a new phase in the relationship between the state and the landlords, reflecting the growing strength of the latter. In 1838, by signing the free trade treaty with Britain, the Porte liberated the landlords from the monopolistic buying policies of the sultan; in 1916 the landlords were being freed from the virtual buying monopoly of Germany and Austria-Hungary.³⁴

32 Y. S. Atasagun, *Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Ziraat Bankası 1888-1939*, 1939, pp. 48-55, of *Mevzuat İlavesi*.

33 Ahmad, “Nascent Bourgeoisie”, p. 345, n. 17 above.

34 The farmers were now organized into an association, the *Çiftçiler Derneği*, founded in July 1914 but which became effective only in 1916. Talât became its first honorary president and Minister of Agriculture Ahmed Nesimi its second. Its office holders included high bureaucrats and its members the notables of Anatolia, as well as important Unionists like Kara Kemal. See *İktisadiyat Mecmuası*, 1/20, 13 July 1916, p. 3. Tunaya, *Partiler*, p. 205, n. 118, and 458-61, says that an *Osmanlı Çiftçiler Derneği* which began as an agrarian lobby to pressure the state to include agriculture in national policies, converted itself into a political party during the armistice period. On the 1838 Treaty and agriculture see *Birinci Köy ve Ziraat Kalkınma Kongresi, Türk Ziraat Tarihine Bir Bakış*, 1938, pp. 69-74.

The war, however, also had a detrimental effect on agriculture. The acute labour shortage which had made wages relatively high became critical when the Porte declared mobilization in August 1914. To make matters worse, farm animals were requisitioned for military purposes throughout the empire. The impact of both measures was felt in the countryside.³⁵ The Porte had already seen the impact of war on labour during the Balkan Wars. Therefore before war broke out the army had already schemes to give courses in modern farming to enlist-ed men, and to release some of them during sowing and harvesting.³⁶ The government met the war emergency by legalizing forced labour at the outbreak of hostilities and enforced it more rigorously during the war. With the men being killed at the various fronts, women and children were forced to assume the heavy tasks on the home front, both in the factories and in the fields. Tekin Alp, one of the principal Unionist ideologues and propagandists, eulogized the contribution that women made in the economic struggle for survival:

While the men found themselves at the front struggling heroically for the very survival of the motherland, the women at home struggled equally hard with all their might to provide food for the country and guaranteed its economic future...

The activity of our peasant women is to be seen above all in Konya province. Samih Bey, the vali of Konya, has decided to build a monument to perpetuate the memory of this noble achievement of Turkish women in this historic epoch through which we are passing.³⁷

Forced labour, male and female, was the only way to keep land under cultivation. The total area under cultivation had, according to

³⁵ Novichev, *Ekonomika Turtsii*, devotes the first chapter to agriculture and provides interesting detail about the impact of mobilization and requisitioning. He wrote: "... the worst losses in livestock were suffered by the animal most used in Turkish agriculture, i.e. the oxen which was almost wiped out." Its population declined by 85.5 per cent between 1913 and 1919. See pp. 18-19.

³⁶ *The Orient*, V/20, May 20, 1914, p. 198.

³⁷ Tekin Alp, "Bu Seneki Mahsulümüz", *İktisadiyat Mecmuası*, VII, 22 July 1916, pp. 1-2.

one estimate, declined from 60 million *dönüm* in 1914, to 30 million *dönüm* in 1915, and 24 million in 1916.³⁸ The Minister of Agriculture, interviewed in the first issue of *Iktisadiyat Mecmuası* (Feb. 1916), emphasized the extraordinary circumstances during the war and how military needs prevented expansion. Despite all the aid they had given the farmer the results never came upto their expectations. "Drought, hail storms, floods, locusts, and disease" only aggravated an already terrible situation. Therefore their efforts would have to be redoubled this year. Yet during these critical times the landlords often took over the lands of peasants who failed to return from the front, and there were thousands who did not.³⁹

By 1916, however, the food situation had become sufficiently critical for the state to intervene even in the affairs of the landlords. There was now an undeclared war economy in operation, influenced no doubt by the German example, and by the many German officials serving as advisers in the various ministries, with Geheimrat Dr Hahl at the ministry of Commerce and Agriculture. A decree was passed in the summer obliging farmers to work their lands only under state supervision. The goal was to produce more food to feed people rather than the highly profitable cash crops. The state did not forbid these completely, but tried to establish a balance. In return, it supplied the farmer with machines, manure, and met his other needs, including labour. The decree was implemented by a commission chaired by the Minister of Agriculture and by his officials in the provinces; there were severe penalties for non-compliance. The state had no intention of making a profit and would reinvest any surpluses that accrued from these measures for the benefit of the farmer. These reforms were seen by some to have significance far beyond the short run. "By this means

³⁸ *Écho de Bulgarie*, 1 March 1917 in War Office, DRFP, 17 March 1917. Novichev, *Ekonomika Turtsii*, pp. 19-20 gives similar figures: area under cultivation declined from 64 million *dönüm* in 1913 to 30 million in 1915, and 25 million in 1916. Talât Paşa gave the figure of 40 million *dönüm* in his 1917 Congress speech in Sept. 1917. The increase may be due to a more effective use of forced labour, as well as the reoccupation of Ottoman territories under Russian control.

³⁹ Şevket Süreyya Aydemir, "Toprağın Hikâyesi", *Cumhuriyet*, 29 March 1971.

[commented *Wirtschaftszeitung der Zentralmäche*] one of the greatest drawbacks of Turkish agriculture, 'small farming' as it is called, will be abolished. In Anatolia the land is very much broken up among small owners, hence intensive cultivation is difficult, but it will now be made possible by the nationalization of agriculture and the joint cultivation of the soil."⁴⁰

It is possible to see two basic trends in the land policy of the Young Turks, and specifically that of the Unionists. The first, articulated by intellectuals in the press, emphasized the importance of the small farmer for the empire's future prosperity and survival. The writings of Ahmed Şerif in *Tanin* and Parvus in *Türk Yurdu* circa 1912-13 are representative of this trend. This group wanted to protect the small farmer from the predatory practices of the landlords, and they considered a co-operative movement as a way to guarantee his interests from the usurers, who were often also the landlords. In 1913, the government sent a special commission abroad to study the working of the co-operative system in Rumania, Bulgaria, and Austria-Hungary, which concluded that such a system in the empire would also render a valuable economic service. Such people also wanted the Agricultural Bank to serve the small farmer by providing him with low interest loans, enabling him to stand on his own two feet. Despite their writings, they exercised no discernible influence on their comrades in government who represented the other trend favouring the large landowner, convinced that it was there that the salvation of the empire lay. They were the policy makers and the executives, seemingly unconcerned with the populist ideology propounded by CUP organs. Their aim was to introduce capitalist agriculture into Anatolia as rapidly as possible no matter what the social cost. So once again the 1916 Agriculture Bank law and the decree of 1917 favoured those engaged in mechanized agriculture and agricul-

⁴⁰ 6 Oct. 1916 in War Office, DRFP, 28 Oct. 1916; see also Gustave Herlt's article in *Weltwirtschaftliches Archiv*, Feb. 1917 in DRFP, Economic Survey, i, 27 March 1917.

tural companies with bank credits.⁴¹ The small farmer had to continue to survive as best he could.

This policy was successful in so far as it enabled Turkey to last out the war. Production must have increased substantially even though cultivated acreage declined by a third, if we accept Talât Paşa's figures. *Hilâl* reported that production had increased sufficiently to feed the local population and to export great quantities to other regions in need.⁴² This must not be understood to mean that everyone was well or even adequately fed; on the contrary the poor in the towns were close to starvation, with occasional bread riots, as by the women of the Fatih district of İstanbul.⁴³ But high prices had also brought wealth and prosperity to a small class of farmers throughout Anatolia. Dr. Nazım, an important Unionist exaggerated of course when he said that the war had enriched *the population* of Turkey, especially in the region around İzmir. "In nearly all parts of the town one can see traces of our economic revival. The coffee houses which used to line the quayside before the war have made way for shops... The value of money has declined so much that our peasants, who made fortunes through the unwarranted rise in food prices, can pay three liras for a pair of stockings for their daughters."⁴⁴ But there is no doubt that a powerful and prosperous agrarian class had indeed emerged, conscious of its interest and capable of fighting for them in the arena of politics. It would show its power during the period of national struggle and the throughout the Republic.

In contrast to the landlord, the position of the peasantry deteriorated throughout the Young Turk period. Not only did successive governments not remove the abuses and burdens the peasants com-

41 Atasagun, *Ziraat Bankası*, 202; Tekin Alp, "Ziraat Bankası", *İktisadiyat Mecmuası* 19-10, 27 April and 5 May 1916.

42 *Hilâl* (n.d.), quoted in *Revue de Turquie* (Lausanne), 4, August 1917, 121.

43 Galip Kemalî Söylemezoğlu, *Hariciye Hizmetinde 30 Sene*, 1955, pp. 405, 408-410.

44 *Tanin*, 8 Dec. 1917, pp. 2-3. Despite this prosperity, farmers and tax farmers (tithe collectors) were exempt from the tax on war profits which went into effect on 1 Jan. 1918. See *Hilâl* and *Tanin*, 26 Dec. 1917.

plained of, they added to them. As production became increasingly for the market, – internal and export – the rate of exploitation increased as the farmer kept more of the surplus. Thus Parvus observed even in 1913 that the tithe collected from the peasant was significantly greater than the ‘permissible’. Constantly rising land prices, resulting from improved communications and irrigation and therefore profitability, encouraged local notables to expropriate commons or the lands of peasants unable to enforce their claims or rights. For a while peasants benefitted from scarce labour and obtained high wages. But with the outbreak of war they could no longer do so because they were made to provide forced labour.⁴⁵

How did the peasantry respond to this increasing oppression? Their answer was the traditional one: they became outlaws. This is the usual response of peasants whose political horizon is limited and restricted by parochialism, and in our case by ethnic and religious divisions which the notables exploited. For example they manipulated the division between local peasants and Muslim immigrants (refugees) coming from the Balkans. In such circumstances a mass peasant movement was hardly possible and so the peasants became bandits to escape from their oppressive lives. This was especially true after the outbreak of war and Behice Boran writing about the villages in Manisa province, learned that “During the years an age of disorder prevailed in the mountain villages as in the villages of the plains; bandits multiplied.” Their ranks were swelled by deserters from the army, and in one case at least they overcame ethnic and religious rivalry by sheltering with Greeks in the Samsun region. The result was that the government decided to deport Greeks as a war measure to better controlled areas.⁴⁶ The problem of insecurity in the countryside had

⁴⁵ Boran, *Toplumsal Yapı*, p. 37; see also p. 32.

⁴⁶ Elkus to Secretary of State, Constantinople 2 Jan. 1917, in *Foreign Relations of the United States 1917*, Supplement i, pp. 15-16. Novichev, *Ekonomika Turtsii*, pp. 32-4, confirms the Porte's policy of manipulating ethnic and religious differences. He also mentions a pact between Greek and Georgian villagers in the Samsun region. Turkish deserters seeking refuge with Greek bands, a peasant uprising in Feb. 1917 in the Fatma district which was put down by govern-

become so acute by 1917 that it was one of the reasons for requiring a stronger government than the one headed by Said Halim Paşa. Yet Talât Paşa's policies did nothing to alter the rural situation which continued to get worse. By 1918 the press carried reports of serious outbreaks of brigandage throughout Anatolia, especially in the province of Bursa. Even fairly large provincial towns were insecure and public life was threatened. The government was asked to take prompt action and in July 1918 Talât appointed İsmail Canbulat as his Minister of the Interior, specifically to deal with this problem energetically. But the new minister resigned on 30 September complaining that the government lacked the power to restore order in the countryside. His resignation came in the wake of a second bandit attack on the Bandırma train.⁴⁷

The alienation of the peasantry from the state became a cause of grave concern and the CUP redirected its attention towards the problem. Yusuf Akçura for one considered the peasants "the basic matter of the Turkish nation" as well as the ones who needed and deserved the greatest aid.⁴⁸ They were, after all, by far the most numerous groups amongst the Turks and if they were neglected the very existence of the nation would be in doubt. Ideas like these led the CUP to found an association in İzmir to work for the moral and physical improvement of the peasantry. The *Halka Doğru Cemiyeti* would create institutions like libraries and lecture rooms for the education and welfare of the peasants, and a printing press for pamphlets and reasonably priced books.⁴⁹ These measures came too late but much of

ment forces, as well as revolts and insurrections. His information, he says, is based on the reports of tsarist secret agents operating in Turkey during the war.

47 Mehmed Cavid, "Meşrutiyet Devrine Ait Cavit Bey'in Hatıraları", *Tanin*, 10 July and 2 Aug. 1945; *Tasvir-i Efkâr* 14 July 1918 and *Tanin* 1-2 July 1918. Throughout July and August 1918 the press reported brigand activity which hampered the harvest as peasants were threatened by marauding bands.

48 Yusuf Akçura, "İktisadi Siyaset Hakkında", *Türk Yurdu*, xii, 1333/1917, p. 3521, quoted by David Thomas, "The Life and Thought of Yusuf Akçura (1876-1935)", unpublished Ph. D., McGill University 1976, p. 149.

49 *Tanin*, 8 and 15 Dec. 1917.

this idealism was carried into the Kemalist movement and its most famous manifestation is Mustafa Kemal's speech describing the peasant as "our master."⁵⁰ For a brief moment it seemed as though the Kemalists might carry out the much needed revolution in the countryside but in the end they also adopted the Young Turk policy of reaching a political compromise with the landlords and accepted the status quo in the countryside.

50 Text in Kazım Öztürk (ed.), *Cumhurbaşkanlarımızın T. Büyük Meclisini Açılış Nutukları*, 1969, p. 84-5. The speech was delivered on 1 March 1922.