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Agrarian and Land Reform during Atatürk's Period in the Pendulum of Economics, Ideology, and History

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Abstract

One of the most crucial points in interpreting Turkish history is agrarian and land reform. In the study, what was done for agrarian and land reform during the Atatürk period will be conveyed chronologically, including significant developments. The fifteen years covered in the study also addressed the changes in agricultural structure, agricultural policies, and discussions on peasantry. Despite the critical and radical steps taken during the Atatürk period between 1923 and 1938, it has been concluded that a radical land reform could not be achieved in every respect. However, it is thought that it would be wrong to attribute this negative situation to Atatürk's short life.

Keywords: Land Reform, Agrarian Reform, Tithe, Industrial Plans, Kadro Movement.

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İktisat, İdeoloji ve Tarih Sarkacında Atatürk Döneminde Tarım ve Toprak Reformu

Öz

Türkiye tarihinin yorumlanmasında en can alıcı noktalardan biri tarım ve toprak reform meseleleridir. Çalışmada Atatürk döneminde tarım ve toprak reformu için neler yapıldığı kronolojik bağlamda dönemdeki önemli gelişmelere de yer verilerek aktarılacaktır. Çalışma kapsamında ele alınan on beş yıllık süreçte tarımsal yapının değişimi, tarım politikaları ve köylülüğe ilişkin tartışmalar da ele alınmıştır. Ancak 1923-1938 yılları arasını kapsayan Atatürk döneminde önemli ve radikal adımlar atılmış olmasına rağmen köklü bir toprak reformunun her yönden başarısız olması sonucuna ulaşılmıştır. Ancak bu olumsuz durumun Atatürk'ün kısa ömrüne yükletilmesinin de doğru olmayacağı düşünülmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Toprak Reformu, Tarım Reformu, Aşar Vergisi, Sanayi Planları, Kadro Hareketi.

Introduction

Land reform is the totality of measures that will improve the legal relations between the land and those who work it. In its most used sense, land reform is the granting of land to landowners to those who are landless or do not have enough land. In its broad sense, land reform is an institutional change regulating land and people's relations.¹ It is an integrated program that reorganizes the structure of agriculture to facilitate social and economic progress through the values and philosophy of society.² Agrarian reform can be defined as improving structural deficiencies in agricultural lands. Agrarian reform aims to increase production and includes services such as credit, marketing, education, publication, research, organization, and equipment that the farm sector needs. Land reform and agrarian reform are thought to be two sides of the same coin.

The problems of distributing private property lands among society members attracted state administrators' attention in the Republic's

¹ World Bank, *Land Reform, Sector policy paper*, Washington, D.C.: World Bank Group 1975, p. 3.

² Erich Jacoby, *Man and Land*, Andre Deutsch, London 1970, p. 7.

early years. The main concern of the study is to reveal what initiatives were taken and attempted to be taken for agrarian and land reform from the foundation of the Republic until the death of Atatürk (between 1923 and 1938), to investigate the process and to contribute to drawing valuable lessons for the future.

In this context, the first part of the study examines the factors that determined the formation of ideas on agrarian and land reform in Türkiye during the Atatürk Period and the initiatives taken. The Ottoman State, which came to the brink of political and economic collapse due to the Balkan War, World War I, the Turkish War of Independence, and foreign debts, presented a weak image regarding agriculture. Even basic raw materials such as flour, sugar, and wheat were imported abroad. It can be said that Atatürk made some attempts to overcome these adverse conditions in the agricultural sector before the Republic of Türkiye was officially established in 1923. In the *Izmir Economic Congress*, policies regarding the organization of a new state and capital structure were specified. The agrarian and land reform issues were brought to the agenda in the newly established state, and the necessary steps were taken in this regard.

The second part of the study includes studies on agrarian and land reform in the Republic's early years. In this section, it is also put forward that, contrary to what some valuable writers have argued, the abolition of the tithe was not in favor of large landowners but instead relieved the peasantry involved in agriculture from a significant burden and thus made an outstanding contribution to Türkiye, which organized capital accumulation through the agricultural sector—the Republic's early years included efforts that considered a comprehensive agricultural policy a fundamental pillar and took it seriously. However, it is thought that these efforts included initiatives related to agrarian reform rather than land reform.

The third part of the study mentions that the 1925 Sheikh Said Rebellion was a critical factor in the emergence of the political perception of land reform and agrarian reform.

The fourth section of the study discusses the Great Depression in the US in 1929, which negatively affected many economies, shrinking the

capitalist world market and dramatically dropping agricultural product prices. A new perspective emerged on agriculture and land reform issues during this period. Because statism became a main policy element, the dialectic between agriculture and industry began to be understood.

In the last section of the study, *Kadro Magazine*, which can be considered one of the phenomena that gained importance in the environment of the searches brought by the 1929 Crisis, and the views it presented in the political and economic fields and the echoes it created are mentioned. It is argued that the magazine gave a new shape to the policies related to agrarian and land reform, as well as industrialization, especially in the context of the prominent issues of the period, such as ideology, planning, and statism. The First Five-Year Industrial Plan (1934-1938) and the Second Five-Year Industrial Plan (1938-1942), which could not be implemented due to the outbreak of World War II and the death of Atatürk, can be regarded as the products of this process.

The study aims to reveal what was done or attempted to be done for agrarian and land reform from the foundation of the Republic of Türkiye until the death of Atatürk (between 1923 and 1938), to scrutinize the process and to contribute to valuable lessons for the future. In doing so, it is necessary to know well what opportunities the administrators of the period had, and it is believed that detailed information on these issues is also presented in the study. It is hoped that this article, which evaluates the general appearance of Türkiye in the 1920s and 1930s through facts such as agrarian reform, land reform, and industrialization, will make a significant contribution to the literature by providing a source for new studies and that the inquiries and evaluations on the subject will give a different perspective on the evolutionary transformation in the historical process.

The Genesis of Agrarian & Land Reform Ideas in Atatürk's Period and the First Attempts on the Subject

“As those who generally deal with scientific research and methodology know, “posing the issue” is the most important first step; if the issue is not posed correctly, no matter how extensive and detailed

the research on concrete events, correct conclusions cannot be reached".³ Evaluating historical facts through today's lens can lead to erroneous interpretations. Regarding the study, it is necessary to include the fundamental reasons that formed the idea that agrarian and land reform was required in Türkiye during the Atatürk Period. Most of these reasons lie in the years of the collapse of the Ottoman Empire. The Ottoman Empire's economy collapsed because of the Balkan War, World War I, the War of Independence, and foreign debts. At the end of the First World War, which had shed blood all over the world in the first quarter of the 20th century, the Ottoman Empire, which the Westerners called the *Sick Man*, had officially collapsed, and Anatolia had been invaded.

In the first fifteen years of the Republic of Türkiye until 1938, known as the Atatürk Period, efforts were made to restructure the collapsed economy inherited from the Ottoman Empire. During this period, the country lacked national capital and enterprise power. Radical steps were taken to establish the nation-state model with all its institutions and rules in every area of society and economy.⁴

The agricultural census conducted in the Ottoman Empire in 1912-1913 provides clues about the agrarian structure and land distribution inherited from this period. According to the data compiled for Anatolia, covering 1 million families, 1% of the families engaged in agriculture owned 39% of the total land, and 87% of the families owned 35% of the total land.⁵ It should also be noted that the crisis experienced by agriculture during World War I continued to increase during the War of Independence. In these years, agricultural production, the backbone of the economy, decreased by half.⁶ Grain farming carried out on an area of 66 million acres before the war, was reduced to 35 million acres by the war's end, and the country faced the danger of famine. During this

³ Behice Boran, *Yakın Tarihimizde Yönetici-Aydın Kadro ve Kalkınma Sorunumuz*. Cilt: 1, TÜSTAV, İstanbul 2010, p. 565.

⁴ Murat Koçtürk, Meryem Gölalan, "1923-1950 Türkiye Ekonomisinin Yapısal Analizi", *Üçüncü Sektör Kooperatifçilik*, 45/2 (2010), pp. 48-65.

⁵ Oya Köymen, *Cumhuriyet Döneminde Tarımsal Yapı ve Tarım Politikaları, 75 Yılda Köylerden Şehirlere*. Türkiye İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları, İstanbul 1999, p. 11.

⁶ Mücek, op. cit., p. 179.

period, the bread needs of the people were met by mixing barley, oats, and acorns into the bread grain.⁷ Kara Kemal Bey made the following observations concrete at the 1916 Congress of the Committee Union and Progress:

“A state that had to import everything from needles to thread could not even produce the essential needs of its citizens such as bulgur, olives, sugar, gas, and coffee. It supplied wheat partly from Anatolia but especially from abroad (Ukraine and Romania). Prices had increased tremendously during the war years. Istanbul's daily flour need was 25,000 sacks, whereas only 8,000 sacks could be provided. Hunger was knocking on the door of every house. Moreover, the country's economy was not in the hands of the Turks. The grain trade in Istanbul was in the hands of the Greeks. They also had the mills”.⁸

Mustafa Kemal Pasha, who did not despair in this situation, started to implement his sole aim when he set foot on Anatolian soil in Samsun, establishing an independent Turkish State based on national sovereignty. Agriculture was on the verge of deterioration in the armed phase of the struggle carried out under these conditions, and wheat production regions such as Eskişehir and Afyon, which were the war scene, were extensively damaged.⁹ Agricultural production was at its lowest in 1920, 1921, and 1922.

To overcome these unfavorable conditions, the Regulation on the Implementation of Agricultural Obligations, dated October 9, 1921, determined who would be exempted from military service to work in agriculture and the activities that needed to be carried out to increase production. In addition, in the same year, laws such as the postponement of war obligations, the provision of seed wheat, and the right to plant vacant lands were enacted.¹⁰

Consistent with these policies, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk expressed the place and importance of agriculture and peasants in economic life in the

⁷ Nadir Yurtoğlu, *Demokrat Parti Dönemi Tarım Politikaları ve Siyasi, Sosyal ve Ekonomik Hayata Tesirleri (1950-1960)*, Atatürk Araştırma Merkezi, Ankara, 2017, p. 13.

⁸ Mücek, op. cit., p. 121.

⁹ Yurtoğlu, op. cit., p. 15.

¹⁰ Mücek, op. cit., p. 197.

speech he delivered on March 1, 1922, at the opening of the third meeting of the Grand National Assembly:

“Who is the owner and master of Türkiye? Let us answer this together immediately: The owner and master of Türkiye is the peasant, the real producer. Therefore, the peasant is the one who deserves more prosperity, happiness, and wealth than anyone else”.¹¹

As a result of these developments, the Ottoman Empire, which had outlived its historical and actual life, represented the previous century with its archaic structure and was turned into a simple toy in the hands of imperialist powers, was eventually erased from the stage of history.¹² With the establishment of the Republic, the policy that the new regime would follow became an important issue. In the Izmir Economic Congress (February 17-March 4, 1923), legal and institutional regulations were envisaged for the effectiveness of economic activities.¹³ In his opening speech at the Izmir Economic Congress on February 17, 1923, he said:

“Friends, those who conquer with the sword are forced to be defeated by those who conquer with the plow and consequently abandon their positions. Indeed, the Ottoman Sultanate was like this. The Bulgarians, Serbians, Hungarians, and Romanians clung to their plows, maintained their existence, and grew stronger. At the same time, our nation acted like vagabonds behind these conquerors and was defeated by them one day because it did not work in its homeland. It is a fact that this has been the case in every period of history and everywhere in the world. For example, the English farmer entered while the French brandished their swords in Canada. In this civilized struggle between the plow and the sword, the plow is the one that is finally victorious. Gentlemen, the arm that uses the sword gets tired, and finally, the sword is put in its sheath. Perhaps the sword is condemned to mold and rust in that sheath. However, the arm that uses the plow becomes stronger daily, and as it becomes stronger, it owns and possesses more land”.¹⁴

¹¹ Yurtoğlu, op. cit., pp. 15-16.

¹² Mücek, op. cit., p. 152.

¹³ Yakup Kepenek, *Türkiye Ekonomisi*, Verso, İstanbul 1990, p. 35.

¹⁴ Tarım ve Orman Bakanlığı, *Atatürk ve Tarım*, Ankara Üniversitesi Ziraat Fakültesi, Ankara 1981, p. 18.

With these words, Atatürk pointed out the trajectory of the Izmir Economic Congress. What could be more natural than restructuring a society whose economy was primarily based on agriculture and was in the throes of political and social renewal? Atatürk also chose the development of the Turkish peasantry as a primary goal and believed that the foundation of the Turkish economy was based on agriculture.¹⁵

In short, the founders of the Republic inherited a lousy legacy from the Ottomans. All these negativities paved the way for the emergence of agrarian and land reform issues in the newly established state and the nascency of ideas that necessary steps should be taken in these matters.

Figuration of Agricultural and Industrial Policies Within the Scope of Economic System Seekings & Land Reform Debates

The country was still under occupation when the Republic was founded on October 29, 1923. The endless wars hit the already insufficient agricultural production. The capitulations and The Ottoman Public Debt Administration exploited the country economically and politically. There was a total of 281 industrial establishments in the country. Only 9 percent of these were state-owned. Only 10 percent of the capital and labor in these establishments belonged to Turks, the rest to foreigners and minorities.¹⁶ The feudal order dominated the East. The peasants were landless; they did not even have a plow or oxen.¹⁷

During the founding years of Türkiye, the primary source of national income was agricultural production. Efforts in the field of agriculture began to yield results after 1923. Significant cotton, tobacco, and hazelnut increases were particularly noticeable:

“In 1923, Türkiye’s total tobacco production was 26,000 tons. This amount increased to 54,000 tons in 1926. Cotton production, 150,000 bales before the war, fell to 90,000 bales in 1923 but increased to 110,000 bales in 1926. Hazelnut production, which varied by year,

¹⁵ Afet İnan, *Izmir İktisat Kongresi 17 Subat-4 Mart 1923*. Atatürk Kültür, Dil ve Tarih Yüksek Kurumu, Ankara 1989, p. 12.

¹⁶ Hanri Benazus, *Ekonomi ve Tarım: Atatürk’ün Yorumuyla Atatürkçülük 6*, Sözcü, İstanbul 2022, p. 7.

¹⁷ Benazus, op. cit., p. 7.

picked up after the war and remained at normal levels at 50,000 tons in 1925 and 16,000 tons in 1926 the following year".¹⁸

The increases in credit provided by Ziraat Bank played a significant role in these developments. The credits, around 4 million in 1919-1922, suddenly increased to 8 million in 1923.¹⁹ In 1928, it was increased to 26 million and in 1936 to 35 million lira.²⁰

One of the notable initiatives made during this period was the enactment and entry into force of Village Law No. 442, dated March 18, 1924, for the development of the village and ensuring its safety and order.²¹ For the Agricultural Credit Cooperatives to start operating, the Law on Agricultural Unions was enacted in 1924. This law was developed in 1929.²² Thus, with the efforts of Atatürk, agricultural cooperatives were established so that the villagers could sell their products without any intermediaries and earn more.

Concrete steps have been taken to strengthen the agricultural industry, thus increasing farm production and rapidly improving the villagers' situation. In this context, establishing İş Bank in 1924 can be considered a prominent initiative. İş Bank provided loans to newly established businesses and contributed to the establishment of many new companies.

From 1925 onwards, seed improvement, development, and mechanization in agriculture were given great importance. A package project study has been initiated covering technical and administrative areas in agricultural policy. For example, with the law numbered 682 *Spreading of Young Plants and Seeds Without Charge and Provisions for Establishing Nurseries* issued on December 2, 1925, the free distribution of all kinds of saplings and seeds and the training of farmers were

¹⁸ Mücek, op. cit., p. 191.

¹⁹ Mücek, op. cit., p. 191.

²⁰ Doğan Avcioğlu, *Türkiye'nin Düzeni. Dün, Bugün, Yarın. 1. Cilt*, Cem, İzmir 1973, pp. 487-488.

²¹ Benazus, op. cit., p. 72.

²² Benazus, op. cit., p. 12.

provided for the development of agriculture.²³ Kuruç states that the efforts to increase agricultural production had two crucial goals:

“One was enthusiasm and desire for mechanization. The other was the desire to spread and institutionalize education and research in agriculture. The number of tractors increased with the incentives given and would exceed two thousand by the end of the 1920s. Plows also exceeded two hundred thousand in the same period”.²⁴

The first mechanization incentive policies of the Republican period aimed to expand the cultivation area and included various incentives. With a law passed in 1924, those who cultivated at least 500 acres of land and those with at least 200 small or 50 large animals and their assistants were exempted from military service.²⁵ In 1925, when agricultural machinery imports peaked, the Ziraat Bank distributed 50 Fordson tractors to farmers in Tarsus.²⁶ Atatürk gave importance to modern agricultural tools and machinery in the Gazi Forest Farm he founded in 1925.²⁷ The name of this farm later became Atatürk Forest Farm.²⁸ The objective was to be an example and guide for the surrounding villages.

During this period, the taxes transferred from the Ottoman Empire were tried to be regulated, and the tithes, which were transferred to the Republic and was one of the most critical taxes collected on income, was abolished in 1925, which can be considered as one of the most prominent initiatives on this subject.

Some view that the abolition of the tithes strengthened the alliance between the new republican administration and large landowners, that large landowners gained dominant places within the dominant bloc, and that these dominant places acquired the character of a periodic

²³ Benazus, op. cit., p. 72.

²⁴ Bilsay Kuruç, *Mustafa Kemal Döneminde Ekonomi*. İstanbul: İstanbul Bilgi University Publications, İstanbul 2011, p. 455.

²⁵ Gabriel Bie Ravndal, *Turkey: A Commercial and Industrial Handbook (No. 28)*, US Government Printing Office, US 1926, p. 90.

²⁶ Oya Köymen, *Kapitalizm ve Köylülük: Ağalar, Üretenler, Patronlar*, Yordam, İstanbul 2017, pp. 113-114.

²⁷ Benazus, op. cit., p. 73.

²⁸ Benazus, op. cit., p. 78.

hegemony.²⁹ It has even been claimed that all of these indicate the contradictory character of the Republican regime, that this conflicting character is reflected in the laws with the discourse of “the peasant is the master of the land,” which removes the peasant from the serf status, and that, on the other hand, the Civil Code, which gives legal status to private property formed on state-owned lands, has a quality of reinforcing the dominance of the landowners.³⁰ Doğan Avcıoğlu stated that the abolition of the tithe was mainly in the interest of large landowners. At the same time, Tevfik Çavdar³¹ asserted that this situation created a conflict between the agricultural and industrial sectors. However, it is not possible to agree with these criticisms. First, this tax was collected not only from large landowners but also from small landowners. Therefore, it is thought that Doğan Avcıoğlu's claim that the abolition of the tithe was a gift from a new regime to large landowners³² does not reflect the truth. Contrary to Yalçın Küçük³³'s views, according to us, the abolition of the tithe was not a concession given to feudal lords, large landowners, or capitalist farmers, and contrary to İsmail Cem's claim, according to us, the actual beneficiaries were not the wealthy farmers.

The removal of the tithe did not create a conflict between the agricultural and industrial sectors; on the contrary, it increased the purchasing power of the farm sector and increased their demand for industrial goods. The practice can only be criticized by claiming that it did not reflect fairly on society in the context of people outside the agricultural sector.³⁴ In 1924, the tithe covered 22% of the state income. Additional taxes were imposed to meet the budget deficit, and taxes on sugar and kerosene were increased. The tax increase on sugar and kerosene affected the urban population more than those in rural areas. This can be interpreted as income transfer from urban consumers to

²⁹ See Mücek, op. cit., p. 241.

³⁰ See Mücek, op. cit., p. 270.

³¹ Tevfik Çavdar, *Türkiye'de Liberalizmin Doğuşu*, Uygarlık, İstanbul 1982, p. 258.

³² Avcıoğlu, Doğan, *Türkiye'nin Düzeni: Dün, Bugün, Yarın*, Bilgi, Ankara 1969, p. 168.

³³ Yalçın Küçük, *Türkiye Üzerine Tezler (1908-1978)*, Tekin, İstanbul 1978, p. 81.

³⁴ Necdet Ekinci, *Sanayileşme ve Uluslaşma Sürecinde Toprak Reformundan Köy Enstitülerine*, T.C. Kültür Bakanlığı Yayınları, Ankara, 1989, p. 61.

rural regions.³⁵ Gülten Kazgan also came up with the idea that the abolition of the tithe threatened the existence of the feudal structure but led to a burden imposed on the working class by indirect taxes³⁶. Despite all this, the abolition of the tithe in 1925 undoubtedly positively impacted the agricultural sector of the population, as indicated in Table 1. The agricultural income increase in the year after the abolition of the tithe was 16%, so much so that grain production increased fourfold after the repeal of the tax.³⁷

Table 1. National Income and Average Growth Rates of Sectors (1924-1929)

	Annual growth (%)
National Income	10.3
Agriculture	13.0
Industry	7.5
Service	8.2

Source: Korkut Boratav, *Türkiye İktisat Tarihi 1908-2009*. İmge, Ankara, 2016, p. 72.

It was grasped that Türkiye needed to industrialize to develop economically. For this purpose, the Industrial Encouragement Law was enacted in 1927 to encourage and protect industrial establishments. As an essential breakthrough in this period, the establishment of sugar beet cultivation and sugar factories are the unchanging cornerstones of the agricultural policy of the Republic of Türkiye.³⁸

In 1927, the first sugar factory started operating in Alpullu. Efforts were made in the cotton industry, and wheat and flour imports were prevented.³⁹ Wheat production, around 1 million tons in 1924-1925, increased to 2.7 million tons in 1929.⁴⁰ The main concerns stemmed from the size of the agricultural area related to exports. After the first

³⁵ Korkut Boratav, *Türkiye İktisat Tarihi 1908-2009*, İmge, Ankara 2012, pp. 54-55.

³⁶ Kazgan, op. cit., p. 82.

³⁷ Benazus, op. cit., p. 79.

³⁸ Benazus, op. cit., p. 73.

³⁹ İsmet Giritli, *Kemalist İdeoloji: Siyasal ve Ekonomik Yönleri*, Yaşar Eğitim ve Kültür Vakfı, İzmir 1981, p. 49.

⁴⁰ Tuncer Bulutay, Yahya Tezel, and Nuri Yıldırım, *Türkiye Milli Geliri (1923-1948)*, Ankara Üniversitesi, Siyasal Bilgiler Fakültesi Yayınları, No. 375, Ankara 1974.

sugar factories started production in Uşak and Alpullu, Eskişehir and Turhal Sugar Factories were later put into operation:

"Türkiye's annual sugar consumption was an average of 70,000 tons, while the annual production of the Alpullu and Uşak Sugar Factories was 15,000 tons. In other words, the government had to buy 55,000 tons of sugar from abroad. It is also a fact that sugar production in both factories increased continuously in the 1920s. With the commencement of production in these factories, sugar production reached 27,000 tons in 1932".⁴¹

Meanwhile, the first agricultural census in the Republic of Türkiye was conducted in 1927. According to this census, the distribution of lands by use was as follows (Table 2):

Table 2. Distribution of Lands by Use in the First Agricultural Census (1927)

Area	Acres	Ratio
Arable Land	231.500.000	%31
Forest	139.487.000	%18
Pasture	269.409.000	%36
Mountain, Rock, Out of Use	102.234.000	%13
Swamp, Lake	13.629.000	%1

Source: Ahmet Akif Mücek, *Türkiye'nin Tarihi ve Ekonomi Politik Yapısı (1838-2016)*, Belge, İstanbul 2019, p. 273.

According to the 1927 agricultural census, there were 1,751,000 farmer families, making up 9,216,000 people. Only 43.6 million acres, or 1/6, of the 231.5 million acres of land suitable for cultivation could be cultivated. The cultivation carried out here was mainly cereals (Table 3). The existence of large areas of uncultivable land, in a way, slowed down the demand for land. However, the real obstacle to land reform was still the power of large landowners.⁴²

Table 3. Distribution of Planting on Arable Lands (1927)

Product	Rate	Acres
Grains	%89.5	39.093.000

⁴¹ Taner Derbentli, "1923-1938 Yılları Arasında Türk Sanayiinin Gelişimi", *Bursa İktisadi ve Ticari İlimler Akademisi İktisat Fakültesi Dergisi*, 2/2, (1981), pp. 75-82.

⁴² Sevgi Korkut, *Toprak Reformu ve Türkiye*, Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi Publications, Ankara 1984, p. 45.

Legumes	%3.9	1.740.093
Industrial Plants and Vineyards	%6.6	2.804.104

Source: Mücek, op. cit., p. 273.

Following these censuses, Atatürk realized that the peasants did not have enough land to cultivate and began to develop some ideas, first distributing uncultivated state lands to farmers who did not have land and then implementing general land reform in the country. As discussed in the following sections 1929, laws were enacted to distribute land to farmers who did not have land in some regions.⁴³

"The 1920s encompass efforts that considered a comprehensive agricultural policy as a basis and took it seriously".⁴⁴ However, these efforts encompassed initiatives related to agrarian reform rather than land reform. However, some incidents triggered the idea of land reform.

The Sheikh Said Rebellion and the Sequent Agrarian & Land Reform Policies (1925-1929)

After the establishment of the Republic, attempts were made to eliminate feudal relations and to break the influence of feudal elements on the people. The main goal was to break the economic dependency relations shaped in the peasant-landowner chain. These attempts constitute the ontological aspect of the Republic regime and its reformist policies. However, the groups against these policies aimed to continue their existence. In this context, the Sheikh Said Rebellion (February 13 / April 15, 1925), in other words, the rebellion movement against the central government in Eastern Anatolia, began. The primary aim of the rebellion was to revive the caliphate and shake the state authority that tended to disintegrate the feudal system by taking control of the villages in the Eastern region.

After the Sheikh Said Rebellion, the government prepared a draft law to distribute land and submit it to the Turkish Grand National Assembly. The land would be distributed to farmers who were transferred to landless or had little land, immigrants, and nomads. Up to 2000 acres of land were given from the national land to those who did not have or had

⁴³ Benazus, op. cit., p. 79.

⁴⁴ Kuruç, op. cit., 2011, p. 456.

little land on the condition that the price would be paid within ten years. A total of 73,450 acres of land was given to 96,000 farmers.⁴⁵

The law numbered 1097, dated June 19, 1927, stated that the lands given to landless peasants, tribal peasants, and nomads would not be taken back. Immediately after the law took effect, the expropriation process of 20,000 acres of land belonging to large landowners in the East was completed in the same year, and 11,000 acres of agricultural land were distributed to landless peasants.⁴⁶ Through the law numbered 1505 enacted on June 2, 1929, the land was distributed to the villagers by expropriating the extensive lands in the East and some large farms in Muğla and Konya. Şükrü Kaya, The Minister of Interior at the time, has shown his determination to continue the implementation of Law No. 1505 in other provinces (Eastern provinces).

In these contexts, it can be claimed that the Sheikh Said Rebellion paved the way for the emergence of a political perception towards land reform. In his speech opening the Turkish Grand National Assembly in 1929, Atatürk said, "Giving land to farmers is also a matter that the government must follow. Providing the working Turkish peasant with enough land to work is one of the main solutions that will enrich the country's production".⁴⁷

Steps Toward Forging the Organic Bond Between Agrarian& Industrial& Land Reform After the Great Depression (1929-1932)

The 1929 Crisis, also known as the Great Depression, can be considered a development that negatively affected the Turkish, US, and European economies. The crisis, which began with the loss of value of stocks on the New York Stock Exchange on October 24, 1929, caused around 16 million stocks to lose between 50% and 90% in one day.⁴⁸ The depression mainly manifested in stagnation; factories were closed in many countries, production fell, and unemployment rose rapidly. For

⁴⁵ Mustafa Solak, *Atatürk'ün Bakanı Şükrü Kaya. (Uluslaşma, Laiklik, Toprak Reformu)*. Kaynak, İstanbul 2013, p. 127.

⁴⁶ Ekinci, op. cit., p. 133.

⁴⁷ Bilsay Kuruç, *İktisat Politikasının Resmi Belgeleri (Söylev, Demeç ve Yazılar)*, Ankara Üniversitesi Siyasal Bilgiler Fakültesi, Ankara 1963, p. 3.

⁴⁸ İlhan Tekeli and Selim İlkin, *1929 Dünya Buhranında Türkiye'nin İktisadi Politika Arayışları*, ODTÜ, Ankara 1977.

example, if the world industrial production in 1928 is accepted as 100, it is observed that the index fell to 94 in 1930 and 7.5 in 1932.⁴⁹

Following these developments, the Republican administration needed to revise its national economic vision: The national economy was henceforth characterized according to the new framework drawn by statism. One of the main reasons why etatism became more evident in the economic and political arena was that the state, which had only exercised influence over customs that year due to the Treaty of Lausanne, now had the opportunity to implement customs tariffs.⁵⁰

The decline in agricultural export prices worldwide and the difficulties experienced in imports also made statist policies necessary because Türkiye was a country that produced raw materials and farming materials in the world economic division of labor.⁵¹

In 1923-1929, more than 80% of the total export value was provided by agricultural products, 55% of which was supplied by tobacco, grapes, hazelnuts, cotton, and figs. The export value of tobacco, one of the most basic export products, fluctuated between 21% and 36% of total exports, depending on world prices throughout the period. Fluctuations in export revenues naturally became one of the sources of instability in the Turkish economy.⁵² 1929, wheat was 15 kurus, but in 1930, it fell to 3-4 kurus, and farmers became poorer.⁵³ For example, between 1927 and 1933, the price of sugar fell from 22 kurus to 8 kurus worldwide and from 50 kurus to 40 kurus in Türkiye. In short, both domestic and foreign trade terms were against the agricultural sector.⁵⁴ The fall in prices shook the situation of Turkish farmers and the Turkish economy.⁵⁵ It was

⁴⁹ Gencay Şaylan, *Değişim, Küreselleşme ve Devletin Yeni İşlevi*, İmge, Ankara 1994, p. 55.

⁵⁰ Yahya Tezel, *Cumhuriyet Döneminin İktisadi Tarihi (1923-1950)*. Türkiye İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları, İstanbul 2015, pp. 180-181.

⁵¹ İsmail Hüsrev Tökin, *Türkiye Köy İktisadiyatı*, İletişim, İstanbul 1990 p. 124.

⁵² Köymen, op. cit., 2017, pp. 115-116.

⁵³ Ahmet Hamdi Başar, *Davalarımız*, Arkadaş, İstanbul 1943, p. 3.

⁵⁴ Oya Köymen, *Türkiye'de Tarımsal Yapının Gelişimi (1923-1938)*, Boğaziçi University Publications, İstanbul 1981.

⁵⁵ Feroz Ahmad, *Modern Türkiye'nin Oluşumu*, (Trs. Yavuz Alogan), Kaynak, İstanbul 1999, p. 76.

becoming necessary to initiate an industrialization and development drive entirely different from the previous periods.

In this context, the Industrial Congress was organized in 1930. It was believed that the policies to be produced regarding industrialization should obtain the following results from agriculture in the congress: Providing national nutrition, feeding the national industry with the necessary raw materials in proportion to its current and future needs, creating the capital required for industrialization by giving importance to the export of agricultural products.⁵⁶ It has been argued that agriculture and industry are sectors that cannot be considered separately because the product of one sector meets the raw material of the other. It was highlighted that industrialization required agriculture and the essential development of the agriculture industry, which could be achieved through agrarian reform.⁵⁷

Following the Great Depression, agriculturalization and reform efforts continued to be addressed as a significant cause. The most important initiative in this area was the organization of the First Agricultural Congress (1931) as a continuation and complement of the 1930 Industrial Congress. The issues that occupied the agenda most in the First Agricultural Congress were the provision of cheap and term credit to farmers, reductions in farmer taxes, the development and spread of poultry farming, animal husbandry, afforestation of the country, the development of winemaking and viticulture, and hazelnut and olive problems.⁵⁸

Land reform discussions also came to the agenda during this period. Considering the existence of landless farmers during the Atatürk period, land acquisition activities were given importance. Although land distribution to farmers was discussed in some regions, since this could not be fully implemented, landless farmers' land acquisition problem could not be solved during this period.

⁵⁶ Ekinçi, op. cit., p. 138.

⁵⁷ Ekinçi, op. cit., p. 142.

⁵⁸ Yurtoğlu, op. cit., p. 21.

Kadro Movement& New Opinions About Agrarian & Land Reform& Economic Planning Issues

One of the main factors contributing to the discussions on land and agrarian reform during the Atatürk period and enabling the production of new policies in this direction was the Kadro magazine, published between 1932 and 1935. The magazine was published under the leadership of intellectuals such as Vedat Nedim Tör, Şevket Süreyya Aydemir, Burhan Asaf Belge, and İsmail Hüsrev Tökin.

The Kadro magazine was worked with considerable publishing discipline, and 36 issues were published in its 3-year publication life. The magazine was involved in the period's heated discussions, such as the Great Depression, imperialism, class society, statism, agriculture, cooperation, and industrialization. It influenced Türkiye's economic thought and policy research.⁵⁹ The preparation of an industrial plan in 1932 and its implementation in 1933 are directly related to the views and repercussions of the Kadro magazine, especially in areas such as planning and statism.

The First Five-Year Industrial Plan was prepared in 1933, approved, and implemented in 1934. The industrial branches envisaged in this plan and largely realized are as follows: Cement, glass, and bottle industry, iron industry, paper and cellulose industry, sulfur industry, chemical industry, textile industry, textile industry, sugar industry. One of the most basic principles of the plan is that it addresses industrial branches whose primary raw materials are grown in the country. In 1934, \$ 8 million was spent from Soviet Russia, and in 1938, from the United Kingdom, 16 million pounds of outdoor resources were provided. Import inputs of weaving factories with the first of these loans and the other Karabük iron-steel factories were provided.⁶⁰ The credit received from Soviet Russia can be considered the first example of debt to the developing country. Sümerbank undertook the construction and

⁵⁹ Erdem Özgür and Alp Yücel Kaya, "Kadro'nun Maddeci Tarih Yazımı: Türkiye ve Osmanlı Tarihinde Derebeylik Rejimi", (Eds.), Erdem Özgür, Alp Yücel Kaya, Türkiye 'de İktisadi Düşünce, İletişim, İstanbul 2017, p. 201.

⁶⁰ Tefik Çavdar, Bilsay Kuruç, Erdiç Tokgöz, Turhan Olcaytu, Yücel Ülken, Atatürk Dönemi İktisat Politikası, İstanbul Üniversitesi İktisat Fakültesi Mezunları Cemiyeti Yayınları, İstanbul, p. 43.

financing of the project in the weaving factories, which were to be established by debt. The loan from Soviet Russia was also used to purchase machinery and train technical personnel. The loan was the basis of the first five-year plan in 1934 regarding financing.⁶¹ The leading factories established between 1933 and 1938 and their opening years are as follows: Bakırköy Cloth Factory (1934), Kayseri Cotton Weaving Factory (1935), Paşabahçe Glass Plant (1935), İzmit Paper and Cardboard Factory (1936), Konya Ereğli Weaving Factory (1937), Nazilli Fabric Printing Factory (1937), Gemlik Artificial Silk Factory (1938), Bursa Woolly Industry Weaving Factory (1938), Isparta Rose Oil Factory (1938), Karabük Iron and Steel Plant (1939). As it can be comprehended, using domestic raw materials in the industrialization line through the said plan, prioritizing the production of consumer goods, and establishing the regional distribution of the factories gained importance. Şevket Süreyya's statements in his article titled "Programmed Statism" in the Kadro magazine, "Statism is a national social order in which all areas of national life and the skeleton of the national body are organized in a national harmony that prioritizes the general and supreme interests of the nation over individual interests and tendencies"⁶², played an essential role in the implementation of this plan. Gülten Kazgan sheds light on the developments in agriculture following the First Five-Year Industrialization Plan with the following words:

"Even in the adverse conditions of the 1930s, Türkiye implemented import substitution in basic foodstuffs; there was no need to import wheat and flour, sugar production expanded, and cotton and industrial plant production provided domestic input for the newly developing textile industry. The main institutions that form the basis of Turkish agriculture today are the product of the Atatürk period. Establishing a self-sufficient economic structure in foodstuffs is also the product of the policies implemented in this period. In the adverse conditions of the period, ways were constantly sought to save agricultural producers and peasants from the miserable conditions they were in, and institutions deemed appropriate in this context were created".⁶³

⁶¹ Tahir Kumkale, *Atatürk'ün Ekonomik Mucizesi*, Pegasus, İstanbul, 2007: 234.

⁶² Şevket Süreyya Aydemir, "Programlı Devletçilik", Kadro, 34 (1934), pp. 5-13.

⁶³ Yaşar Aksoy, *Atatürk'ün Ekonomi Devrimi Kalpaklı Kalkınma*, Ümit, Ankara 1998, p. 126.

The success seen in implementing the First Five-Year Industrial Plan led to the preparation of the Second Five-Year Industrial Plan in 1936. The plan was broader regarding its subjects, the capital needed, and the economic and social activities it would stimulate in the country. The most crucial difference between the second plan and the first is its structure, which prioritizes heavy industry. The plan envisages the establishment of more than 100 industrial enterprises. However, this plan could not be put into practice due to the death of Atatürk and the Second World War.

Agrarian and land reform were also prioritized from the magazine's first issues. Especially in the article series titled National Economic Research and in the article series titled *Millet İktisadiyatı*, Kadro writers, especially Vedat Nedim Tör, addressed the status of agriculture together with its past and put forward many suggestions for the future. The policy recommendations in these articles include ensuring the productivity and welfare of the peasantry in Türkiye through state intervention, preventing the seizure of the values produced by the peasantry by unproductive intermediary elements, understanding the conditions under which agriculture is carried out in the country's rural areas, and ensuring that small producers can produce rationally in a way that can compete with the world market⁶⁴. For example, teaching correct production techniques to villagers in agricultural production was likened to recruiting villagers into the military, and the cooperatives planned to rationalize agricultural production were given a kind of General Staff role.

İsmail Hüsrev Tökin, one of the writers of Kadro magazine, argues in his series of articles called National Economic Research that the economic and social structure of the countryside should be well known before a plan is created for agriculture. Agricultural producers were under the restrictions of tribal chiefs in the east and landownership in other regions. He pointed out that the country's development of agriculture and industry was possible with an agricultural and land reform that would destroy the landownership system. Therefore, Tökin argued that the development of agricultural production and the

⁶⁴ Vedat Nedim Tör, "Müstemele İktisadiyatından Millet İktisadiyatına", *Kadro*, 1/1, (1932), pp. 8-11.

peasants depended on taking steps towards liquidating landlords and feudal lords and providing credit systems that would not oblige the producers to rely on usurers⁶⁵. Measures were taken to stabilize the villagers' incomes in the agricultural sector. In 1932, the Wheat Protection Law was enacted, and the exportability of wheat was aimed to be improved by preventing price drops through purchases by the Ziraat Bank.⁶⁶ The state-owned purchasing company, the Soil Products Office, was founded in 1938. This office protected agricultural incomes by determining the minimum price level when world grain prices were meager.⁶⁷

In addition, agricultural studies were accelerated, and various agrarian schools were opened to train experts in the field. The Higher Agricultural Institute was established in 1933. The Ankara University Faculty of Agriculture and Veterinary Medicine was born from this institute.⁶⁸ During this period, students were sent to Germany and Hungary to receive education in different branches of agriculture.

Following these developments, in the 1930s, ideas about eliminating the dominance of landowners and giving land to the people began to be voiced more loudly. Şükrü Kaya and other Republican cadres brought the Turkish Resettlement Law No. 2510 to the agenda to provide land to the landless and small-landed peasants and to eliminate the pressure of the landowners on the Republic and the people.⁶⁹ From 1923 to 1934, land distribution was as follows:

Table 4. Information on Land Distribution in the Republic of Türkiye between 1923 and 1934

Social Segment	Land (Acre)	Vineyard (Acre)	Garden (Acre)
Eastern Refugees	122.937	-	-
Exchanged*	4.482.567	98.606	160.300
Migrants and Refugees**	1450.20	58.814	8359

⁶⁵ İsmail Hüsrev Tökin, "Türkiye'de Derebeylik Rejimi", *Kadro*, 1/7, (1932), pp.16-24.

⁶⁶ Erdal Akbaş, "1929 Dünya Ekonomik Krizi Sonrası Türkiye Cumhuriyeti'nin Buğday Üreticisini Koruma Çabaları (1929-1939)", *Atatürk Yolu*, 71 (2022), pp. 24-42.

⁶⁷ Ali Ata Yiğit, "Türkiye'nin Tarıma Dayalı Sanayi Politikası 1923-1938", *Doğuş Üniversitesi Dergisi*, 13/2, (2012), pp. 315-326.

⁶⁸ Benazus, op. cit., p. 73.

⁶⁹ Solak, op. cit., pp. 127-128.

Local farmers in need of land	731.450	-	-
Total	6.787.234	157.420	168.659

(*)99,807 households, 380,243 people.

(**)58,027 households, 247,295 people.

Source: Mustafa Solak, Atatürk'ün Bakanı Şükrü Kaya. (Uluslaşma, Laiklik, Toprak Reformu), Kaynak, İstanbul 2013, p. 221.

From 1923 to 1934, 6,787,234 acres of fields, 157,422 acres of vineyards, and 169,559 acres of gardens were distributed to exchanges and immigrants and partly to landless or small-land farmers (Table 4).

Table 5. Information on Land Distribution in the Republic of Türkiye Between 1934-1938

Social Segment	Number of families	Decare
Migrants and refugees	28.536	1151690
People who have transferred	2.426	149021
Landless or small land farmers	48.411	1517235
Nomads	7.886	129.388
Those who suffered from disasters such as floods and landslides	1.436	52491
Total	88.695	2.999.825

Source: Solak, op. cit., p. 222.

From 1934 to the end of May 1938, 2,999,825 acres of land were distributed to 88,695 families with landless or small landholdings, including immigrants and refugees, within the framework of the provisions of the Resettlement Law (Table 5). In addition, the total farms purchased through expropriation and given to the villagers and the lands distributed to the government were 1,077,256 acres.⁷⁰

During this process, Atatürk also supported land reform efforts with his messages in his opening speeches to the Turkish Grand National Assembly. In his speech on November 1, 1936, he said the land law should be enacted as soon as possible:

⁷⁰ Solak, op. cit., p. 203.

“I expect the high support of the Public Council to bring the land law to fruition. Every Turkish farmer's family must have land to live and work on. The solid foundation and development of the homeland are based on this principle”.⁷¹

On November 1, 1937, while opening the third year of assembly, Atatürk said:

“The foundation of the national economy is agriculture. That is why we attach great importance to development in agriculture. Programmed and practical studies that will spread to the villages will make it easier to achieve this goal. However, to achieve this vital task accurately, it is necessary first to determine an agricultural policy based on serious studies and establish an agricultural regime that every villager and citizen can easily understand and happily implement. First, no farmer should be left without land in the country. What is more important is that the land that can support a farmer's family should not be divided for any reason or reason. The land area that large farmers and farm owners can operate should be limited according to the population density and soil fertility of the regions of the country where the land is located. The work tools of all farmers, large and small, should be increased and renewed. Protective measures should be taken without delay”.⁷²

These words prove Atatürk's stance in emphasizing the need for reforms in the agricultural sector, especially supporting small farmers.⁷³ The death of Atatürk and the subsequent start of World War II caused land reform initiatives to be shelved for a while. Under the leadership of İnönü, Türkiye created its roadmap to protect itself from the devastating effects of the war.⁷⁴ İnönü again touched upon the Land Reform in the Grand National Assembly of Türkiye in 1943.⁷⁵ Later, various laws were enacted on multiple dates, especially to settle and provide land to

⁷¹ Deniz Doğru, “1923-1950 Yılları Arasında Toprak Reformu Girişimleri Ve Çiftçiyi Topraklandırma Kanununa Yapılan Muhalefet”ı, *Uluslararası Türkçe Edebiyat Kültür Eğitim Dergisi*, 10/2, (2021), pp. 824-839.

⁷² Ekinci, op. cit., p. 92.

⁷³ Gülden Çamurcuoğlu, “Türkiye Cumhuriyeti'nin Toprak Reformu ve Millî Burjuvazi Yaratma Çabası”, *Ankara Hacı Bayram Veli Üniversitesi Hukuk Fakültesi Dergisi*, 13(1) (2009), p. 167.

⁷⁴ Yurtoğlu, op. cit., p. 22.

⁷⁵ Ömer Lütfi Barkan, *Türkiye'de Toprak Meselesi*, Gözlem, İstanbul 1980, pp. 457-458.

immigrants from abroad. According to these laws, 10,662,059 acres of land, 157,422 acres of vineyards, and 169,659 acres of gardens were distributed to immigrants and partly to landless and small-landed farmers until 1944.⁷⁶ Following this, İnönü accepted the Law to Provide Farmers with Land No. 4753 in the Turkish Grand National Assembly on June 11, 1945, to break large landowners' social and political influence.⁷⁷ Land distribution to peasants was met with excellent resistance by the landlords, as it could reduce the labor force available to the landlords and force them to pay more for land.⁷⁸ However, all these advancements must be the subject of another study.

Conclusion

The study is based on Atatürk's economic policies, ideology, and initiatives he took regarding agriculture and land reform during his time at the Republic of Türkiye. Thus, it is nourished by the question that some claims, such as Atatürk did not carry out agrarian and land reform but focused on the superstructural elements of the revolution, can be falsified from specific perspectives, thus making an essential contribution to the literature.

Certain factors brought issues such as agrarian and land reform to Türkiye's agenda during the Atatürk Era. Atatürk witnessed the decline of the Ottoman Empire as a young officer and observed that the empire was also geographically fragmented due to various wars. It is possible to talk about a structure in which products such as cotton fabric, flour, and sugar, among the most basic consumer goods, were imported because they could not be met from domestic sources. All these negativities prepared the ground for the emergence of agrarian and land reform issues in the newly established state and the formation of ideas that the necessary steps should be taken in this regard.

Frankly, the Republic of Türkiye was founded in 1923 on the ruins of a medieval agricultural empire. Despite all the difficulties, some successes aligned with the decisions made at the İzmir Economic Congress. First, the Tithe was removed from the agricultural sector, and

⁷⁶ Korkut, op. cit., p. 46.

⁷⁷ Ekinçi, op. cit., p. 136.

⁷⁸ Çamurcuoğlu, op. cit., pp. 161-163.

capital accumulation in agriculture was made possible. The increase in agrarian loans provided by Ziraat Bank, the establishment of İş Bank, the adoption of the Village Law No. 442, and the steps taken in the same year to establish Agricultural Credit Cooperatives mainly include initiatives related to agrarian reform.

The abolition of the tithe can be described as an event that explains the initial socio-economic structure of the New Republic administration. It is thought that it is impossible to talk about the abolition of the tithe, as some theorists put it forward, as it aimed to accelerate the capitalist processes of the feudal landowners. The state gave up essential revenue items with the abolition of the tithe, but this brought positive results in the long run.

In addition to agrarian reform, the idea of land reform coming to the forefront was mainly concreted and accelerated after 1925. The uprising led by Sheikh Said in February 1925 to bring back the caliphate and prevent agrarian and land reform harmed developments in the Republican period. After this uprising, the Republic's administrators focused on the region and began to bring up the issue of land reform more, in addition to agrarian reform.

The beginning of the Great Depression in the world in 1929 was a separate turning point for the Turkish economy. The most severe blow for Türkiye during this period was the decrease in the prices of agricultural products and raw materials in world markets. The reasons for reflecting the crisis on Türkiye lie in its subordinate position in the international division of labor. The adverse conditions created by the crisis paved the way for the emergence of views that industry and agriculture needed to be developed in Türkiye and that the two sectors were inseparably linked. In this context, the 1930 Industrial Congress and, subsequently, the 1931 Agricultural Congress were organized, and agrarian and industrial reforms were attempted to be carried out simultaneously.

It is also necessary to mention that the Kadro magazine gave a new shape to the agrarian and land reform discussions during the Atatürk period. The First and Second Five-Year Industrial Plans and the idea that it is essential to develop agriculture and industry simultaneously and to

spread the sector whose raw materials are domestically produced in the country were also shaped on the awareness axis created by the Kadro magazine. On the other hand, the writings of writers such as İsmail Hüsrev Tökin and Vedat Nedim Tör on land and agrarian reform and the need to end the feudal order brought new policies to the agenda on these issues.

In all these contexts, it can be argued that necessary steps were taken in agrarian and land reform during the Atatürk period (1923-1938). The removal of the tithe, which exploited the peasants more than anyone else, the practices of statism in agriculture, the provision of social ownership through large state farms such as the Atatürk Forest Farm, and the constant mention of land reform issues in various media during his reign, which are discussed in detail throughout the study, are concrete manifestations of Atatürk's initiatives and policies on this issue. However, the fact that the reform was not wholly successful in every respect should not be attributed to Atatürk's short life and the duration of his rule.

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