STATE INTERVENTION, LAND DISTRIBUTION, AND THE CONDITION OF SMALL RURAL PRODUCERS IN RURAL ESKIŞEHIR DURING THE GREAT DEPRESSION (1929–1939)

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ABSTRACT

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This thesis examines the changes in the economic situation of small agricultural producers in the Eskişehir countryside between 1929 and 1939, focusing on state-led policies and the relationship between the state, large landowners, and small peasants. The sharp decline in agricultural product prices during the Great Depression of 1929 pushed small producers in export-oriented agricultural regions, including Eskişehir, into a deadlock. In this context, the adoption of statism and the implementation of a 'land distribution' policy aimed at enabling the small peasantry to sustain their subsistence economy were among the priority objectives of the Republican cadres to improve the situation of small agricultural producers. Based on this background, the thesis addresses two fundamental questions. The first is how the Great Depression affected small peasantry in the rural areas of Eskişehir, an important trade basin during the Republican era, and to what extent it caused economic damage. The second question concerns how the 'land distribution' policy, which was intended to mitigate the negative impact of the Depression on peasantry, was implemented and what kind of resistance it encountered. In conclusion, this thesis aims to contribute to

the literature by establishing a relationship between the adverse impact of the Great Depression on agricultural producers and the land reform policy. To achieve this goal, the study employs a qualitative research methodology involving a comparative analysis of archival and secondary sources.

Keywords: small agricultural producers, Eskişehir, The Great Depression, land distribution, resistance

ÖZ

BÜYÜK BUHRAN (1929-1939) SIRASINDA ESKİŞEHİR KIRSALINDA DEVLET MÜDAHELESİ, TOPRAK DAĞITIMI VE KÜÇÜK KIRSAL ÜRETİCİLERİN DURUMU

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Bu tez, 1929-1939 yılları arasında Eskişehir kırsalındaki küçük tarımsal üreticilerin ekonomik durumlarındaki değişimi devletçi uygulamaların neticesinde devlet, büyük toprak sahipleri ve küçük köylülük arasındaki ilişki üzerinden incelemektedir. 1929 Büyük Buhranı ile birlikte tarımsal ürün fiyatlarında yaşanan ciddi düşüş özellikle Eskişehir'in de dahil olduğu ihracata dayalı tarımsal üretim yapan bölgelerdeki küçük üreticileri bir çıkmaza sürüklemiştir. Bu bağlamda, devletçiliğin benimsenmesi ve küçük köylülüğün geçimlik ekonomisini sürdürebilmeleri için bir 'topraklandırma' politikası, Cumhuriyet kadrolarının küçük tarımsal üreticilerin durumunu iyileştirmek için öncelikli amaçlar arasındaydı. Bu tez, bahsedilen arka plandan hareketle, temelde iki soruya cevap üretmeye çalışmaktadır. Birincisi, Büyük Buhran'ın Cumhuriyet döneminde önemli bir ticaret havzası olan Eskişehir kırsalında küçük köylülüğü nasıl etkilediği ve ekonomik olarak ne ölçüde zarar verdiğidir. İkinci soru ise, Buhran ile birlikte köylülük üzerinde oluşan olumsuz etkiyi hafifletmeyi amaçlayan 'topraklandırma' siyasetinin nasıl uygulandığı ve ne tür bir dirençle karşılaştığıdır. Sonuç olarak, bu tez, Büyük Buhran'ın tarımsal

üreticiler üzerinde yaratmış olduğu negatif etki ve toprak reformu politikası arasında bir ilişki kurarak literatüre bir katkı sunmayı hedeflemektedir. Bu amaca ulaşmak için, tez, arşiv ve ikincil kaynakların karşılaştırmalı analizini içeren nitel bir araştırma metodolojisi kullanmaktadır.

Anahtar kelimeler: küçük tarım üreticileri, Eskişehir, Büyük Buhran, arazi dağıtımı, direniş

To My Grandmother

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The incoming Great Depression in 1929 shook not only large-scale industrial production, but also agricultural relations and rural life across the globe, regardless of scale. Both industrial and agricultural output declined sharply, along with a noticeable drop in prices.[1] For the Republic of Turkey, still in its early years and heavily reliant on an agriculture-driven, fragile economy, the crisis struck with particular force. İlhan Tekeli and Selim İlkin point out that the Depression had especially harsh consequences for small-scale peasant producers.[2] The Great Depression had a deep impact on Turkey, largely because it caused a steep decline in agricultural prices. Since most people in early Republican Turkey lived in the countryside and Yahya Tezel estimates that around 75 percent of the population worked in agriculture at the time, contributing roughly half of the country's total income.[3]

At this point, the Republic of Turkey's desire for industrialization came into play alongside efforts to recover from the effects of the Depression. In 1932, the state systematized its import-substitution industrialization policies, which reshaped the countryside as both a site of production and a consumer market, forging new relationships between government and rural producers, who are landowners, small peasants, landless peasants, and agricultural workers. Yet, the burden of this industrialization effort was not shared equally across all segments. Through

[1] Oya Köymen, *Sermaye Birikirken: Osmanlı, Türkiye, Dünya* (İstanbul: Yordam Kitap, 2007), 44.

[2] İlhan Tekeli and Selim İlkin *1929 Dünya Buhranında Türkiye'nin İktisadi Politika Arayışları* (Ankara: ODTÜ, 1977).

[3] Yahya S. Tezel, *Cumhuriyet Döneminin İktisadi Tarihi (1923-1950)* (İstanbul: Türkiye İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları, 2015), 401.

mechanisms such as indebtedness and irregular direct purchases by the state, large landowners and merchants gained the upper hand - so that the true burden of the Depression fell on small rural producers and landless peasants. At this point, as the effects of the crisis intensified and small agricultural producers could no longer sustain their subsistence economies, debates over land ownership in rural Turkey began to emerge. The property structure inherited from the Ottoman Empire largely continued, and the Republican era was characterized by a landscape in which small producers were predominant, each cultivating relatively limited plots of land.[4] In this context, Republican cadres, both through legislation and their public statements, emphasized the urgent need to allocate land to small-scale and landless peasants. However, since the laws did not systematically provide for land distribution to the peasantry, this did not result in a structural transformation of landownership in the Turkish countryside. According to Önal,

> *"All land ownership policies of the Republic have further exacerbated the existing inequality in property distribution. While large landowners have been continuously enabled to expand their holdings, the landless segments have been granted small properties through the distribution of state lands. Instead of a land reform, the policy of 'land allocation' has been the solution found by the Republic of Turkey to the problem of landlessness without disturbing the interests of large landowners."*[5]

The effects of the Great Depression on the peasantry and the politics of land distribution are examined through the specific example of Eskişehir. Eskişehir holds a significant position due to being located at a key junction compared to most Anatolian cities, the export-oriented structure of its rural producers made possible by its transportation network, and the direct implementation of major Republican policies in the region.[6] At this point, Eskişehir embodies a dual structure: it is both a

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[4] See Oya Köymen, *Kapitalizm ve Köylülük: Ağalar, Üretenler, Patronlar* (İstanbul: Yordam Kitap, 2008), 107; Oya Silier, *Türkiye'de Tarımsal Yapının Gelişimi (1923-1938)* (İstanbul: Boğaziçi Üniversitesi, 1981), 9–10; Suat Aksoy, *100 Soruda Türkiye'de Toprak Meselesi* (İstanbul: Gerçek Yayınevi, 1969), 67.

[5] Nevzat Evrim Önal, *Anadolu Tarımının 150 Yıllık Öyküsü* (İstanbul: Yazılama Yayınevi, 2010), 68.

[6] Due to the Anatolian-Railway line passing through Eskişehir, Eskişehir serves as a connection between Anatolia and Istanbul. For this reason, it has also been an important political and economic center during the Republican period. Investments such as the opening of the sugar factory, the establishment of the Instructor Course, and the establishment of the Seed Improvement Station can be given as examples at this point.

typical Anatolian town and one of the agricultural centers with an export-based profile. For all these reasons, Eskişehir has been chosen as the field of research to understand the conditions of small peasantry as a result of both the Great Depression and land distribution effects. Finally, this work offers a historical evaluation of the early agricultural economy and property structures inherited from the Ottoman era. It argues that rural producers in Eskişehir should be seen not merely as objects of government policy and discourse but as active economic and political agents in their own right. When looking at the broader framework, we see that the literature generally consists of successive discussions. However, in addition to this, there is no consensus in the literature regarding the distribution of land ownership in Turkey and the state-class relations. This situation can essentially be summarized under two main points.

From the perspective of rural Turkey, the fundamental problem -apparent both from the discourse of the cadres and from the laws enacted or attempted to be enacted during the period- is the insufficient land ownership among small producers and landless peasants. In this context, the first point to be examined is how land ownership was distributed in Turkey. However, the accuracy of data regarding this issue in Republican Turkey is highly contested. For instance, based on a study conducted in 1912, as cited by Oya Köymen, it was determined that there were 870,000 landowning peasants, 40,000 large landowners, 10,000 feudal lords, and 80,000 landless peasants in Turkey.[7] Yet, it is impossible to relate categorizations to the actual amount of land owned. For example, the difference in quantity of land ownership between a landowning peasant and a large landowner remains unknown.

Additionally, based on a survey conducted in the 1930s, both Ömer Lütfi Barkan and Oya Silier have presented tables depicting land distribution in that decade. According to the data shared by Barkan, peasants owning less than 50 *hectares o*f land were classified as small property owners, accounting for 99.75% of the total.[8] Similarly,

[7] Köymen, *Kapitalizm ve Köylülük*, 107.

[8] Ömer Lütfi Barkan, "La Loi Sur La Distribution Des Terres Aux Agriculteurs Et Les Problemes Essentiels d'une Reforme Agraire En Turquie," *İstanbul Üniversitesi İktisat Fakültesi Mecmuası* 6, no. 1-2 (2014): 76.

Oya Silier's data categorizes peasants based on the average size of land they held.[9] Due to the absence of other studies and the inability to cross-reference with alternative sources, the accuracy of these records remains subject to debate.

One issue discussed in the literature about land distribution -though the reliability of the data is uncertain- is the situation of land allocation in Eskişehir and the pattern of land ownership there. A source from the 15th year of the Republic states that peasants were farming on given land each at that time. However, when the total cultivable land is divided by the number of people engaged in farming, the average land per person amounts to approximately 14.4 *hectares*.[10] This figure would decrease further if unaccounted individuals were excluded. Regardless of the exact accuracy of these figures, between 1929 and 1939, small-scale and landless peasants in Turkey did not have access to sufficient land.

The second debated issue in the literature concerns which social classes the state allied with or excluded through its overall economic policies and land distribution strategies. Faruk Birtek and Çağlar Keyder argue that the state began transferring surplus products from rural areas to support industrialization. They argue that the transfer of surplus products was kept going by preserving the small farmers' independent status, implying a kind of alliance between the state and these peasants.[11] On the other hand, Oya Köymen disputes this, pointing to İsmail Hüsrev's estimates of the minimum land needed for a peasant family to survive, and stresses that in reality, the state did not protect small producers.[12] In line with Birtek and Keyder's argument, it can be claimed that the Republican government saw rural areas both as a market and as a reservoir to support industrialization. Yet, the indebtedness and eventual dispossession faced by small agricultural producers remain evident. Therefore, unlike Birtek and Keyder, it is difficult to argue that the

[9] Silier, *Türkiye'de Tarımsal Yapının Gelişimi (1923-1938)*, 67.

[10] C.H.P Eskişehir İl Yönetim Kurulu, *Cumhuriyetin 15'inci Yılında Eskişehir* (Eskişehir: C.H.P. Eskişehir İl Yönetim Kurulu, 1938).

[11] Keyder, *Toplumsal Tarih Çalışmaları*, 199.

[12] Köymen, *Kapitalizm ve Köylülük*, 124.

state formed a true alliance with small producers, and the position adopted in this thesis aligns more closely with the perspective reflected by Oya Köymen.

This thesis aims to answer two fundamental questions: 1) How were small producers across Turkey in general, and poor peasants in Eskişehir in particular, affected by the Great Depression? 2)To what extent was the policy of distributing land to landless or land-poor peasants successful, and what kinds of resistance did it encounter? The main argument of the thesis is that, as in other regions of Turkey integrated into external trade, the Depression forced a significant transformation upon small-scale production in Eskişehir. Starting from the second half of the 1920s, the decline in agricultural product prices had a destructive impact on all small producers in Turkey, pushing them into a continuous cycle of dependency and debt. Moreover, the frequently stated "land redistribution" policy by the Republican cadres in Turkey emerged as a response to the worsening economic conditions and the lack of subsistence land among the rural poor. However, this policy fell far short of addressing the existing problems and failed to bring about a structural transformation. All these research questions are explored in greater depth through the case of Eskişehir, aiming to explain how this process unfolded in practice.

The answers proposed to these questions are based primarily on two types of sources: primary and secondary. In addition to the secondary literature used, this thesis also draws on a variety of archival materials such as laws, records from the Turkish Grand National Assembly (TBMM), Agricultural and Statistical Yearbooks, and some newspaper issues. The legal documents examined focus mainly on land distribution policies, rather than covering all agricultural laws. Similarly, parliamentary speeches have been selectively examined, focusing especially on discussions concerning the land distribution to peasants. Some newspaper reports are also used to illustrate indebtedness relations, while documents from the Prime Ministry Republic Archives have been consulted to uncover petitions related to land allocation and debt postponement in Eskişehir. This study mainly adopts a qualitative research approach, aiming to investigate how the land distribution efforts for small peasants were realized in Eskişehir. By choosing Eskişehir as a case study, it explores how the general national policies affected the local peasantry, thus presenting a historical understanding that moves from the general to the particular.

The contribution of this study to the literature lies in linking land distribution efforts during the Republican era to the state's economic policies, thereby clarifying the aims behind these land allocation policies. Within this framework, the thesis argues that the cadres' discourse on land distribution was not limited to allocating land only to landless peasants but also aimed to provide small producers with sufficient land through distribution. Additionally, although there is not much data available on landholdings for specific cities, an estimate of the average property size in Eskişehir around 1938 has been made using a study from that time. It seems that many previous studies have not made use of these 1938 sources, even though they were published for many cities. I believe that a closer look at these sources would shed more light on the conditions both in the cities and among the peasants. Overall, this study tries to link the state's economic policies with its land distribution efforts, to better grasp the political economy behind land allocation.

This thesis consists of three chapters. The first chapter, titled "The Effects of the Great Depression on the Republic of Turkey and the Peasantry: 'Statism' as a Reaction," begins by explaining how the Great Depression emerged and how it affected the Turkish economy. It then continues by discussing the rise of statism and the strategy of industrialization through extracting products from the rural areas. The final section of this chapter focuses on how smallholder peasants were affected by the state policies and how they became increasingly integrated into the system. Thus, this chapter mainly concentrates on the state policies that arose during the crisis period in Turkey and examines the transformation of the small peasantry.

The second chapter, titled "Peasantry in Turkish Agriculture and Land Distribution between 1929-1939," begins by explaining land ownership patterns in rural Turkey. It then continues by examining both the statements of the Republic's leading cadres regarding the issue of landlessness and the political responses they formulated. Following this, the chapter explores the laws enacted in line with the land distribution effort, as well as the Constitution and the Civil Code, which served as a foundation for these laws. Finally, it discusses how all these political and economic actions should be interpreted within the framework of the peasantry-state relationship. In conclusion, building upon the first chapter, the second chapter

investigates the foundations of land distribution policies in Turkish politics and aims to clarify how this process unfolded specifically.

The final chapter, titled “Eskişehir During the Great Depression and the Transformation of Small-Scale Production,” seeks to illustrate how the analysis carried out in the earlier chapters applies specifically to Eskişehir. It opens with an overview of Eskişehir’s general characteristics, including its variety of production and population makeup. Subsequently, it discusses how the Great Depression affected agricultural production in Eskişehir, drawing directly on data from statistical yearbooks and other local sources. Special attention is given to the changes in cereal prices over the years to illustrate how the poor peasantry was impacted by the Depression. The chapter additionally covers the impact of Sugar Factory in Eskişehir as an example of statist policies. Lastly, it discusses the processes and demands related to land distribution in the region, showing that peasants continuously demanded land to improve their circumstances to a sufficient level.

CHAPTER 2

THE EFFECTS OF THE GREAT DEPRESSION ON THE REPUBLIC OF TURKEY AND THE PEASANTRY: 'STATISM' AS A REACTION

The First World War caused great destruction almost everywhere on earth, but the true impact of the war only became apparent after it ended. The post-war landscape revealed a grim picture: cities lay in ruins, production lines were shattered, and lands stretching from barren steppes to fertile plains had been soaked in the blood of a lost, young, and productive population. With industrial infrastructures dismantled and much of the youth either perished or unable to return home, global production capacity declined sharply, and capital accumulation suffered a serious setback. As a result of this devastation, a significant economic recession was experienced in almost every country after the painful period of the First World War between 1914-18.

The effects of the First World War are far too profound to be understood solely through its immediate impact. However, as history has often shown, such destruction was soon followed by a period of renewal. For this reason, after World War I, many countries entered a period of reconstruction to heal the wounds inflicted by the war and wartime economies, and they sought to significantly expand their production capacities. Further detailed information and data can be available on this topic.[13] In this context, as factories and farmlands that had been destroyed or dismantled were rebuilt, production capacity especially with the help of U.S. issued loans to Europe began to increase rapidly. As a result of these policies, by the late 1920s, the supply of goods in capitalist bloc countries had begun to exceed existing demand. Between 1919 and 1929, the world experienced a brief, but intense economic boom driven largely by a surge in demand to replace inventories depleted during the five years of

[13]See Charles P. Kindleberger, *The World in Depression 1929-1939*, foreword by J. B. DeLong and Barry Eichengreen (Berkeley, University of California Press, 2013), 31-58; Michael Graff, A. G. Kenwood, and A. L. Lougheed, *Growth of the International Economy 1820-2015*, 5th ed. (New York: Routledge, 2014), 248-60

wartime.[14]. Regardless of whether a country was developed or underdeveloped/underdeveloped, the war economy had disrupted what had been a stable economic system, leaving long-lasting wounds.

2.1. The World Depression and Its Reflections on Turkish Economy

Despite all the efforts toward renewal and stabilization, it is quite difficult to define the 1920s as a full recovery period. The excessive production aimed at meeting postwar demand may have brought short-term relief, but when combined with a number of other factors that would eventually trigger the Great Depression, it began to have destructive consequences. At the end of this process, the bubble burst, and the 1929 Great Depression broke out. The familiar story goes as follows: due to this excessive accumulation of stock, shares began to be sold on the stock market. This wave of panic selling soon led to a chain of bankruptcies among companies. Consequently, an economic stagnation of a kind rarely seen before unfolded on a global scale. However, when considered alongside the narrative above, it becomes clear that the effects of the Great Depression had already begun to be felt well before its official onset. This is due not only to the disruption of global capital accumulation in the aftermath of the war, but also to the intensifying imperial ambitions that shaped the postwar world order. While the exact causes of the crisis remain a subject of debate, what distinguishes the 1929 crisis from earlier ones is how various economic fluctuations throughout the 1920s escalated and eventually triggered the Great Depression. At this point, Michael Graff, A.G. Kenwood, and A.I. Lougheed offer a summary of the Depression's key causes.

> *"The difficulties of post-war adjustment, including the problems of reparations and war debts; the weaknesses of the gold exchange standard, including the possible overvaluation of the pound sterling and the undervaluation of the French franc; the spread of protectionism; and the adoption of more nationalistic economic policies involving a considerable degree of government intervention in the economy, have all been advanced by way of explanation of the origins of the Great Depression, or its length and severity."*[15]

[14] Kindleberger, DeLong, and Eichengreen, *The World in Depression 1929-1939*, 32.

[15] Graff, Kenwood, and Lougheed, *Growth of the International Economy 1820-2015*, 176.

As the authors have noted, the combination of these factors, particularly the transformations in the global economic system throughout the 1920s and the excessive growth in production, meant that the 1929 Great Depression had a great impact on both agricultural and industrial production chains. As Köymen points out, between 1929 and 1933, the world industrial production index fell from 113 to 65 in the United States and other developed countries, and global trade shrank by 65%.[16] This decline was not only incredible in its magnitude but also had a serious impact on not only industrial production but also agricultural production. It is not certain whether such a serious decline has occurred in other crises throughout the 20th century of history of capitalism, except for the Great Depression.[17] However, the effect of the Great Depression was so wild.

In the period under discussion, agricultural production held considerable significance not only for late-capitalizing countries but also for advanced capitalist nations. However, beyond Western Europe, agriculture remained significant. In 1929, farming made up 25% of total employment in the United States, and farm exports contributed 28% to the overall farm income.[18] Since slightly more than a quarter of export revenues came from agricultural production, fluctuations in agricultural product prices had a global impact, just as much as the decline in industrial goods prices. At this point, the figures reflect a dramatic scale. Köymen notes that from 1929 to 1932, agricultural prices declined by half, whereas industrial prices decreased by 40%.[19] These numbers reflect how deeply both sectors were affected by the downturn. For many agricultural producers, maintaining even a subsistence-level economy became increasingly difficult.

Such a dramatic decline ultimately had a profound impact on countries like Turkey, whose economies heavily depended on agricultural production, and in many cases, it

[16] Köymen, *Sermaye Birikirken: Osmanlı, Türkiye, Dünya,* 45.

[17] Independent of the comparative analysis of the crises that capitalism went through both before and after the Great Depression and the impact of the Great Depression; special importance is given to the impact of the Great Depression, since the Great Depression occurred after the First World War and the economic structure, which was already trying to recover, began to be shaken again with the disintegration that began in the 1920s.

[18]Kindleberger, DeLong, and Eichengreen, *The World in Depression 1929-1939*, 85.

[19] Köymen, *Sermaye Birikirken: Osmanlı, Türkiye, Dünya*, 44.

forced them to alter their economic policies. In Turkey's case, the recovery process was further delayed not only due to the aftermath of World War I but also because the country had just emerged from a war of independence. Yet this was not the only reason. The structural underdevelopment of the Turkish economy, combined with the effects of global economic trends, also hindered the Republic's ability to achieve economic stabilization.

When the Republic of Turkey was established in 1923 following the victory in the War of Independence, it was a country with a weak economy, where most of the production took place in rural areas. The legacy inherited by the young cadres of the Republic from the Ottoman Empire -a legacy that persisted until the 1950s- was an economy fundamentally based on agricultural production. According to the figures provided by Yahya Tezel, 80.9% of the population was engaged in agriculture in 1927, and this figure remained relatively high at 76.4% in 1935. In contrast, industrialization efforts remained quite limited during this period. At this point, it is worth noting that throughout the years in question, the proportion of the population employed in the industrial and service sectors remained below 12% until the 1950s. This figure clearly demonstrates that most of the population derived their livelihood from rural areas.

Table 1. Percentage distribution of the working population by sector

	1927	**1935**	**1950**	**1962**	**1972**	**1982**	**1992**	**2012**
Agriculture	80.9	76.4	77.7	77.1	65.0	53.7	43.7	24.6
Industry	8.9	11.7	10.3	10.9	14.5	19.3	20.2	26.0
Services	10.2	11.9	12.0	12.0	20.5	27.0	36.1	49.4

Source: Tezel, Cumhuriyet Döneminin İktisadi Tarihi (1923-1950), 133.

While approximately 80% of Turkey's population was engaged in agriculture, nearly 50% of the country's gross domestic product was generated by the agricultural sector. Between 1929 and 1940, while the share of agricultural production in the GDP[20] decreased, the industrial sector remained roughly stable. There was a shift

[20] For Gross Domestic Product: "Gross domestic product (GDP) is the standard measure of the value added created through the production of goods and services in a country during a certain period."

toward what is referred to as the "other services" sector.[21] It is likely that the decline in agriculture's share within the economy during these years is primarily related to the significant drop in agricultural product prices. Since both the population and economic activity were concentrated in rural areas, the Republic of Turkey relied heavily on agriculture as its main source of surplus value. In Anatolia, agricultural production was at the core of economic life, and much of the country's economic activity centered on bringing these agricultural goods to market. From the late 1920s onward, economic conditions started getting worse in many places, and Turkey was one of them. Prices were dropping, and this quickly became a serious problem for producers. Since most people in Turkey still lived in rural areas and the production was mainly taking place there, the impact of the crisis was especially harsh. As prices for agricultural products dropped, rural producers found it difficult to generate adequate income and sustain their livelihoods. The decline in product prices was severe. As Şevket Pamuk mentioned:

> *"The principal mechanism for the transmission of the Great Depression to the Turkish economy was the sharp decline in the prices of agricultural commodities. Prices of wheat and other cereals declined by more than 60 per cent from 1928-9 to 1932-3 and remained at those levels until the end of the decade. Prices of the leading export crops–tobacco, raisins, hazelnuts and cotton–also showed declines averaging around 50 per cent, although they recovered somewhat later in the decade."*[22]

While the collapse in agricultural prices was already having a devastating effect on the Turkish economy, it was not the only problem facing the young cadres of the Republic: "For Turkey, 1929 was, however, a year full of unexpected and strange surprises."[23] With the onset of the Great Depression in 1929 and the approaching

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Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), "Nominal Gross Domestic Product (GDP)," *OECD DATA, accessed 07.07.2025, https://www.oecd.org/en/data/indicators/nominal-gross-domestic-product-gdp.html#:~:text=Gross%20domestic%20product%20(GDP)%20is,and%20services%20(less%20imports).*

[21] Tezel, *Cumhuriyet Döneminin İktisadi Tarihi (1923-1950),* 401.

[22] Sevket Pamuk, "Intervention During the Great Depression: Another Look at Turkish Experience" *in The Mediterranean Response to Globalization before 1950, ed. Şevket Pamuk and Jeffrey G. Williamson* (London; New York: Routledge, 2000), 327–28.

[23] Bilsay Kuruç, *Mustafa Kemal Döneminde Ekonomi: Büyük Devletler ve Türkiye* (İstanbul: İstanbul Bilgi Üniversitesi Yayınları, 2011), 283.

deadlines for repaying debts inherited from the Ottoman era, the free trade regime in Turkey became increasingly inadequate in addressing the emerging economic problems. Related to this, the decline in prices created serious problems for the Republic of Turkey, both in terms of maintaining budgetary balance and sustaining production. According to Tezel, the impact of the Great Depression on Turkey resulted in the deterioration of the terms of foreign trade, a reduction in import volume, and a decrease in government revenues.[24] However, the more critical issue was the changing conditions faced by agricultural producers.

In conclusion, rural producers, who already had limited production capacity, were particularly affected by the sharp drop in agricultural prices. "The purchasing power of agricultural products fell by 30%."[25] As a result, the agricultural downturn that already began in the latter half of the 1920s deepened with the 1929 crisis, placing rural producers in an increasingly difficult position. According to this, much like the rest of the world, Turkey adopted a state-driven economic model as a response to the Depression, aiming to soften its effects. Like the path taken by several Latin American countries, Turkey embraced an import-substitution strategy.[26] This marked the end of the import boom that had defined much of the 1920s. From then on, Turkey began working towards building an economy that could stand on its own, with changes taking shape not just economically, but also socially and politically. What follows is an examination of how statism took shape as a development path during the Depression, with particular attention to its impact on agriculture.

2.2. The Emergence of Statism in Turkey and the Integration of the Countryside into the National Market Economy

Although the idea of state intervention in economic life has deep historical roots in Anatolia, statism as an official policy emerged in the early 1930s. Throughout the 1920s, the weakness of the private sector, especially in industry but also across the broader production process, became increasingly evident. At the same time, the

[24] Tezel, *Cumhuriyet Döneminin İktisadi Tarihi (1923-1950),* 286.

[25] Tezel, *Cumhuriyet Döneminin İktisadi Tarihi (1923-1950),* 286.

[26] See Korkut Boratav, *Türkiye İktisat Tarihi, 1908-2002* (Ankara: İmge Kitabevi, 2003), 59-81.

absence of a strong bourgeois class in Turkey was widely acknowledged. In response, the state attempted to drive capital accumulation by offering incentives and directly taking control of production. However, the worsening economic conditions in the second half of the 1920s, combined with the outbreak of the Great Depression in 1929, led the cadres of the Republican People's Party to embrace statism as both a protective strategy and an economic opportunity. While the state had already been playing an active role in the market during the 1920s, its involvement became more institutionalized and structured during the 1930s.

Throughout the 1920s, the Republican People's Party (CHF) continued the legacy of the Committee of Union and Progress by embracing the idea that the state should act as a vehicle for capital accumulation. Within the broader framework of the *millî iktisat* (national economy), the importance of cultivating a *millî burjuvazi* (national bourgeoisie) was repeatedly emphasized. This vision was formalized at the Izmir Economic Congress in 1923. In essence, the İzmir Congress laid out a plan in which capital accumulation would lead to industrialization. According to this approach, the state assumed a direct role in initiating ventures capable of generating capital accumulation. As Yahya Tezel put it,

> "*The main characteristic of development policy in the 1920s was that, from the early days of the Republic, the Ankara government pursued an interventionist economic policy aimed at creating a favorable social, political, and economic environment to encourage private accumulation in general and industrial investment in particular, along with providing direct support."*[27]

Between 1923 and 1929, Turkey's open trade policies caused a big jump in imports. Because of that, the country kept importing more than it exported, leading to a constant trade deficit. This heavy dependence on imports made it hard for Turkey to save enough money to invest in its own industry, so the industrial sector did not get the funds it needed to grow. As Tezel notes:

> *"All value judgments regarding the capitalist economy were shattered by the 1929 crisis. The fundamental principles of liberal economics began to be*

[27] Tezel, *Cumhuriyet Döneminin İktisadi Tarihi (1923-1950),* 271-72 (Translation is mine).

> *questioned. In Turkey, the idea of 'economic freedom,' which had been reinforced at the İzmir Economic Congress, also lost its credibility."*[28]

It seems that the 1929 crisis fundamentally challenged capitalist value judgments and liberal economic principles. For example, Faruk Birtek summarizes the origins of statism in Turkey as follows: "In general terms, Etatism should be seen as the double response of a historically specific polity: first, to the World Depression and, secondly, to developments in the Turkish economy in the years 1923-30."[29] The state has been attempting industrialization efforts since the 1920s. However, in the period following 1929, strengthening the domestic industry became a key focus of the Republic of Turkey's economic policies. With the adoption of the principle of statism by the Republican People's Party in 1932, the concept of self-sufficiency marked the era. Pamuk says that "As the unfavourable world market conditions continued, the government announced in 1932 the beginning of a new strategy called *etatism*, or state-led import-substituting industrialization. Etatism promoted the state as the leading producer and investor in the urban sector."[30] However, politically, this acceptance began before 1932. With the crisis that hit the liberal world in 1929, self-sufficiency was constructed as a solution, and the number of imports was significantly restricted, making the idea of self-sufficiency a priority. According to Seda Bakırcı,

> *"The Great Depression caused agricultural product prices to fall rapidly, deepening an already existing issue for Turkish industry. This issue was the market problem of Turkish industry... In order to continue and accelerate its development, the industrial sector had to find new markets."*[31]

The need for a market to support industrialization was highly significant for the Republican leadership. Compared to the agricultural sector, the industrial sector in

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[28] Tevfik Çavdar, *Türkiye Ekonomisinin Tarihi 1900 - 1960* (Ankara: İmge Kitabevi, 2003), 232.

[29] Faruk Birtek, "The Rise Fall of Etatism in Turkey, 1932-1950: The Uncertain Road in the Restructuring of a Semiperipheral Economy." *Review*: *A Journal of the Fernand Braudel Center for the Study of Economies, Historical Systems and Civilizations* 8, no. 3 (1985), http://www.jstor.org/stable/40240997

[30] Pamuk, "Intervention During the Great Depression: Another Look at Turkish Experience," 330.

[31] Seda Bakırcı, "Cumhuriyet Dönemi İktisat Politikaları İçinde Çiftçiyi Topraklandırma Kanunu'nun Anlamı ve Önemi" (Master's Thesis, Gazi Üniversitesi, 2010), 52.

the country was quite weak and struggled to sustain itself independently. For the Republican cadres, progress was believed to come through industrialization. For instance, in 1921, the Minister of Finance, Ferit Bey, made the following statement reflecting the early 1920s sentiment: “Turkey works and produces, but others benefit from its products... We sell the raw materials, which we earn through hard labor, to foreign countries at negligible prices. Then, foreigners alter these materials and sell them back to us...”[32]

As an agricultural country, Turkey’s industrialization fundamentally depended on its own rural areas as the main market. This reliance intensified a longstanding challenge faced by Turkish industry, namely the limited market capacity. It was this pressing issue that gave rise to the emergence of statism as a necessary economic approach.[33] Considering the importance of the rural economy in Turkey, industrialization based on agriculture and the transfer of agricultural surplus gained prominence. Likewise, the state sought to extract surplus products from rural regions. During the 1930s, in alignment with the import substitution policy, the state primarily aimed to appropriate agricultural surplus from the market. The main reason behind this development was the enactment of the *Buğday Koruma Kanunu* (Wheat Protection Law), passed in 1932 with the law no. 2056 and the establishment of the *Toprak Mahsülleri Ofisi* (Agricultural Products Office) in 1938, with the Law No. 3491.[34] In Turkey, a system was implemented to enable large landowners to sell their products at higher prices. The Wheat Protection Law provided the legal basis for this system and laid the groundwork for the creation of the office. Both laws, enacted at different times, specifically regulated the grain market by setting fixed prices to withdraw agricultural products from rural producers.[35] Moreover, in the 1930s and

[32]İstanbul Sanayi Odası Dergisi 1969 (38) 12-3, quoted in Tezel, *Cumhuriyet Döneminin İktisadi Tarihi (1923-1950)*, 172.

[33] Bakırcı, "Cumhuriyet Dönemi İktisat Politikaları İçinde Çiftçiyi Topraklandırma Kanunu’nun Anlamı ve Önemi," 52.

[34] Although both laws numbered 2056 and 3491 came into being on different dates, they specifically regulate the grain market and ensure the withdrawal of agricultural goods from rural areas with fixed and determined prices from farmers.

[35] Bakırcı, "Cumhuriyet Dönemi İktisat Politikaları İçinde Çiftçiyi Topraklandırma Kanunu’nun Anlamı ve Önemi," 74.

the 1940s, the state is known to have directly extracted goods and money from the agricultural sector, especially through sales cooperatives and various indirect taxes.

The economic contraction triggered by the Great Depression posed significant challenges for the Republic of Turkey but also created an opportunity to address the pressing issue of generating a market for the much-aspired industrialization. Through the import-substitution model, Turkey purchased agricultural products at set prices, providing both goods and cash to the industrial sector. Additionally, the state actively participated in industrial production, taking necessary steps to promote the country's industrialization. In this context, while the state managed to balance payments, budget deficits were also minimized. "Using a more general dataset, the difference between exports and imports showed a negative result until 1930, but it turned positive between 1930 and 1933."[36] The data primarily shows that as the state turned to the domestic market, it began to meet the self-sufficiency concept and started to fulfill its needs from the domestic market. However, this positive outcome did not extend equally to small rural farmers and urban workers.

How rural relations developed under these policies and how smallholder peasants were affected by both the Depression and import-substitution policies constitute an important topic of discussion. While it is accepted that the Depression had a negative impact on all sectors and, more specifically, on all rural producers, it remains necessary to clarify how different segments of the peasantry were affected. At this point, the focus will be on examining the dependency relationships that were experienced by small peasants, their indebtedness, and the livelihood difficulties they experienced.

2.3. The Transformation of Small Peasantry After the Great Depression: Issues of Dependency, Indebtedness, and Sustenance

The importance of agriculture within Turkey's economy and its economic dominance can be seen. According to how Oya Köymen conveys, "By the foundation of the

[36] State Institute of Statistics, *Statistical Yearbook (1932-33)* (Ankara: Devlet Matbaası, 1933), 236.

republic, 10.3 million of the 13.6 million total population live in villages."[37] The fact that a massive portion of the population lives in rural areas also demonstrates the strength of agricultural production in the country. For 1927, 75.78% of the population lived in rural areas, and by 1935, this percentage had risen to 76.47%.[38] Over the years, the countryside stood out as the primary area of production upon which the population in Turkey relied for their sustenance.

The Great Depression of 1929 shook the global economy as a whole and particularly constrained the economic resources of countries that generated surplus value primarily through agriculture. Along with the Depression, the prices of agricultural products declined. Like other countries whose economies relied heavily on the marketing of agricultural goods, rural producers in Turkey also entered a period of hardship. In Turkey's case, since a large part of the population lived in rural areas and most of the surplus value came from agriculture, the state consistently tried to increase agricultural output to extract surplus goods from the market. Despite these efforts, during this period (which severely challenged rural producers), peasants with little or no land were unable to sustain a subsistence economy, failed to accumulate wealth, and fell into a serious economic crisis. For example, İlhan Tekeli and Selim İlkin summarize the rural producers' distress during the Depression years as follows:

> *Agricultural producers faced several challenges: (i) the prices of the goods they primarily consumed increased; (ii) the cost of agricultural inputs, including tools like slingshots and plows, also rose; (iii) lacking access to organized credit institutions, the interest rates they paid surged from 2% per month before the war to 7% per month now; and (iv) expenses such as railway transportation fees and packaging material prices went up as well. These increases, occurring while agricultural prices were falling, shifted the "terms of exchange" against the sector. According to Birgen, regardless of whether a liberal or socialist framework is used as a measure, "the depression reigns with the utmost severity in our village life."*[39]

The Depression negatively affected all agricultural producers in general, but a key point of debate is which level of producers in rural areas was most heavily impacted.

[37] Köymen, *Sermaye Birikirken: Osmanlı, Türkiye, Dünya*, 98.

[38] State Institute of Statistics, Agricultural Statistics (1934-37), (Ankara: Receb Ulusoğlu Basımevi, 1939),19.

[39] Tekeli and İlkin, *1929 Dünya Buhranında Türkiye'nin İktisadi Politika Arayışları*, 87.

Especially, the state's purchase of agricultural products from the market and their use in the domestic market was at a price close to the foreign market price during the early years of the Great Depression. Even though the subsequent purchase prices were below market levels, large landowners were not as affected as it is believed, as they were able to store a large portion of their products or sell additional products in the market. Ultimately, they were able to avoid the market price set by the state because they could connect directly with the merchant. At this point, the most affected group was the small producers. As a result, their subsistence economies were harmed because they had to sell their products to the state and then buy some food items from the state at higher prices.

While such a decline in prices affected the small peasantry the most, this situation also began to determine the types of relationships they entered. In this context, small producers were forced to form dependent relationships with large landowners, merchants, and the state, particularly in the stages of borrowing and marketing their agricultural products. Through the sum of these relationships, small producers were directed toward production for the market and became increasingly integrated into the existing system. The relationship between small producers and landless peasants and the market, even if they are independent, primarily depends on merchants, large landowners, or the state itself. The relational dynamics they entered periodically shaped their position within the relations of production. However, due to market requirements, their place within these relations can overlap and shift. A dependency relationship can be observed between the triangle of large landowners, small producers, and the market. The existence of landownership accompanies a position of 'forced subjection' both in terms of direct production and the relationship established with the market. Although Turkish agriculture is dominated by small-scale production, the weight of this relationship is related to large landownership.

This state of subjection mainly stems from two basic points of dependency. The first of these takes place in the agricultural production phase between the large landowner and other segments of the peasantry. Accordingly, seizing the surplus value produced by the productive part of the peasantry, it helps to directly determine the property relations in agriculture. When it comes to the second, it is the intermediary role in

which the large landowner plays the part in the process of agricultural products being commodified and supplied to the market, regardless of being produced by a small-scale producer or landless peasant. At the same time, the large landowner takes the role of merchant and intermediary by adopting a direct lending and product buying character. As a result, the dependence of other layers of the peasantry (without large landownership) on the market was reinforced. According to Köymen,

> *"... This exploitation resulting from production was the first way the landowners accumulated capital. The second way small farmers were exploited was through the landlord lending money at very high interest rates (like usury). When the farmer could not pay back the debt, the landlord took their land. The third way was through trade: the landlord-merchant bought the farmer's products at low prices and sold them necessary goods like kerosene, salt, and fabric at high prices."*[40]

As a result of these two types of dependency relationships, occurring during the production phase and during the period of lending, small peasants faced serious hardship. The significant price decline in agricultural production caused by the Great Depression deepened this existing dependency relationship and further burdened the peasantry with debt, both legally and illegally. Indebtedness, particularly to large landowners and moneylenders, had two consequences for peasants. The first was that peasants became sharecroppers or laborers working on someone else's land. The second, as Oya Köymen emphasized, could result in the worst-case scenario, in which poor peasants lost their land. According to İsmail Hüsrev Tökin, small businesses, after becoming indebted to moneylenders through debt, became sharecroppers for them. If they could not repay their debt, they faced the danger of losing their land.[41] For him, the current situation in rural Turkey demonstrates that this debt relationship entered by poor peasants is truly an unpayable debt. A significant portion of peasantry, unable to pay their existing debts, is losing their means of production to loan sharks. Considering that these loan sharks are also large landowners in most rural areas, it can be argued that land consolidation is taking

[40] Köymen, *Sermaye Birikirken: Osmanlı, Türkiye, Dünya*, 99.

[41] İsmail Hüsrev Tökin, "Türk Köylüsü Bir Toprak Reformu Bekliyor," *Kadro Dergisi, no.21* (1933): 22-23.

place. Again, according to Tökin's account, there are complaints on this point. One of these complaints is from Armutlu:

> *"For example, in Armutlu, where interest rates are between 120 and 600, hundreds of thousands of liras worth of gardens and fields are mortgaged to loan sharks for a pittance. When the money cannot be paid, these properties fall into the hands of the* loan sharks."[42]

Such high interest rates, given the already declining agricultural prices, were causing serious hardship for small peasants, and amounting to a suicide attempt on their part. However, this dependency relationship is not limited to illegal borrowing. Another key aspect of this relationship involves the *Ziraat Bankası* (Agricultural Bank) and the *Tarım Kredi Kooperatifleri* (Agricultural Credit Cooperatives). The debt relationship of the peasantry deepens through these institutions, further strengthening their dependence on the market. According to the 1933 Statistical Yearbook, "The total amount of loans provided by the Agricultural Bank in 1931 was 25,483,827 liras."[43] Agricultural Credit Cooperatives also played a similar role. However, debt burdens were not always so mild. According to an article published in Son Posta newspaper on January 15, 1938, it was stated that "loan interest rates will not exceed 8.5%."[44] This indicates that even an 8.5% interest rate was already quite high, suggesting that earlier rates had been even more burdensome, making it nearly impossible for producers to repay their debts. Below, the loan amounts provided by the Agricultural Bank are listed, showing that these amounts have increased year by year.[45] At this point, a year-by-year analysis reveals the significant increase in the amount of loans provided by Agricultural Bank. The situation becomes clearer when compared to previous years. According to an article published in Ülkü magazine,

> *"While the total amount of money given to farmers in the thiry-five years from the bank's establishment to the proclamation of the Republic (1888-1923) did not exceed 23 million, this figure reached 105 million between*

[42] İsmail Hüsrev Tökin, "Türkiye Köy İktisadiyatında Borçlanma Şekilleri," *Kadro Dergisi no.3* (1932): 32.

[43] State Institute of Statistics, *Statistical Yearbook (1932-33)* (Ankara: Devlet Matbaası, 1933), 314.
[44] Ekonomik Kalkınma*, Son Posta*, 15 Ocak 1938.

[45] State Institute of Statistics, *Statistical Yearbook (1932-33)* (Ankara: Devlet Matbaası, 1933), 314.

1923-1933, demonstrating the significant increase in the amount of money given to farmers during the Republic period."[46]

Table 2. Loans issued by the Agricultural Bank 1919-31

Year	Loan Amount (Lira)	Year	Loan Amount (Lira)
1919	1,019,450	1926	16,294,210
1920	985,643	1927	17,124,531
1921	898,323	1928	29,046,428
1922	927,085	1929	25,880,187
1923	4,807,604	1930	40,325,608
1924	16,400,562	1931	25,483,827
1925	15,456,271		

Source: *Başvekalet İstatistik Umum Müdürlüğü, İstatistik Yıllığı (1932-33)* (Ankara: Devlet Matbaası, 1933), 314.

At this point, there is a discrepancy between the figures in the statistical yearbook and the figures of Ülkü magazine. However, both sources reveal a similar development in terms of loan amounts. However, when the peasant demands are examined, it can be stated that the loans provided by the Agricultural Bank and credit offices were insufficient in amount to meet the needs of small producers, and not all of them had access to these loans.[47] Cem Emrence stated the main reason for accessibility was that "Yet in some instances peasants had to work harder to get credit: they were required to get a receipt from the council of elders in the village, a process which was usually discriminatory against the poor peasants."[48] Therefore, it can be seen that poor peasants were in difficult situation not only because of the inadequacy of the credit mechanism but also because of local power relations. When

[46] "Köylü ve Ziraat Bankası," *Ülkü Dergisi, no. 10* (1933): 316.

[47] Whether all villagers have access to these credit opportunities is ultimately a guess. However, there are strong doubts. In the archives of the Republic, both the demands of the villagers and the CHP inspection reports state that the amount of credit should be increased. For this reason, it can be assumed that the villagers have not been able to access sufficient credit.

[48] Cem Emrence, "Turkey in Economic Crisis (1927-1930): A Panoromic Vision," *Middle Eastern Studies 39, no.4* (2014): 69, http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00263200412331301787

the economic downturn led to a decrease in the amount of credit extended, particularly noticeable in 1931, peasants increasingly resorted to borrowing from large landowners and merchants as a means to sustain their subsistence economies:

> *"In many cases, peasants borrowed from individuals because either they were too far from the Agricultural Bank or credit cooperatives, or the latter refused to give credit. When borrowing from individuals, the peasants paid even higher interest rates."*[49]

Due to the short repayment periods and the relatively high interest rates, these loans placed small producers in an even more difficult position, ultimately making them unable to repay their debts. Considering that even an interest rate of 8.5% can be regarded as high, it can be inferred that the interest rates on loans taken from individuals imposed a very heavy burden on producers. "This is no interest or usury. It is a state of running into an unrepayable debt."[50] In the early 1930s, in this news piece on Son Posta newspaper, Hasan Fehmi is describing the peasantry's dead-end situation within the agricultural structure. The web of relations that they are necessarily forced into brings about impoverishment, especially for the poor peasants and small-scale producers. The debt relationship that can be seen here is a valuable historical example for telling us about not only the relationship itself but also the loss of self-preservation phenomenon for the peasants.

The loss of economic independence among small producers in rural Turkey, triggered by the worsening economic conditions, drew the attention of both large landowners and state officials. The impact of the Great Depression on rural production and the situation of small producers has been a frequent topic of discussion. In 1929, Şükrü Saraçoğlu, the Minister of Treasury and Finance, described the cost of living and explained how, despite increases in production, living standards had declined:

> *"A portion of the complained-about cost of living should be considered normal. The greatest difficulty caused by the rising cost of living stems from*

[49] Elif Akçetin, 'Anatolian Peasants in the Great Depression 1929–1933', *New Perspectives on Turkey* 23 (2000): 87, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0896634600003393.

[50] Halkın Sesi, *Son Posta*, 1 Ağustos 1931.

> *the disruption of balance in personal budgets. Some families who used to live on five gold coins now earn sixteen, yet they feel more strained. In other words, the increased production of many families is not enough to meet their needs. In these classes, needs have surpassed production, which has exacerbated hardship."*[51]

Following 1929, economic contraction persisted, particularly in rural areas, and the condition of the peasantry appeared not very promising. At this point, although they primarily pursued their own interests, large landowners also voiced the problems faced by small producers. In 1933, Halil Menteşe, a major landowner in İzmir, also referred to the worsening economic conditions of the peasantry.

> *"The farmers are suffering from a severe imbalance. Since 1929, agricultural surpluses have fallen by more than 150%, yet the prices of clothing and household goods have not decreased; due to bartering and other factors, they have even increased somewhat. They have certainly not fallen compared to 1929. Moreover, taxes on essential goods for peasants, such as oil and sugar, have not decreased since 1929. Facing a heavy burden of around 40%, severe imbalance, and debts, along with high prices, if special measures are not taken for the peasants, they will not be able to endure this, and a large part of our agriculture will decline."*[52]

Both the network of relations established by large landowners with the market and the discussions within the parliament reveal that rural producers did not experience the 1930s in a period of prosperity. While the prices of agricultural products declined in both national and international markets, the prices of consumer goods increased due to customs policies and the effects of import-substitution strategies. For small producers, who were already struggling to reserve seeds for the following season, this constituted a severe economic and social crisis. Consequently, small-scale producers in Turkey became increasingly dependent on the market and more vulnerable to the negative conditions of market dynamics. As subsistence agriculture grew more difficult to sustain, smallholding peasants faced a significant erosion of their economic autonomy.

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[51] Bilsay Kuruç, Belgelerle Türkiye İktisat Politikası 1. Cilt (Ankara: Ankara Üniversitesi Siyasal Bilgiler Fakültesi Yayınları, 1988), 21, quoted in Oktay Yenal, *Cumhuriyet'in İktisat Tarihi* (İstanbul: Türkiye İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları, 2010), 79.

[52] Kuruç, *Mustafa Kemal Döneminde Ekonomi*, 317.

During the 1930s, following the Great Depression, the independent producer character of small-scale rural producers in Turkey was increasingly threatened. Not all rural producers were affected equally by the decline in prices; small peasants felt the crisis more acutely due to their inability to stockpile and their need to sell their current harvest below market prices. Recognizing that small producers could no longer sustain their subsistence economies, state officials shifted their political agenda toward efforts to redistribute land to the peasantry. The following section will explore the transformation of landownership relations. It will assess whether small producers were actually granted land during the Depression years and provide an analysis of the nature of the relationship between the state and rural producers.

CHAPTER 3

PEASANTRY IN TURKISH AGRICULTURE AND LAND DISTRIBUTION BETWEEN 1929-1939

While there is a limited number of sources in the literature regarding the distribution of land ownership in Turkey, and the reliability of these sources remains debatable, available data suggest that land was highly fragmented and predominantly held by independent small-scale producers. Although there were periodical variations in land distribution, it can be assumed that the distribution remained within certain boundaries in general. Within this trajectory, the situation of small producers and the subsistence deprivation of landless peasants became evident in the land redistribution issue. The period between 1929 and 1939 marks an era during which the legal framework for the political discourse on land redistribution in Turkey was being established. Prominent political figures of the time, such as İsmet İnönü, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, and Celal Bayar, drew attention to the plight of landless and smallholder peasants and frequently declared that legislative and administrative measures would be taken to resolve the problem. However, it remains unclear to what degree these promises were put into effect, how effective the laws that were passed really were, and what impact these policies had on the productivity of the rural farmers. Given the Republic's foundational commitment to private property rights and the complex socio-economic ties linking rural areas to the central government, the debates and legislation of the period shed light on the challenges associated with land redistribution.

3.1. The Distribution of Land Ownership in Turkey and the Condition of Small Producers

The legacy inherited from the Ottoman Empire provides significant insight. This legacy largely reflected a deeply unequal structure in which aghas and 'feudal lords'

controlled most arable land, while small producers, despite their overwhelming numbers, were confined to cultivating limited land. As Köymen reports,

> *"The agricultural censuses conducted in 1912–1913 offer some clues regarding the land distribution inherited from the Ottoman period. According to data collected for Anatolia, covering one million families, 1% of the total families owned 39% of the land, while 87% of the families owned only 35% of the total land."*[53]

1,183,941 1,570,216 In addition, drawing on the 1912 statistics, Oya Silier also highlighted the limited size of land cultivated by small producers in various regions of Turkey. According to statistics from 1912, land ownership of less than 5 hectares in regions other than the Mediterranean and Southeastern Anatolia regions was between 70% and 85%.[54] From this point, it can be understood that small peasants in the Ottoman Empire were confined to a very limited area and struggled to produce within it. Similar to the data shared by Oya Silier, Tevfik Güran also presented statistical data compiled from various sources. Accordingly, the total number of peasants in the Ottoman Empire who owned less than 5 hectares of land was 1,183,041, representing a 75% share of the total. Furthermore, according to calculations based on 1909 data, the average number of decares owned in the Ottoman Empire was 28.5 decares. This figure was. 44.9 in Ankara, 21.2 in Kastamonu, and 25.7 in Sivas.[55] In addition to the landownership studies conducted during the Ottoman Empire, property calculations in the Republican period were based primarily on data from the year 1938. According to what Suat Aksoy quotes from Ömer Lütfi Barkan, a survey conducted in 35 provinces in 1938 shows that the rate of peasants in Turkey who owned less than 50 hectares of land was 99.75%, and these were called small property owners.[56]

The below table primarily illustrates the distribution of landownership in Republican Turkey before 1940s. It contains two separate instances of the term "total": the first

[53] Köymen, *Kapitalizm ve Köylülük,* 107.

[54] Silier, *Türkiye'de Tarımsal Yapının Gelişimi (1923-1938),* 9–10.

[55] Tevfik Güran*, Resmi İstatistiklere Göre Osmanlı Toplum ve Ekonomisi* (İstanbul: Türkiye İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları, 2017), 186-7.

[56] Aksoy, *100 Soruda Türkiye'de Toprak Meselesi*, 58.

is used to indicate the combined number of landholdings of 500 decares and above, while the second reflects the overall total. Apart from these, aggregate figures regarding average land size are not provided. At this point, the data has been directly reproduced from the figures used by Ömer Lütfi Barkan without modification.[57]

Table 3. The Land Ownership Distribution in 1938

Land Area (In Decares)	Number of Land Property	Percentage (%) of Landowners	Total Area Occupied (Decares)	Proportion of Total Land Area	Average Property Size (Decares)
Large Property (More than 5000)	418	0.01	6,400,000	3.70	15,000
Medium Sized Property (Between 500-5000)	5,764	0.23	17,200,000	9.95	3,000
SUBTOTAL	6182	0.25	23,600,000	13.66	
Small Property (Less than 500)	2,493,000	99.75	149,180,000	86.34	60
TOTAL	2,499,182	100	172,780,000	100	

Source: Ömer Barkan, "La Loi Sur La Distribution Des Terres Aux Agriculteurs Et Les Problemes Essentiels d'une Reforme Agraire En Turquie," İstanbul Üniversitesi İktisat Fakültesi Mecmuası 6, no. 1-2 (August 2014): 76.

Furthermore, according to what Silier reported from İsmail Hüsrev Tökin, a peasant family needs to own approximately 7-10 hectares of land to make a living.[58] According to Tökin's estimation, although regional variations may exist, it can be argued that peasants owning less than 7 hectares of land, on average, fell short of the minimum subsistence threshold. However, based on the figures cited by Suat Aksoy from Barkan, it is not possible to determine how many individuals lacked sufficient land, as all farmers owning less than 50 hectares were grouped into a single category. Thus, while a more detailed dataset would be necessary for precise assessment, Silier gives a clear account of land distribution in the 1930s and clarifies this situation further.

[57] The amounts quoted by Barkan are given in decares, based on the original table. They can be recalculated by considering 1 hectare as 10 decares. In other tables, it is given in decares or hectares, depending on the original.

[58] Silier, *Türkiye'de Tarımsal Yapının Gelişimi (1923-1938)*, 63.

Table 4. Land distribution in the 1930s

Land Groups (In Decare)	Number of Families	(%)	Land	(%)
Landless	128,690			
1-20	856,661	34.3		
21-50	611,971	24.4		
51-100	524,413	21.0		
101-500	499,955	20.0	149,180,000	86.4
501-5000	5,764	0.2	17,200,000	10.0
5001 and more	418	0.02	6,400,000	3.7
TOTAL	2,499,182		172,780,000	

Source: Silier, Türkiye'de Tarımsal Yapının Gelişimi (1923-1938), 67.

In contrast to the data presented by Barkan, Silier provides a clearer categorization in her presentation of landownership statistics, drawing on both Barkan and Kanbolat. The table she uses is structured around five main components: the amount of land owned, the number of families, the percentage of families within the total, the total amount of land held, and the share of that land within the overall total. Despite this detailed breakdown, there is still insufficient information on the extent of land cultivated–and the proportion of the total this represented—by those who either owned no land or held less than 10 hectares.

As a result, the land distribution in Turkey has mainly worked in favor of large landowners. Small producers, despite being numerous, have had to share a limited area and simply do not have enough land. As of this point, there is a serious inequality in the distribution of agricultural property in Turkey. Therefore, in the process of integrating agricultural production, which is one of the important parts of the Turkish economy, into both national and international markets, the problem of whether small producers have enough land rather than the prevalence of small producers is emerging as a problem. Despite all existing data, Mehmet Nuri Alpay, with a hint of possible irony, states this: "Those who own a few decares of land and a few oxen cannot claim to be poor, because Turkey's soil is very rich and returns the

labor of those who work on it."[59] However, the tables above and the calculations of İsmail Hüsrev illustrates that in fact, small scale producers in Turkey simply do not have enough land.

As the data demonstrates, there was significant property inequality in rural Turkey. Thus, the issue of land distribution, or more precisely, the settlement of landless and smallholding farmers, has always been a significant topic of discussion since the foundation of the Republic because as Sinan Yıldırmaz mentioned that

> *"The peasants is the essence of the Near East. Peasant embodies maps showing the distribution of population or cultivated land. They support the workers and merchants in the town. Also, sustain the landowner and the government by paying rent and taxes."*[60]

Consequently, the government has acknowledged the existence of a landlessness problem in Turkey, and "landlessness" has been recognized as the economic issue of the Turkish countryside by the relevant authorities.

3.2. Landlesness in the Early Republican Era: Perspectives from Prominent Republican Cadres

The Republican cadres regarded landlessness as a critical factor influencing the transition from the Ottoman Empire to the Republic of Turkey. The legacy inherited by the Republican governments was a situation in which a huge portion of the population lived in rural areas and earned their livelihood through agricultural production. As seen in the 1927 census, a substantial portion of the population lived in rural areas and depended on availability of agricultural surplus for their livelihood. According to this, 10,342,891 people lived in rural areas, which corresponds to 75.78%. According to the census conducted in 1935, this ratio rose to 76.47%.[61]

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[59] Mehmet Nuri Alpay, *Köy Davamız ve Köyün İçyüzü* (Ankara: Örnek Matbaası, 1952), 52.

[60] Sinan Yıldırmaz, *Türkiye'de Köylülüğün Sosyal Tarihi (1945-1960)* (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2021), 37.

[61] State Institute of Statistics, Agricultural Statistics (1934-37), (Ankara: Receb Ulusoğlu Basımevi, 1939),19.

As previously stated, according to Tökin's calculations, a rural producer in Turkey needs to own between 7 and 10 hectares of land on average to provide a living. According to data from Suat Aksoy and Oya Silier, it can be inferred that around 80% of small producers do not possess sufficient subsistence land. For this reason, the issue of land distribution to the peasantry and ensuring their access to adequate cultivable land became one of the major items on the agenda.

At this point, government cadres attempted to take certain steps toward resolving this issue. For instance, figures such as Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, İsmet İnönü and Celal Bayar made efforts to intervene in this matter over a period of approximately ten years. Statements made in the Assembly or at party congresses were fundamentally centered on the land distribution to the peasantry and ensuring their access to sufficient land. It is clear from these statements that the segment referred to as the peasantry consisted of landless peasants and small landowners. Ultimately, peasants were compelled to work on others' fields to sustain production. This was, in essence, the concrete situation that the cadres were trying to address.

According to İnönü's parliamentary speech, there is a condition in rural Turkey where producers are unable to own land. Therefore, providing land for farmers is seen as a means for the peasantry to work more efficiently. The policy developed by the party, through the efforts of İsmet İnönü, emphasized the necessity of land distribution to farmers.

However, at this point, İsmet İnönü expresses his hope that large landowners to work productively while also stressing that there will be no land concentration in Turkey, and they will remain unaffected. With this statement made in 1929, a form of assurance was provided to large landowners.

> *"Our concern in this matter is to provide landless peasants with the opportunity to work on fields that will become their own property. Far from interfering with those who possess the effort and wealth to operate large farms, on the contrary, we wish to see them work productively and earn profits as well."*[62]

[62] TBMM Zabıt Ceridesi 3. Dönem 13. Cilt 3. Birleşim (09.11.1929): 16, retrived from https://www5.tbmm.gov.tr/tutanaklar/TUTANAK/TBMM/d03/c013/tbmm03013003.pdf

Despite İsmet İnönü's statement, the Republican People's Party had not adopted a formal decision on this matter in its 1931 party program; however, by 1935, this issue was included in the party program. According to Article 34 of the program, "Providing sufficient land to every Turkish farmer is one of the main objectives of our Party. It is necessary to enact specific expropriation laws to distribute land to landless farmers."[63] With this article directly included in the Republican People's Party program, it can be assumed that the effort to distribute land to landless or smallholder farmers was addressed in a systematic manner.

By 1936, similar statements continued to be made, indicating that the issue had not yet been fully resolved. For this reason, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, being directly in charge, highlighted that the priority was for peasants to work on their own land. He pointed out that a huge portion of producers in rural Turkey did not possess sufficient land and emphasized the necessity for the peasantry to own subsistence land. Like İnönü's 1929 statement, in which he assured that the rights of large landowners would not be affected, Atatürk's remarks also stressed a comparable point regarding peasants operating large areas of land. Accordingly, the modernization of agricultural tools and the creation of space for large landholders became part of the agenda.

> *"It is absolutely necessary for every Turkish peasant family to own the land they will live and work on. The solid foundation and development of the homeland rely on this principle. In addition to this, we would like to encourage the cultivation of large estates using modern tools in order to ensure increased production for the country."*[64]

In his speech the same year, İnönü stated that the existence of landless peasants was one of the greatest problems. He emphasized that peasants working on others' lands were evident and clearly incompatible with the party program. At this point, İnönü expressed that, due to the economic policies of the time, peasants needed to be granted land and work on their own plots. However, working on land owned by others was a challenge not only for landless peasants but also likely affected small

[63] Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi, C.H.P. Programı (Ankara: Ulus Basımevi, 1935), 29-30.

[64] TBMM Zabıt Ceridesi 5. Dönem 13. Cilt 1. Birleşim (01.11.1936): 5, retrived from https://www5.tbmm.gov.tr/tutanaklar/TUTANAK/TBMM/d05/c013/tbmm05013001.pdf

producers. Contrary to İnönü's claim, a much larger portion of the peasantry than half did not have sufficient land.

> *"The number of landless farmers in our country exceeds all estimates. Even in regions where land is most fragmented, nearly half of the peasants are landless. These individuals are compelled to work under very harsh conditions and with very low productivity on lands owned by others."*[65]

In 1937, the Republican cadres continued their efforts with similar motivation. Accordingly, the goal was to ensure that peasants were granted land and worked on their own plots with sufficient hectarage. Celal Bayar, who was supported by the capital circles of the time, also addressed this issue and emphasized the necessity for peasants to own adequate land. In his speech, he referred to Article 34 of the 1935 party program and reminded the audience of the program's requirements.

> *"The principle of leaving no landless farmer is based on Article 34 of our party program. We consider it a solid foundation for the homeland that every Turkish farming family owns land sufficient to sustain themselves through their labor. According to the population density of each region and the fertility level of the land, we will limit the amount of land that large landowners can cultivate."*[66]

However, despite the party program and numerous attempts, the issue of landlessness remained unresolved and continued to occupy the leading figures of the Republican government. As the supreme authority, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk once again found it necessary to intervene, this time issuing a warning to large landowners. By 1937, faced with the ongoing failure to resolve the land question, Atatürk emphasized the need to limit land ownership. Consequently, restrictions on the amount of cultivable land were proposed, to be determined according to its productivity:

> *"Firstly, there must be no landless farmers left in the country. More importantly, land sufficient to sustain a farming family must not, under any circumstances, be divided. The extent of land that large farmers and estate*

[65] İsmet İnönü, *Konuşma, demeç, makale, mesaj ve demeçleri* (Ankara: TBMM, 2003), 255.

[66] TBMM Zabıt Ceridesi 5. Dönem 20. Cilt 3. Birleşim (08.11.1937): 21, retrived from https://www5.tbmm.gov.tr/tutanaklar/TUTANAK/TBMM/d05/c020/tbmm05020003.pdf

owners can cultivate must be limited according to the population density of the region where the land is located and the fertility of the soil…"[67]

As a result, from 1929 to 1937, figures such as Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, İsmet İnönü, and Celal Bayar stated that peasants did not possess sufficient land to sustain themselves. They focused on the issue of land distribution to ensure the continuity of state economic policies and to enable small producers to maintain their subsistence economies. It is important to emphasize that, between 1929 and 1937, there was a widespread assurance that the rights of large landowners would not be violated. Thus, throughout the period from 1929 to World War II, many messages regarding the condition of the peasantry were conveyed, yet the economic and political concrete reflections of these discourses were not fully realized. Surveys conducted in 1938 indicate that the problem of landlessness remained unresolved and that peasants continued to struggle to maintain their subsistence economies. Efforts to distribute land were addressed not only through rhetoric but also directly via legislation. However, the effectiveness of these laws and the extent to which they benefited the peasantry remain subjects open to debate.

3.3. Constitution and Laws as Outcomes of Land Distribution Efforts

During the period leading up to 1939, Republican cadres repeatedly made statements both in the parliament and at party congresses emphasizing the necessity of land distribution to peasants. Therefore, it is indisputable that one of the key political agendas of the ruling government at the time was the land distribution to the peasantry. However, this effort cannot be evaluated solely based on the speeches of the cadres. Throughout this period, numerous laws were enacted, and several legislative proposals were prepared to lay the groundwork for the land distribution to peasants, some of which were enacted into law. For example, in 1933-34, two separate legislative proposals were introduced regarding the distribution of state lands controlled by large landowners, aiming to transfer the untitled portions of these lands to the state. This was intended to enable landless peasants to benefit from state-owned lands. However, both proposals were rejected and thus did not become law.

[67] Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, *Atatürk'ün Söylev ve Demeçleri III* (Ankara: Atatürk Kültür, Dil ve Tarih Yüksek Kurumu, 2024), 389.

From the founding of the Republic through the 1920s, the overall structure and functioning of the state were fundamentally established, with the economic framework of the state being specifically defined. During this period, the existence of private property was strongly emphasized, laying the foundation for capital owners to accumulate wealth. Two key legal documents from the 1920s attract particular attention: the 1924 Constitution and the 1926 Civil Code. The 1924 Constitution not only defined the new Republic's economic policies but also outlined the broader framework for nation-building. It shaped the socio-economic direction of the period by establishing how state would approach administration and development.

Since the majority of Turkey's population lived in rural areas and capital accumulation was concentrated in the hands of merchants and large landowners, the rights guaranteed by the Constitution primarily affected rural property relations in Turkey. In this regard, maintaining the integrity of ownership over land to protect the rights of landowners has constituted a significant matter. For example, article 74 of the 1924 Constitution states that "Under normal circumstances, no one's property can be seized or nationalized without the payment of its price in advance."[68]

While regulating the field of private law, the Civil Code aimed to establish a contemporary legal system. Accordingly, it defined the forms of relationships between private individuals and clearly articulated the right to private property. According to Article 618 of the Code,

> *"The owner of a thing has the right to dispose of it as he/she wishes within the limits of the law; he/she may file a claim of ownership and prevent any interference by anyone who unlawfully possesses the thing."*[69]

The article explicitly states the rights of owners, protecting their ownership rights and authorizing legal claims against external interventions, such as trespassing, unauthorized occupation, confiscation, holding property without a valid legal title

[68] 1924 Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Anayasası, No. 491, Date. 20.04.1340.
https://www.anayasa.gov.tr/tr/mevzuat/onceki-anayasalar/1924-anayasasi/

[69] Türk Kanunu Medenisi, No. 743, Date. 17.02.1926.
https://www5.tbmm.gov.tr/tutanaklar/KANUNLAR_KARARLAR/kanuntbmmc004/kanuntbmmc004/kanuntbmmc00400743.pdf

and the like. The spirit of the article aligns with classical and modern legal theories on property rights, particularly those rooted in many Western legal systems and philosophical traditions. When considered together, both the 1924 Constitution and the Civil Code clearly demonstrate that the right to private property was recognized and protected in 1920s Turkey. During the early Republican period, as public capital was being reorganized, private property effectively reinstated the necessary conditions to secure its protection within the legal frameworks established by the Constitution and the Civil Code. From the outset, personal capital and property relations took shelter under the pretext of the state's lack of public capital, effectively placing themselves under its legal and institutional protection, particularly through the principle that no property could be expropriated without prior compensation. In this way, the property rights of large landowners, along with the principle that these rights could not be violated or fragmented were protected by the Constitution and the Civil Code themselves.

Through these two fundamental legal documents, namely the 1924 Constitution and the 1926 Civil Code, numerous legislative proposals were passed by the Grand National Assembly of Turkey during both the 1920s and the 1930s. These laws primarily aimed to regulate the settlement of people, predominantly of Turkish origin, with the intent of establishing social, cultural, and economic order.

For instance, Law No. 1097 was primarily aimed at facilitating the relocation of certain individuals from the eastern provinces to the western regions. The purpose and extent of the law are outlined in Article 1, which states that nearly 1,400 individuals were to be resettled in the western part of the country due to military, administrative, and social reasons.[70] While the specific class background of the peasantry targeted by this resettlement policy is not entirely clear, it can be inferred that those in need were also among the resettled. According to Article 3 of the law:

[70] Bazı Eşhasın Şark Menatıkından Garb Vilayetlerine Nakillerine Dair Kanun, No. 1097, Date. 19.06.1927.
https://www5.tbmm.gov.tr/tutanaklar/KANUNLAR_KARARLAR/kanuntbmmc005/kanuntbmmc005/kanuntbmmc00501097.pdf

"Those among the relocated individuals who are in need shall be transported by the government to the designated districts and shall be provided with food during their journey and until the completion of the resettlement process."[71]

At this point, as stated in Law No. 1097, a redistribution of land occurred concerning the land left behind by the relocated individuals. According to Law No. 1505, a portion of the land mentioned in Law No. 1097, as deemed appropriate by the government, is allocated to peasants, tribal members, nomads, and immigrants. Accordingly, the government could distribute land to peasants and immigrants by dividing large estates. This provision is articulated in Article 2 of the law:

"Within the area specified in Article 1 of Law No. 1097, the government is authorized to distribute a portion of the land, as deemed necessary, to the individuals mentioned in the first article. Depending on the size of the estate, the landowner may, if desired, retain between 500 and 2,000 decares of land."[72]

In this context, during the process leading up to the Settlement Law enacted on June 14, 1934, the distribution and fragmentation of land generally occurred due to migrations, whether voluntary or forced. While Law No. 1097 addressed the land situation of those relocated from the eastern provinces to the West, Law No. 1505 legalized the distribution of vacancy lands in the Beyazıt province to those in need.

Therefore, until 1934, no significant land distribution policy was pursued, and as emphasized by the Constitution and the Civil Code, care was taken not to divide or redistribute private property. At this point, it is necessary to take a closer look at the Settlement Law. Within the period in question, the Settlement Law was the most comprehensive legal regulation concerning land distribution. The following section will examine both its key articles, and the statistics related to land distribution.

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[71] Bazı Eşhasın Şark Menatıkından Garb Vilayetlerine Nakillerine Dair Kanun, No. 1097, Date. 19.06.1927.
https://www5.tbmm.gov.tr/tutanaklar/KANUNLAR_KARARLAR/kanuntbmmc005/kanuntbmmc005/kanuntbmmc00501097.pdf

[72] Şark Manatıkı Dahilinde Muhtaç Zürra Tevzi Edilecek Araziye Dair Kanun, No. 1505, Date. 08.06.1929.
https://www5.tbmm.gov.tr/tutanaklar/KANUNLAR_KARARLAR/kanuntbmmc007/kanuntbmmc007/kanuntbmmc00701505.pdf

The efforts to land peasants gained momentum after 1934. With the adoption of the Resettlement Law in 1934, the land distribution policy came into effect. Moreover, in 1939, certain articles were updated through Law No. 3667. The general aim of this law was to settle Turkish populations in various parts of Anatolia. In this regard, like the laws mentioned above, the Resettlement Law also involved a form of social regulation. However, this regulation was not limited to that domain. The law explicitly stated that peasants resettled in designated areas would be provided with land. Furthermore, during the parliamentary discussions of the law, Şükrü Kaya, the Minister of Interior, clearly expressed its underlying intent.

> *"Today, five million people in the country work on land owned by others. As a result, those who work the land can barely make a living. Saying "The peasant is the master of the nation" has almost become just an empty phrase. In more than half of some provinces, peasants work on land that belongs to others."*[73]

Accordingly, the widespread landlessness of Turkish peasants remains a significant problem. The intention is clearly to resolve this issue by providing land for the peasants. According to Asım Karaömerlioğlu, for the settlement of Kurds, "With the 'Resettlement Law' adopted in June of this year (…) paved the way for the state to expropriate certain lands when necessary."[74]At this point, the state began distributing land to both incoming immigrants and poor farmers. According to Article 10 of the Resettlement Law,

> *"Any immovable property that, prior to the publication of this law, was recognized -whether by any ruling, document, or customary practice- as belonging to the personality of tribes or to their leaders such as chiefs, beys, aghas, or sheikhs, whether registered or unregistered, shall pass to the State. In accordance with the provisions of this law and the procedures determined by the State, these immovable properties shall be distributed and registered to immigrants, refugees, nomads, relocated persons, and local peasants who are landless or have insufficient land."*[75]

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[73] TBMM Zabıt Ceridesi 4. Dönem 23. Cilt 68. Birleşim (14.06.1934): 139, retrived from https://www5.tbmm.gov.tr/tutanaklar/TUTANAK/TBMM/d04/c023/tbmm04023068.pdf

[74] Asım Karaömerlioğlu, *Orada Bir Köy Var Uzakta: Erken Cumhuriyet Döneminde Köycü Söylem* (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2006), 121.

[75] İskan Kanunu, No. 2510, Date. 14.06.1934.
https://www5.tbmm.gov.tr/tutanaklar/KANUNLAR_KARARLAR/
kanuntbmmc013/kanuntbmmc013/kanuntbmmc01302510.pdf

While efforts were made to distribute land by dividing the lands of the landowners, the overall aim was to distribute state lands. "According to the provisions of the Resettlement Law dated 14.6.1934 and numbered 2510, by the end of May 1938, a total of 2,999,825 decares of field land was distributed to 88,695 families of immigrants, refugees, landless, and small-scale farmers."[76] As seen in Table-2, approximately 38% of all land distributed during the given period was allocated to muhajirs (immigrants) and refugees. In contrast, about 50% of the land was distributed to small-scale farmers. If these proportions are divided among the families who received the land: each immigrant and refugee family received an average of 40.35 decares of land, while local farmers were allocated an average of 31.35 decares.[77]

Table 5. Amount of Land Distributed Between 1934-1938

	Household Count	**Decares**
Muhajir (Immigrant) And Refugees	28,536	1,151,690
Relocated Persons	2,426	149,021
Local Farmers with Land or Small Landholders	48,411	1,517,235
Nomads	7,886	129,388
Victims of Flooding and Landslides	1,436	52,491
Total	88,695	2,999,825

Source: Bilir, ''Türkiye'de Toprak Sorunu ve Köylülük'', 58–59.

Despite the lands distributed under the Resettlement Law, whether these lands were sufficient remains a matter of debate. According to the figures related to Article 17 of the same document, for every family with two members, between 30-45 decares of good-quality land, 45-60 decares of medium-quality land, and 60-90 decares of low-quality land would be distributed. Additionally, a certain amount of land would be

[76] Aksoy, *100 Soruda Türkiye'de Toprak Meselesi*, 59–60.

[77] Mehmet Caner Bilir, ''Türkiye'de Toprak Sorunu ve Köylülük'' (Unpublished Master's Thesis, Marmara Üniversitesi, 2012), 58–59.

allocated for each additional family member. According to calculations by İsmail Hüsrev, the land distributed seems roughly sufficient for subsistence farming. However, when looking at the average land distributed, it appears less than the amounts specified in the Resettlement Law were given. Even if only good-quality land is considered, the amount distributed is less than the commonly cited figures. Therefore, the land allocated generally corresponds to a level below subsistence. Also, Article 17 of the law states:

> *"Resettlement shall be carried out by providing a family with a house or house plot suitable to their population and needs; craftsmen and merchants shall also be provided with a shop, store, or similar place and circulating capital sufficient to sustain them; and farmers shall be provided with adequate land, a pair of draft animals, tools and equipment, seed, a stable, and a barn or yard."*[78]

In conclusion, during the period from the founding of the Republic until 1939, land distribution efforts generally continued as a secondary aspect of the policy of compulsory resettlement. At this point, especially in the eastern provinces, a policy of expropriation was pursued by dividing large estates held by landowners and distributing the land to peasants. Regarding the constitutional obstacles to land distribution policy, the provision in Article 74 of the 1924 Constitution, which stipulated that land could only be taken from owners at high prices, was amended in 1937. Article 7 of Law No. 3115, which states, "The expropriation prices for lands and forests to be expropriated to make farmers landowners and to have forests managed by the State, as well as the payment method of these prices, shall be determined by special laws,"[79] was added to the relevant constitutional article. Thus, the constitutional barrier to expropriation was removed, allowing expropriation to be carried out through special laws. From this perspective, it cannot be claimed that these laws contributed to a general land distribution policy or that peasants were

[78] İskan Kanunu, No. 2510, Date. 14.06.1934.
https://www5.tbmm.gov.tr/tutanaklar/KANUNLAR_KARARLAR/kanuntbmmc013/kanuntbmmc013/kanuntbmmc01302510.pdf

[79] Teşkilatı Esasiye Kanunun Bazı Maddelerinin Değiştirilmesine Dair Kanun, No. 3115, Date. 05.02.1937.
https://www5.tbmm.gov.tr/tutanaklar/KANUNLAR_KARARLAR/kanuntbmmc017/kanuntbmmc017/kanuntbmmc01703115.pdf

comprehensively provided with adequate land across the country. In the current section, the relationship between the state and the peasants as a result of this entire network of relations will be examined. Later, all these networks of relations will be concretized in the example of Eskişehir.

3.4. Republican Policies in the 1930s and the Question of Alliance with the Peasantry

After 1929, the Republican administration's move toward statism brought about practices that served as a kind of umbrella for rural production in an economic context. According to Pamuk, "The crisis also changed the nature of political power with a weakening of the large landowners and export-oriented interests and the commitment to the liberal order that prevailed until World War I."[80] The aim was to protect small-scale farming and industrial production in the rural areas from economic fluctuations in the market. In a liberal economy, the state was as important a mechanism as market mechanisms in terms of production, and communication with the peasantry was a significant point. Turkey's policies regarding the transfer of agricultural surplus and the development of relationship with between landowners and small agricultural producers constitute a significant area of analysis.

According to Faruk Birtek and Çağlar Keyder, with the transfer of surplus from agriculture to industry, a relationship emerged between the state and producers. In this regard, after the crisis, the state stopped engaging with large landowners and focused on protecting small producers from unfavorable market conditions. According to this system of thought, with the onset of the depression years, the state aimed to establish the concept of self-sufficiency by supporting fragmented small-scale farming and using the products obtained from it to strengthen industry. Up until the onset of World War II, small producers were attempted to be protected. According to Birtek and Keyder,

> *"In the industrial area, the state sought to create a domestic foundation for capital accumulation by strengthening a national industrial bourgeoisie. In*

[80] Pamuk, "Intervention During the Great Depression: Another Look at Turkish Experience ," 321.

> *the agricultural sector, an alliance was formed with the middle peasantry, who were newly gaining access to the market. The middle peasantry was first protected from crisis and stagnation, then transformed into a class that, on the one hand, was prepared to produce the necessary agricultural surplus and, on the other hand, enabled the transfer of surplus to the state for industrialization purposes."*[81]

However, the process of the state's interaction with which layer of the peasantry in the agricultural sector is essentially a more complex one. Although the effects of the depression were felt by all classes, the small peasantry faced the risk of not being able to meet the needs of their subsistence economy. At this point, Köymen disagrees with the analysis of Keyder and Birtek. According to Köymen:

> *"Birtek and Keyder argue that in the 1930s, the government supported and strengthened small farmers through its wheat price policy, at the expense of weakening large farmers. Other authors have also argued that during the two world wars, governments supported both large landowners and small peasantry, and that small peasant property was consolidated and spread. However, research conducted both in the 1930s and later does not support this claim. According to Barkan's calculations for 1934, a minimum of 100 decares is required for a farmer's family to make a minimum living. According to Ismail Hüsrev's calculations, the minimum amount of land required for a minimum living is between 70 and 100 decares."*[82]

At this point, the argument presented by Oya Köymen seems more explanatory. In Turkey's rural areas, small producers and landless peasants, due to both market prices and the state's low purchasing policy, could no longer manage their subsistence economies, which they were already struggling to maintain under difficult conditions. In fact, the loans provided by Ziraat Bank and the Agricultural Credit Office demonstrate that continuous production was not feasible for small producers. The small producer, far from making a profit, could not even sustain their family economy with their agricultural products. The constant requests for debt postponement found in the Republican archives confirm this situation. From the state's perspective, rather than supporting small-scale farming, policies were implemented to ensure the continuity of production. At this point, the claim that the

[81] Keyder, *Toplumsal Tarih Çalışmaları*, 199.

[82] Köymen, *Kapitalizm ve Köylülük*, 124.

state formed an alliance with small producers and turned its back on large landowners does not seem satisfactory in terms of explanatory clarity.

As a result, this process did not proceed through a fair alliance between the peasantry and the state, but rather through steps that could be seen as statist but were mostly taken on behalf of the market and large producers. At this stage, it cannot be seen that land distribution proceeded in a manner equivalent to a subsistence economy based on small peasant ownership. The area occupied by large landowners in the rural economy has not shrunk, and no legal or economic momentum has been provided by the state for small-scale production. Therefore, this is not so much an alliance as a contradiction between the government's rhetoric and its real policies. Within this contradiction, smallholders and landless peasants are bound by economic and political chains to both government officials and large landowners, even for their subsistence economies.

The period between 1929 and 1939 is a time when the seeds of crisis spread by the global economic depression were being collected by the state in rural areas. Although the crisis was centered in the international arena, there were deep wounds that exacerbated its destructive impact on the rural areas of the Republic of Turkey. What was tried to be picked up from these wounds with tweezers were the painful effects of the crisis, but these efforts did not heal the much deeper bleeding wounds of small production. It was a declaration of the obvious that private property was distributed unequally in the agricultural lands on which the Republic was built. If we take the Constitution, the Republic provided the legitimacy of this private property distribution in the legal field and kept the structure in the rural area standing from its very foundation. While the small landed or landless peasantry created by this standing structure was in a tight spot, the liberal or statist prescription only protected the market and the political status quo from the crisis for a sustainable economy. Although the statements of the cadres were repeated in similar ways for the most affected layers by the crisis, many practices did not consistently bring about radical reforms that would save small production from the crisis.The next section will explore how these developments unfolded in Eskişehir. This exploration will consider the impact of the Great Depression, statist policies, and land distribution

issues on the region. Furthermore, the state-peasant relationship in Eskişehir will be analyzed through the perspectives of local authorities, including figures such as Emin Sazak. The topics discussed thus far have focused on the broader transformation that occurred in Turkey between 1929-1939. The next chapter aims to determine the role and position of the Eskişehir peasantry within that transformation.

CHAPTER 4

ESKIŞEHIR DURING THE GREAT DEPRESSION: THE TRANSFORMATION OF SMALL-SCALE PRODUCTION

Throughout history, Eskişehir has stood out as an attractive settlement due to its central location in Anatolia and its relative proximity to major urban centers compared to other Anatolian towns. In this context, the city has received waves of migration at different times and has held agricultural significance for the states that controlled it. While it is not entirely possible to trace the exact dates of all migratory movements to Eskişehir, there are clues regarding how the city's settlements took shape. These immigrants, who have arrived in Eskişehir throughout history, constitute a significant portion of the population, including Bulgarian immigrants, Tatars, and Circassians. In total, they settled in 96 villages.[83] In this regard, Eskişehir has long exhibited a cosmopolitan character and has served as a dynamic Anatolian city with a continuous history of settlement. Looking at Eskişehir during the early Republican era, it is observed that 58% of the population consisted of locals, Yörüks, and Turkmens, while 42% were immigrants.[84] While it is unclear exactly how these immigrants contributed to the city's economy or what production sector they were engaged in, given that a significant portion of the population was engaged in agricultural production, it can be assumed that these immigrants were also involved in agricultural activities. In this context, the arrival of these immigrants over time revitalized the city's economic activity and population mobility. A parallel can be drawn between this and the rapid population growth in other Anatolian cities. According to Tunçdilek:

[83] Necdet Tunçdilek, "Eskişehir Bölgesinde Yerleşme Tarihine Toplu Bir Bakış," *İstanbul Üniversitesi İktisat Fakültesi Mecmuası* 15, no. 1-4 (2015): 191.

[84] Koçkar, *Eskişehir Halkbilim Ürünleri*, 8.

> *"The impact of these influxes was felt not only in rural settlements but also in the city. While Eskişehir exhibited a rather dull town character until 1850, its population increased and it began to develop with the arrival of immigrants from that time onwards."*[85]

For instance, according to the 1930 Statistical Yearbook, the number of muhacirs who settled in Eskişehir between 1921 and 1929 was 2,711.[86] In this context, Eskişehir is an important city in terms of agricultural production, migration, and the presence of a railway line through the city. The significant migration to the city during the Republican era also proves this. Therefore, it is necessary to examine how the situation of Eskişehir's small peasantry changed with the Great Depression and the results of land acquisition efforts.

4.1. An Overview of Eskişehir: Its Development, Demographic and Agricultural Structure

Due to its location on the front lines during the War of Independence, Eskişehir suffered significant losses prior to the founding of the Republic of Turkey. During this period, many of the city's key production areas were destroyed or severely damaged. In the period following the establishment of the Republic, due to both its geopolitical importance and its emotional significance for the cadres, the city received significant investments during its reconstruction. Thus, during the mentioned period, the Republican cadres' efforts -such as the *Halkevleri* (People's Houses), instructor courses, the establishment of factories, agricultural modernization efforts, and resettlement policies- were implemented. As a result, Eskişehir was becoming a relatively vibrant Anatolian city owing to the railway line passing through the city, its proximity to larger cities, and the introduction of somewhat improved farming techniques through the agency of immigrants and direct state support.

Eskişehir had four districts including the central district. These were Merkez, Mihalıççık, Seyitgazi, and Sivrihisar. In 1930, the total population of Eskişehir was

[85] Tunçdilek, "Eskişehir Bölgesinde Yerleşme Tarihine Toplu Bir Bakış," 203.

[86] State Institute of Statistics, *Statistical Yearbook 1930,* (Ankara: Ahmet İhsan Matbaası, 1930), 100.

154,332[87] and rising to 206,791 by 1940.[88] Over the course of thirteen years, the population of the city increased by 52,459, reflecting a growth rate of approximately 34%. When Eskişehir's development is compared to that of both more commercially developed cities and several other Anatolian towns, the extent of this transformation becomes more apparent. According to the 1927 census, the populations of Ankara, Aydın, Kayseri, and Konya were 443,754; 212,541; 272,789; and 504,384 respectively.[89] By 1940, these numbers had risen to 602,965 for Ankara, 281,784 for Aydın, 342,969 for Kayseri, and 620,936 for Konya.[90] The corresponding growth rates over these thirteen years were 35.8% for Ankara, 32.5% for Aydın, 25.7% for Kayseri, and 23.1% for Konya. Eskişehir's growth rate, while slightly behind that of the capital Ankara, surpassed those of the other three cities. This increase can largely be attributed to public investment and inward migration during the period. As in many other parts of Turkey, the majority of Eskişehir's population continued to live in rural areas and engaged primarily in agricultural production. According to this, a substantial part of economic activity comes from rural sources.

For instance, the 1927 agricultural inventory indicates in Eskişehir, 39,292 out of 154,332 people were involved in agriculture. However, since the occupation of 112,313 people was unknown, it is likely that the number of people living off agricultural products was even higher.[91] In this context, assuming a similarity to the Turkish average, the majority of Eskişehir's population earned their living through rural production.

The agricultural lands cultivated by the dense peasant population in Eskişehir are distributed across the city center and other districts. The land and agricultural structure of Eskişehir have been described by both Melis Birgün and Koçkar. According to the information provided by Birgün, 603,896 hectares of Eskişehir's

[87] State Institute of Statistics, *Statistical Yearbook 1930,* (Ankara: Ahmet İhsan Matbaası, 1930), 24.

[88] State Institute of Statistics, *Statistical Yearbook* (1942-43), (Ankara: Receb Ulusoğlu Basımevi, 1944), III.

[89] State Institute of Statistics, *Statistical Yearbook (1932-33)* (Ankara: Devlet Matbaası, 1933), 60.

[90] State Institute of Statistics, *Statistical Yearbook* (1942-43), (Ankara: Receb Ulusoğlu Basımevi, 1944), I-V.

[91] State Institute of Statistics, *Statistical Yearbook 1930,* (Ankara: Ahmet İhsan Matbaası, 1930), 50.

land is suitable for agriculture.[92] Although the occupations of 112,313 people are not known, since a large part of the population lives in rural areas, it can be estimated that Eskişehir peasants farm an average maximum of 15.3 hectares.[93] However, when we adapt the population of Eskişehir in the 1927 agricultural census and Yahya Tezel's rate of the population working in agricultural fields to Eskişehir, an estimated 124,854 people of the population are engaged in agriculture. According to this, Eskişehir peasants had nearly 4.83 hectares. However, according to Koçkar, "More than 50% of the province's land is arable… In Eskişehir, where the annual average rainfall is approximately 400 mm, fallow farming is practiced."[94] This shows that, on average, Eskişehir peasants cultivate about 2.40 hectares of land for a year. This land, like the rest of Anatolia, is suitable for dry farming and especially for crops that can withstand cold seasons. Therefore, Eskişehir resembles a typical Anatolian town in terms of agricultural products produced. According to a source written in Eskişehir during the 15th year of the Republic, "From our lands, wheat, barley, vetch, corn, oats, rye, safflower, beet, rice, opium, and other grains are produced."[95] According to the 1927 agricultural census, 34,553 tons of grain were produced in Eskişehir, along with 851 tons of legumes and 835 tons of industrial agricultural products.[96] According to 1939 data, an estimated 141,899 tons of grain were produced in Eskişehir, 2,449 tons of legumes, and 35,862 tons of industrial agricultural products.[97] When these production amounts are divided by the total farming population in Eskişehir, the resulting figures are very low. Consequently, both in terms of product production and land ownership, small peasants in Eskişehir remain far below subsistence levels. To solve this problem, the Eskişehir Sugar factory was founded, and sugar beet production increased significantly in areas of Eskişehir

[92] Melis Birgün, *"Atatürk Döneminde Eskişehir (1923-1938)*", (Master's Thesis, Eskişehir Osmangazi Üniversitesi, 2013), 71.

[93] According to another calculation, when we calculate the average, it is stated that the villagers have approximately 14.4 hectares of land. Therefore, it can be stated that on average, they have a maximum of 14.4-15.3 hectares of land.

[94] Koçkar, *Eskişehir Halkbilim Ürünleri*, 8.

[95] C.H.P Eskişehir İl Yönetim Kurulu, *Cumhuriyetin 15'inci Yılında Eskişehir, 39*.

[96] State Institute of Statistics, *Statistical Yearbook 1930,* (Ankara: Ahmet İhsan Matbaası, 1930), 168.

[97] State Institute of Statistics, *Statistical Yearbook* (1942-43), (Ankara: Receb Ulusoğlu Basımevi, 1944), 149.

closer to water sources, and a substantial portion of peasants sold sugar beets directly to the factory.

Despite Eskişehir's production capacity, the general situation resembles that of the rest of Turkey. Agricultural techniques and tools were far behind the era, and the number of tools available to peasants was also limited. Indeed, Faruk Şükrü notes on this matter: "There were no agricultural tools other than the plow. For this reason, the yield from the land was quite low."[98] However, especially after the 1929 Great Depression, political and economic initiatives aligned with the general economic policy of the Republic of Turkey were implemented in Eskişehir's rural areas to increase production. Efforts were made both to increase the number of agricultural tools in the region and to continue agricultural improvement activities. This motivation was expressed by İsmet İnönü when he visited Eskişehir in 1924: "The more we produce, the less we should think we have produced. We will soothe the war's fatigue through the nation's systematic efforts - double, fivefold, tenfold production... This will be our motto."[99]

In conclusion, Eskişehir was a region carefully studied by the Republican cadres and received significant investments following the proclamation of the Republic. Indeed, by 1940, the area experienced a migration wave comparable to those of other major cities. Since a considerable portion of both the native population and migrants were engaged in agriculture, Eskişehir exhibited a vibrant agricultural production. In this context, the cultivation of crops suited to the continental climate was particularly prevalent. Regarding the marketing of these products, Eskişehir was in a more advantageous position than most Anatolian cities. Thanks to the railway passing through the city, agricultural products collected by merchants were distributed both to the country's large cities and exported abroad directly through this distribution network. For these reasons, the Great Depression affected Eskişehir's peasants, who were so interconnected with external markets, and intensified their concrete problems to a critical level. The difficulties faced by rural producers in Turkey between 1929

[98] Birgün, *"Atatürk Döneminde Eskişehir",* 70-71.

[99] Birgün, *"Atatürk Döneminde Eskişehir*", 71.

and 1939 should first be discussed in terms of how they manifested in Eskişehir. Moreover, it is important to consider how Eskişehir's rural areas were positioned within the industrialization project in line with the state's industrial policies. So, what did the Great Depression do to Eskişehir, and how did it transform its peasants?

4.2. The Great Depression in Eskişehir and Statism as a Solution

The situation for peasants in Eskişehir did not differ significantly from the rest of Turkey; however, conditions began to deteriorate in the second half of the 1920s. In particular, the decline in agricultural product prices and the increase in the cost of essential consumer goods, caused by fluctuations in the global market, worsened the conditions for Eskişehir's peasants. Additionally, natural factors such as periodic droughts, falling prices, rising interest rates, and limited access to credit compelled especially small-scale producers and landless peasants in Eskişehir to constantly engage in a relationship of demand with the state. The economic fluctuations of the 1920s peaked with the onset of the 1929 Great Depression, and throughout the following decade, the poor peasants of Eskişehir found themselves in a state of severe hardship. In 1931, Veli Bey from Çanakkale expressed the destruction caused by the Great Depression. According to Veli Bey,

> *"The peasant, my friends - several peasants would bring in a few okkas of wheat and sell them at the market. With that, they could buy an okka of kerosene and go home. But today, to buy one okka of kerosene, they must sell seven okkas of wheat. Then they would buy a meter of printed cotton cloth. For that, they would pay at most 100 para, three kuruş. Yet today, the same cloth costs 40 kuruş… So, all these essential needs have developed to the peasant's disadvantage…"*[100]

As stated by Veli Bey from Çanakkale, while the prices of agricultural commodities produced by peasants declined, the prices of consumer goods increased significantly. A clearer picture emerges when examining the prices of wheat and barley, two staple commodities in the trade exchange. In 1926, the price of wheat in Eskişehir was

[100] Mustafa Y. Metintaş and Mehmet Kayıran, "1929 Dünya Ekonomik Krizinin Türk Tarımına Etkileri ve 1931 Birinci Türkiye Ziraat Kongresi", *Journal of Süleyman Demirel University Institute of Social Sciences* 23, (2016/1), 44.

375.63 kuruş, and the price of barley was 140.72 kuruş.[101] However, in 1932 and 1933, wheat prices fell to 131.9 and 114.6 kuruş respectively, while barley prices dropped to 79.7 and 65.7 kuruş.[102] This shows that the market prices for wheat and barley declined sharply from 1926 to 1933.[103] However, this was not the only issue. According to the table prepared based on the 1930 Istanbul Chamber of Commerce and Industry Congress Decisions, the cost of wheat production in Eskişehir was 590 kuruş, while the revenue was only 450 kuruş.[104] It is likely that this calculation is not based on a kilo either. Thus, beyond the decline in prices, producers were hardly able to earn any profit. However, the situation began to improve somewhat in the latter half of the 1930s.

When examining the period from 1936 to 1939, the data on how much Eskişehir peasants sold their products for shows a modest level of stabilization. In 1936, barley sold by Eskişehir peasants fetched 2.5 kuruş, and in 1937, it rose to 8.5 kuruş. In 1936, wheat was sold at 4.5 kuruş, and in 1937, at 5 kuruş.[105] By 1939, the price of wheat had dropped to 4.25 kuruş, while barley sold for 3.5 kuruş.[106] This table shows that between 1936 and 1939, there was a relative stabilization. But between the second half of the 1920s and the mid-1930s, wheat prices fell drastically. As a result, the income peasants could make from selling their crops dropped as well. Because of this, many peasants had difficulty affording the basic goods they needed for daily life, and the Depression put their subsistence-based livelihoods under serious strain. However, the overall decline in agricultural product prices did not affect all agricultural producers equally. Large landowners were able to store their products

[101] State Institute of Statistics, *Statistical Yearbook 1930,* (Ankara: Ahmet İhsan Matbaası, 1930), 215.

[102] State Institute of Statistics, *Statistical Yearbook (1932-33)* (Ankara: Devlet Matbaası, 1933), 366.

[103] These calculations made according to İstanbul Kile. 1 Kile=Almost 25.6 kg. Dursun Ayan, "İki Tahıl Ölçüsü Üzerine Sosyomatematik Notlar: Şebinkarahisar Kilesi ve Gödük," *Osmanlı Bilimi Araştırmaları* VI/1 (2004): 77.

[104] Erdal Akbaş, "1929 Dünya Ekonomik Krizi Sonrası Türkiye Cumhuriyeti'nin Buğday Üreticisini Koruma Çabaları" *Journal of Atatürk Yolu 71, (*2022), 29.

[105] State Institute of Statistics, Agricultural Statistics (1934-37), (Ankara: Receb Ulusoğlu Basımevi, 1939), 506.

[106] State Institute of Statistics, *Statistical Yearbook (1941-42),* (Ankara: Ankara Yeni Cezaevi Matbaası, 1943), 173.

and sell them directly on the free market without relying on middlemen or traders. For this reason, the situation primarily posed a threat to small-scale producers. In this respect, although the upheaval affected rural producers in general, large landowners seemed to have found their own ways of navigating the crisis.

However, for poor peasants, the sharp decline in agricultural product prices was not the only problem. In Turkey, high interest rates on loans and natural events such as drought further worsened the already difficult conditions faced by small producers. In this context, the people of Eskişehir experienced significant hardship during a major drought in 1935. About eight years earlier, Eskişehir had also experienced a period of drought. In response, the government sped up irrigation efforts and distributed seeds worth 350,000 lira.[107] Alongside these actions, work also began to improve dry farming practices in line with contemporary agricultural methods.

> *"In a sense, Eskişehir came to serve as a kind of laboratory for Turkish agriculture. In this vast region, which functioned as the country's granary, the goal was to reduce the risk of drought and to educate farmers using the technical knowledge of the day… It laid the foundations of the dry farming method."*[108]

However, by 1935, it was evident that these measures were not a definitive solution to drought. Nevertheless, this project can be seen as a significant initiative by the Seed Improvement Station aimed at increasing agricultural productivity and developing production capacity. Regarding the drought in 1935, it was stated that, in response to the hardship faced by the people, the Red Crescent would distribute more than one hundred thousand kilograms of wheat to farmers in need, and that Ziraat Bank would provide loans in the form of wheat to farmers who were unable to harvest, to be repaid after the harvest season.[109] At this point, due to the effects of the 1935 drought, market prices were thrown into turmoil. The already devastating impact of falling prices on farmers became even more severe due to crop shortages.

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[107] Zafer Koylu and Melis Birgün, *Eski bir Şehrin Hikayesi (1923-1938),* (Eskişehir: Eskişehir Ticaret Odası Yayınları, 2015), 105.

[108] Koylu and Birgün, *Eski Bir Şehrin Hikayesi*, 108.

[109] Koylu and Birgün, *Eski Bir Şehrin Hikayesi*, 111.

At the same time, from the perspective of consumers, rising prices also signified a sharp increase in the value of wheat. This rise in prices was explained in a document written by the Minister of the Interior Şükrü Kaya.

> *"In a telegram received from the Eskişehir province, it is stated that while the price of wheat per kilo was four kuruş a month ago, it has now risen to six kuruş and sixteen para, and that flour prices have surged from six hundred to seven hundred twenty-five kuruş, while the market supply of goods remains limited."*[110]

Both the threat of drought and the sharp decline in prices from the perspective of producers placed small landowning peasants in Eskişehir in an extremely difficult position. From this point onward, impoverished peasants entered significant debt relationships and, due to their decreasing income each year, became unable to repay their debts. These debts were owed to Ziraat Bank, private individuals, and agricultural credit offices. For instance, "In Eskişehir, according to available data, there were 28 cooperatives in districts and 556 in villages in 1937. The total number of members as of that year was 10,905."[111] This situation illustrates the structure of the credit mechanism in Eskişehir. Accordingly, with 10,905 members, a considerable number of people in Eskişehir were directly involved in this credit relationship. Despite the extensive availability of such mechanisms, it is debatable to what extent small peasants could benefit from them. Regardless of whether they obtained credit from institutions or individuals, small producers had great difficulty repaying their debts. In this context, they either lost their means of production, namely, their land, or if their debts were to public institutions, they typically requested extensions. One such example can be found in archival documents:

> *"It has been rumored that interest will be abolished, and debts will be extended for a long period. The people are awaiting this with gratitude and hope. Unfortunately, it has been observed that, due to some additional expenses from Ziraat Bank, a peasant who borrowed fifty lira four years ago now has a debt of two hundred lira."*[112]

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[110] BCA MGM [30.10.0.0/184.266.15], 13.06.1935.

[111] State Institute of Statistics, Agricultural Statistics (1934-37), (Ankara: Receb Ulusoğlu Basımevi, 1939), 9.

[112] BCA CHP [490.1.0.0/651.165.1], 05.08.1936.

Another example is that, as mentioned earlier, the process of land registration through installments is insufficient for poor peasants due to economic conditions and the small number of installments. Years of drought create devastation for the peasantry, and they are unable to repay their debts during harvest time. At this point, they request a delay in their debts until the registration of land in other regions is completed.

> *"In Eskişehir's Çifteler district, for the land belonging to the treasury where 33 villages have settled under the same conditions, it is stated that for the three villages called Mamure, Abbas Halimpaşa, and Said Halimpaşa where they reside, a payment is being requested. However, since this year has been dry, it has been requested that the payment be postponed until the transactions of the other villages are completed."*[113]

Both the threats such as droughts experienced in Eskişehir, and the sudden drop in prices severely harmed the incomes of agricultural producers. At this point, the government's development of a solution against the effects of the Great Depression and the systematization of the principle of statism emerges as an inevitable phenomenon. Similar concerns were shared even by large landowners, as in the rest of Turkey. In this context, Emin Sazak himself declared at a party congress that the government needed to take action. Despite the government's efforts to sustain the cycle of rural production through wheat purchases, Sazak did not present an optimistic picture regarding the future of small-scale agriculture. He warned that peasants were facing the threat of famine and emphasized that significant measures needed to be taken by the Parliament.

> *"Our peasants are in a situation where they are dependent on government assistance. The issue is very sensitive. The country will not recover from this shock in the coming year… The government's position is very delicate this year. The deputies are not in a position to leave here even for an hour."*[114]

In response to the increasing economic crisis that began in the 1920s and culminated with the outbreak of the Great Depression, the government implemented an import-substitution development strategy, as previously mentioned. With the formal

[113] BCA MGM [30.10.0.0/123.879.9], 21.12.1937.

[114] Kuruç, *Mustafa Kemal Döneminde Ekonomi*, 290.

adoption of the principle of 'statism' in 1932, the state began to invest directly in the industrial sector. In this context, transformations were carried out in Eskişehir both in terms of industrialization and the utilization of rural areas as market spaces. There were various factories operating in Eskişehir, but three of them held particular importance. "The large-scale industrial sectors established in Eskişehir during this period were the *Cer Atölyesi* (Locomotive Traction Workshop), which dates back to the Ottoman era, the Eskişehir Sugar Factory, and the Eskişehir Electricity Company."[115]

With the proclamation of the Republic in 1923, efforts were made to open factories in many parts of Turkey and to limit the import of intermediate and consumer goods; thus, striving to establish a self-sufficient structure. Given that Turkey's economy was based on rural production, industrialization steps based on rural production held significant importance. In this regard, the Eskişehir Sugar Factory, founded on industrialization based on agricultural products, began operations in 1933 and stands out as a special area for detailed examination in this study. When the factory was established, "its capital consisted of 30,000 shares each valued at 100 liras, with Türkiye İş Bankası holding 51%, the T.C. Ziraat Bankası 24.5%, and the Sanayi ve Maadin Bankası 24.5%."[116] This situation shows that, along with the principle of statism accepted in 1932, an example of factories directly established by the state was realized in Eskişehir.

With the establishment of the Eskişehir Sugar Factory, efforts were made to develop both the agricultural economy and industrial production in Eskişehir. Amid the difficult conditions of the Depression years, particularly the decline in the grain market in Eskişehir pushed producers into a challenging situation. The state's industrialization efforts at this point aimed both to create a new production field for agricultural producers and to facilitate the easy procurement of products from the agricultural sector, thereby enabling industrialization. In this context, significant investments were made in the Eskişehir Sugar Factory.

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[115] Koylu and Birgün, *Eski Bir Şehrin Hikayesi*, 159.

[116] Zafer Koylu, *ETO 130 Yıl* (Eskişehir: Eskişehir Ticaret Odası Yayınları, 2023), 178-180.

> *"Accordingly, the state provided 5 hectares of land for the establishment of the sugar industry, exempted it from taxes for 10 years, applied discounts on rail transportation of goods, did not tax lime and coal used in factories, exempted factory members from dividend tax for 10 years, and did not collect consumption tax on sugar consumption for 8 years."*[117]

With the opening of the factory, a significant portion of agricultural producers shifted their focus to sugar beet cultivation due to its profitability. Based on the 1927 agricultural survey, wheat production in Eskişehir amounted to 27,066 tons, barley production was 6,457 tons, while beet production was only 280 tons.[118] According to a source published on the 25th anniversary of the Republic, the number of farmers planting beets in 1934 saw a significant rise. Although the cultivated area later decreased, the minimum number of farmers planting beets remained at 14,786. Table 6 indicates the amount of processed beet, the area planted with beet, and the payments made to farmers for beet and premium sugar. Despite some declines in certain periods, both the amount of processed beet and the payments to farmers increased over the years. Furthermore, many farmers allocated their own agricultural land to beet cultivation. Therefore, with the establishment of the sugar factory in Eskişehir, agricultural producers began beet production and tried to alleviate some of the hardships caused by the Depression years. Especially for small producers, the Sugar Factory became a vital means of livelihood and a breath of relief for the poor peasantry during Eskişehir's Depression period. An example of this can be seen in the following statement.

> *"Go to many cities of our country; anyone you greet will talk to you about the crisis, lack of money, scarcity of work, and how tobacco, grapes, eggs, figs, hazelnuts, olives, and olive oil have no value. Come to Eskişehir, everyone talks about the sugar beet. So-and-so earned this much money this year; I am also working for the upcoming campaign. Contact the merchants; thank God, the factory has made us smile.*[119] *In 1922, approximately 2 million farming families earned their livelihoods through jobs related to beet cultivation."*[120]

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[117] Koylu and Birgün, *Eski Bir Şehrin Hikayesi*, 160.

[118] State Institute of Statistics, *Statistical Yearbook 1930,* (Ankara: Ahmet İhsan Matbaası, 1930), 169.

[119] Koylu and Birgün, *Eski Bir Şehrin Hikayesi*, 163-166.

[120] Koylu and Birgün, *Eski Bir Şehrin Hikayesi*, 163-166.

Table 6. Sugar Beet Farming in Eskişehir.

Year	Number of Beet Farmers	Beet Cultivated Area (Hectares)	Processed Beet (Tons)	Payment to Farmers for Beet
1933	8715	4818	83157	1 197 461.-
1934	20518	11399	161378	1 692 999.-
1935	14786	7208	113047	948 491.-
1936	15882	8968	155503	1 142 807.-
1937	17456	10260	129277	876 888.-
1938	13528	6584	90502	779 782.-
1939	16205	8710	179530	1 757 150.-

Source: Avni Altıner, *Cumhuriyetin 25. Yılında Eskişehir* (İstanbul: Bakış Müessesi ve Matbaası, 1948), 24.

The establishment of the Sugar Factory in Eskişehir aimed to mitigate the effects of the Great Depression, particularly by achieving some improvement in the situation of small peasants. This enabled the small peasants to survive, to some extent, despite the hardships of the Great Depression, thanks to their new product potential. The sugar factory not only revitalized rural production but also improved the city's socio-economic situation. Through the housing established in the city, many workers began living in Eskişehir, contributing to the overall economic development of the city. This allowed the small peasantry to expand their scope of activities and more easily sell their products. However, despite this story, the narrative that the situation of the Eskişehir villagers improved completely with the production of sugar beets is quite dubious. Finally, as can be directly accessed from archive sources, the Eskişehir villagers are constantly requesting debt postponement and demanding land. The people of Eskişehir, who currently have an average of 14.4-15.3 hectares of land, probably much less, do not even have enough land to support their livelihood.[121] It is possible that even if sugar beet production has improved the situation of the

[121] As previously emphasized, when the proportion of the population engaged in agriculture in Türkiye is recalculated based on Eskişehir, the average per capita land holding is 4.83 hectares. Therefore, while the estimated land holdings of 14.4-15.3 hectares are based on clearly known data, the likely reality is far from this.

relatively economically poor villagers to some extent, it is quite difficult to claim that it has brought about a major structural transformation.

As a result, during the years of the Great Depression, the poor peasantry in Eskişehir tried to maintain their production amid difficulties such as credit issues, drought, and falling prices. At this point, the state was determined to achieve self-sufficiency through wheat purchase stations and other developed economic policies. Throughout the 1930s, both the quantity and export of these agricultural products increased significantly. For example, in the 1930s, "Turkey's reduction in wheat imports and its achievement of self-sufficiency in wheat is a testament to this. Specifically, wheat exports from Eskişehir significantly increased after 1929. In 1929, wheat exports were 12,000 tons, and by 1937, they had steadily increased to 34,000 tons."[122] At this point, it can be assumed that Eskişehir reached these amounts both because of its proximity to the capital and its railway network. According to Akçetin, in addition to port cities, certain cities like Eskişehir produced agricultural products directly connected to international and national markets via the railway.[123] Moreover, state policies implemented to increase production caused production levels in Eskişehir to rise, as was the case in the rest of the country. However, this increase evidently did not bring much change to the condition of agricultural producers. Due to the continuous decline in grain prices, the increase in wheat exports by Eskişehir peasants did not improve their situation.

At this point, the state attempted to lighten the effects of the Depression in Eskişehir, particularly through the establishment of the sugar industry in the region. However, even this entire process did not allow small-scale producers in Eskişehir to maintain their subsistence economy. The declining prices of the Depression years indicate that producers were earning less than the previous year. For this reason, they increasingly found themselves in a deepening cycle of debt. To somewhat break free from this web of indebtedness and sustain their subsistence economies, small producers in Eskişehir, as in the rest of Turkey, began to demand land from state officials. In the

[122] C.H.P Eskişehir İl Yönetim Kurulu, *Cumhuriyetin 15'inci Yılında Eskişehir*, 70.

[123] Akçetin, "Anatolian Peasants in the Great Depression 1929–1933", 80.

following section, how these demands materialized in rural Eskişehir and how land was distributed to peasants through legislation will be discussed.

4.3. Land Distribution and Demand in Eskişehir

The general increase in production does not necessarily indicate that there was widespread prosperity in Eskişehir. The source discussing the land owned by Eskişehir's peasants' states: "When the Republic was declared, in Eskişehir, which was deprived of even a handful of seeds and a lame ox, every peasant began to cultivate 100-1000 decares of land... yesterday's poor and stagnant Eskişehir is today's productive and wealthy Eskişehir."[124] Still, this claim appears to be debatable. The idea that nearly all peasants cultivated land far beyond what was needed for subsistence does not seem reliable. In Eskişehir province, there are 282,000 hectares of forest; 300,000 hectares of uncultivated and 268,282 hectares of cultivated land; and 485,000 hectares of pasture and meadow.[125] Based on previous calculations, it appears that Eskişehir villagers, on average, own much less land than is necessary for subsistence. Even if they did, the significant decline in agricultural prices raises doubts about whether it would be sufficient to sustain themselves, especially for smallholders. To solve this problem, the government's steps to provide land were limited. As a result, there was demand from peasants and some land distribution efforts in the region. These demands mostly came from the Çifteler area of Eskişehir. The foundation land in Çifteler was not only in that area, but it covered a large amount of land. For this reason, peasants asked the state to give or sell the public land to them.

Between 1929 and 1939, peasants in Eskişehir submitted demands concerning the postponement of debts and the allocation of land to them. Considering that the estimated maximum amount of land owned on average was 14.4 hectares, it can be assumed that a significant portion of the peasants either had no land or possessed only a small amount. Literature suggests that peasants in Turkey were not engaged in

[124] C.H.P Eskişehir İl Yönetim Kurulu, *Cumhuriyetin 15'inci Yılında Eskişehir*, 39.

[125] C.H.P Eskişehir İl Yönetim Kurulu, *Cumhuriyetin 15'inci Yılında Eskişehir*. 37.

radical action regarding land distribution. While this claim is largely true when examining the history of the Republic, it does not imply that peasants had no demand for land. In this context, people of Çifteler had land demands, and these policies were implemented because of such demands.

In Çifteler, a significant number of peasants, mostly immigrants, have been farming and making their livelihood in the region for many years. The land is extensive, with some sources estimating it to cover over 100,000 hectares. As a result, both the population working this large agricultural area and the overall production volume were considerable. According to some peasants from Çifteler in 1937, "The people of thirty-three villages living in the Çifteler land have been settled in the region for at least twenty years and up to one hundred and fifty years. Having paid rent for many years, they demand that the lands be given to them free of charge, but the request for payment has put the peasants in a difficult situation."[126] Their demands emphasized that they had worked as tenants on these lands for many years by paying rent, and when the sale of the land was brought up, they requested that it be given to them without charge. However, by 1940, this issue had still not been resolved. Both the discourse of the period and the laws failed to respond to the demands of the peasants in Çifteler, Eskişehir. Nevertheless, the peasants continued to react and maintain their demands.

> *"With the transfer of the Çifteler estate land in Eskişehir to the Directorate of Foundations, 23 immigrant and 10 native villages find themselves in a landless situation. This land needs to be sold to the 33 village communities with long-term installments, and the people need to be granted land ownership. There is a population of 18,000 on this land, and 29,500 land deeds need to be issued. Since making peasants landowners as soon as possible is one of the principles, the lands in the hands of peasants should be sold at one-tenth of the tax value and at a low price, interest-free."*[127]

In addition to the peasants' demand for land, the documents also state that land distribution must be carried out according to government principles. The main issue at this point concerns where the land distribution will take place. Besides the large

[126] BCA MGM [30.10.0.0/123.879.9], 21.12.1937.

[127] BCA MGM [30.10.0.0/81.532.2], 27.06.1940.

lands belonging to the foundation in the Çifteler area, there is no land of this size owned by the state in any region of Eskişehir. At this point, according to a document written in 1931, there was not enough state-owned land to settle immigrants, and expropriation would be carried out for these lands.

> *"Land distribution took place for 30 households of Bulgarian immigrants and landless local peasants. However, there is no state-owned land available. Therefore, land belonging to individuals was expropriated in accordance with Law No. 1505."*[128]

However, in the Çifteler region, there was a direct request for the sale of foundation lands. According to the mentioned document, it is stated that the rapid resolution of the places intended to be sold would benefit both the administration and the peasants.

> *"As the property of our administration, the prompt registration of the lands we want to sell to peasants through the Agricultural Bank, under the condition of payment without interest over five years and in five installments, is in the interest of both our administration and the peasants."*[129]

However, this goal was not fully achieved. For peasants to obtain title deeds and become landowners, they needed to repay their debts. Yet, due to worsening economic conditions and occasional environmental hardships, peasants were often unable to produce consistent yields, and the market value of their crops was not always sufficient. That was the reason they often asked for their debts to be delayed. This issue was addressed at the C.H.P. congress in Eskişehir:

> *"It was requested that the Çifteler land to be given free of charge to those who have cultivated it so far, the interest rates of the Agricultural Bank to be reduced, and debts to be converted into installments and extension of their payment periods."*[130]

However, despite the demands for land, its distribution, and the deferral of debts, the laws enacted by the ruling C.H.P. did not yield entirely positive results. Even when

[128] BCA KDB [30.18.1.2/19.25.4], 08.04.1931.

[129] BCA KDB [30.18.1.2/19.25.4], 08.04.1931.

[130] BCA CHP [490.1.0.0/494.1989.1], 15.02.1939.

land was distributed to poor peasants, the necessary measures to ensure that this land could be retained were not adequately implemented. The inability of small producers to retain their land cannot be explained solely by debt relations. In addition, large landowners directly seize these lands, either by showing deeds or using other means. This "seizure" is also reflected in some complaints made directly to the government. For example, the immigrants in Sivrihisar had cultivated the land on which they were settled. İsmail Hakkı Efendi filed a lawsuit using two title deeds in his possession. In this way, it became possible to keep the immigrants in a constant state of anxiety.[131]

According to another statement in the same document, a man named Ali seized 18,000 decares of land that had been distributed to immigrants in Sivrihisar.[132] This situation shows that although Eskişehir was one of the regions with heavy settlement, the lands distributed to immigrants could not be protected. It is likely that the individuals mentioned were large landowners. In this way, they used their power over the region to seize these lands as well. At this point, Şükrü Kaya's speech in Parliament regarding the Settlement Law becomes significant.

> *"The state gives land to immigrants as abandoned property; they cultivate it, then someone shows up claiming to be the rightful owner and says, 'This is my property.' He presents a deed and throws the immigrant out onto the street."*[133]

As a result, Eskişehir, especially the district of Çifteler, witnessed many demands for land. In this context, the state embarked on a land distribution effort, both through specific programs and legislative frameworks, to directly sell public lands to peasants. In this regard, not only were there efforts by state institutions, but also petitions and demands from the peasants themselves. However, how much of the distributed land was retained and how productive it remained a matter of debate. Complaints from immigrants residing in Eskişehir during these years indicate that some local actors seized the lands and evicted the immigrants. Additionally, those

[131] BCA MGM [30.10.0.0/81.532.2], 27.06.1940.

[132] BCA MGM [30.10.0.0/81.532.2], 27.06.1940.

[133] TBMM Zabıt Ceridesi 4. Dönem 23. Cilt 68. Birleşim (14.06.1934): 155, retrived from https://www5.tbmm.gov.tr/tutanaklar/TUTANAK/TBMM/d04/c023/tbmm04023068.pdf

who had been settled were also removed from the lands granted to them through the presentation of title deeds to the court. The issue of peasant land distribution generally took place through the allocation of land reclaimed from pastures, meaning relatively infertile lands. This situation is particularly evident in the case of Eskişehir's Çifteler district. Institutions such as the "Eğitmen Kursu" were established on the most fertile lands, while the local population was settled in relatively higher and less productive areas. At the same time, the process of land distribution was prolonged, and it appears that very few areas had been officially registered as private property. "Of the 45,000 decares of farmland, the most fertile portion belongs to the state institutions mentioned above, while the upper part is in the hands of the peasants..."[134]

Thus, the issue of resettlement and land distribution to farmers in Eskişehir, as in the rest of the Turkish Republic, was attempted to be carried out. At this point, there were numerous demands and responses regarding land distribution in Eskişehir. However, due to reasons such as debt relations, landowners' seizure of land, and economic crises, it could not be fully realized.

Therefore, fundamentally, the land that had been distributed was re-concentrated in the hands of large landowners, resulting in the dispossession of smallholders. The complaints of the peasants confirm this process of dispossession. Moreover, whether the distributed lands were indeed fertile and to what extent they increased the productive capacity of the poor peasantry remains unclear and is a subject that requires further discussion. For all these reasons, the effort to provide small peasants in rural Eskişehir with sufficient land through redistribution was not fully successful.

Consequently, it can be assumed that small producers had difficulty achieving subsistence-level livelihoods. However, how the small peasantry did not dissolve despite these difficulties and how they survived despite all the negative effects of the Great Depression is an important point of discussion.

[134] BCA MGM [30.10.0.0/139.993.5], 14.07.1939.

Table 7. Distribution Indicators of 1930-1939

Years	Shares from National Income (%)			Shares within Private Industry (%)		Real Incomes (Index)		Relative Prices (Index: 1924 = 100)			
	Wages (Private Industry)	Salaries	Profits (Private Industry)	Wages	Profit	Wages (Private Industry	Administrative-Technical Staff (Private Industry	Wheat / Industry	Cotton / Industry	Tobacco / Industry	Agriculture / Industry
1929	-	5.2	-	-	-	-	-	120	104	107	114
1930	-	6.8	-	-	-	-	-	91	107	138	102
1931	-	7.1	-	-	-	-	-	59	81	81	91
1932	1.3	8.2	3.4	28.0	72.0	100.0	100.0	80	98	102	119
1933	1.4	8.6	4.9	22.2	77.8	99.9	128.6	74	106	94	94
1934	1.6	8.8	5.8	21.1	78.9	109.5	125.8	68	108	132	86
1935	1.5	8.7	5.7	21.0	79.0	93.5	107.4	80	115	146	94
1936	1.3	7.2	4.9	21.1	78.9	86.4	91.7	70	106	122	83
1937	1.4	7.4	5.5	20.6	79.4	73.1	91.7	68	95	108	85
1938	1.7	7.6	5.3	24.1	75.9	89.5	103.1	68	93	105	91
1939	1.7	9.1	6.2	21.8	78.2	90.3	101.1	68	102	111	91

Source: Korkut Boratav, Türkiye İktisat Tarihi 1908-2002 (Ankara: İmge Kitabevi, 2003), 73.

The table Boratav presented appears to be evolving as the domestic terms of trade turned against agriculture with the Great Depression of 1929. While the agricultural-industrial index was 114 in 1929, it returned to its lowest level in 1936. This situation resulted in the prices of administrative goods rising faster than those of industrial goods. This meant that the peasantry had to sell more to purchase consumer goods. However, the situation was particularly dire for the small peasantry, especially when large landowners had the means to stockpile goods and engage in usury rather than directly marketing them. Due to their small budgets and lack of access to large landowners, they fell further behind over the years. At this point, small peasants, in order to survive and maintain their production activities, resorted to either working in their own fields or developing their productive capacity through self-exploitation.

First of all, the flexibility and adaptability of property relations serve as a survival strategy during crises for small producers. This adaptability manifests in two key forms: tenant farming and sharecropping. Working as tenants or sharecroppers on the lands of large landowners allows the peasantry to continue production and maintain their livelihoods during times of crisis. Due to debt and the high cost of living, a sizable portion of landless peasants were already working as sharecroppers or tenants in the fields of either large landowners or small producers. However, as the rupture deepened, smallholder farmers, unable to produce sufficient crops on their own land or forced to sell their land due to debt, began working on other people's fields. As the crisis began to ease, they returned to family-based production. The second method of survival was to increase production volume, which was also encouraged by the Republic of Turkey. Cem Emrence summarizes this situation as follows.

> *"In response, peasants developed survival strategies to fight the market, though some of them lost the battle. Peasants who stayed on the land sometimes switched from cash crops to new crops, such as from tobacco to sugar cane, or were invited by the focernment to introduce a new commodity. The typical answer to the constant misery was to increase production as much as possible to cover expenses and to decrease their consumption relationship with the market."*[135]

When we shift this picture to Eskişehir, the survival efforts of small peasants become even more apparent. In Eskişehir, as in the rest of Turkey, agricultural prices

[135] Emrence, "Turkey in Economic Crisis (1927-1930): A Panaromic Vision," 72.

plummeted, forcing small peasants into a serious crisis. To escape this situation, as seen above, they attempted to minimize the effects of the decline in real income by increasing production of crops such as wheat, barley, and rye. Furthermore, due to the establishment of the Eskişehir Sugar Factory and the relatively higher profitability of sugar beet production, they shifted their production to this area. All of these struggles were strategies developed by the peasantry to survive. However, land demands in rural Eskişehir demonstrate that the steps taken were not a complete solution for small peasants. Therefore, to maintain their subsistence economy, they continually appealed to government officials to expand their land holdings. As a result of these demands, land redistribution, although insufficient, occurred during the period mentioned. Therefore, thanks to all these steps, although the small peasantry could not improve their current situation, they saved themselves from extinction.

As a result, the Great Depression was felt with all its weight in Eskişehir, as in the rest of Turkey. As of this point, small landowners and landless peasants in particular fell into serious trouble because of falling prices. In this context, the state pioneered the establishment of the sugar industry in Eskişehir, trying to both transfer goods from rural areas to industry and to ease the situation of peasants to some extent. However, the problem for small producers is structural. Therefore, despite all these policies, there has not been much improvement in the situation of the producers. As a result, peasants have been demanding land from the state to make a living. Although the state has a positive view on the land policy due to its policies, these lands have not been fully distributed to farmers with little land/landless land, as it has not been able to solve the real problems in the ownership issue. Both the problems of the credit mechanism and the problems created by large landowners by seizing land have rendered the policies of peasants and the state futile.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

This thesis examines how the political discourses and regulations developed by the state cadres in line with economic policies between 1929 and 1939 shaped the condition of the small peasantry during the Great Depression and 'land redistribution' of the small peasantry in rural Anatolia. At the same time, it seeks to explain how the relations between the state and rural producer classes influenced these efforts and how this dynamic determined the position of small rural producers. Within the framework of this study, two main research questions are posed as follows: 1) How were small producers in Turkey, in general, and the poor peasants of Eskişehir, in particular, affected by the Great Depression? 2) To what extent was the distribution of land to peasants with little/no land, and how successful was it in providing them with sufficient land?

With the effects of the Great Depression, the situation of agricultural producers began to deteriorate. At this point, rapidly falling product prices endangered the subsistence economies of small producers. During the years in question, the primary aim of the Republic of Turkey was both to recover from the effects of the Depression and to seize the crisis as an opportunity by pursuing industrialization based on an import-substitution system. However, the legacy inherited from the Ottoman Empire offered a weak tradition of industrialization and a structure in which large landowners in rural areas held considerable power. Therefore, for this development strategy to be implemented in Turkey, property relations in the countryside needed to be reorganized and production had to be made continuous. Yet, in the face of this necessity, the unequal property structure in Anatolia and the Turkish economy's dependency on agricultural production enabled large landowners to maintain their strong positions within both the economic and political spheres.

Nevzat Evrim Önal, quoting Sabiha Sertel, who witnessed the period firsthand, relays a conversation between her and CHP Member of Parliament Mazhar Müfit, where it is stated that "Mustafa Kemal wanted to carry out many reforms, but the landowners were an obstacle to land reform."[136] In this context, even the laws or drafts that were primarily based on resettlement policies encountered opposition from large landowners. Despite the trust placed in landowners by both İnönü and Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, large landowners expressed their opposition to the land distribution policy during the period leading up to the Second World War. Sabiha Sertel's conversation with Mazhar Müfit demonstrates that large landowners had the power to obstruct legislation even before draft laws were prepared. When considering the bills that were prepared within the CHP throughout the 1930s but were canceled before becoming law, the strength of this opposition becomes even clearer. However, this was not the only influence of large landowners. As seen in the Eskişehir example, large landowners not only opposed land distribution in parliament but also seized the distributed land, either by force or by exploiting the plight of small peasants. In this context, the expulsion of immigrants from their lands by a man named Ali in Sivrihisar can be cited as an example.

Despite the strong opposition of large landowners, a number of laws, most notably the Settlement Law, were enacted in line with the discourse of the cadres and the demands of small producers, and although limited in scope, some concrete steps were taken toward the land distribution to small peasants. However, these concrete steps themselves were far from achieving a structural transformation. They were not able to break the power of large landowners and did not allow peasants to keep their lands. The Eskişehir case demonstrates that land was distributed primarily through state-owned lands to small producers and a portion of the landless peasantry. However, the Eskişehir case demonstrates that the process of land distribution to small peasants or landless peasants does not always result positively. One day, by showing title deeds, immigrants are forcibly removed from the lands they have cultivated and are forced into the process of dispossession. This situation is evident

[136] Nevzat Evrim Önal, "Türkiye'nin İktisadi ve Siyasi Tarihinde Toprak Reformu Tartışmalarının Rolü" in *Toprak Mülkiyeti Sempozyum Bildirileri* ed. Sonay Bayramoğlu Özuğurlu (Ankara: Memleket Yayınları, 2010), 51–52.

both from documents specific to Eskişehir and from Şükrü Kaya's speech in Parliament. Examples such as the direct seizure of a very large plot of land in Sivrihisar by the individual named Ali also stand out. Therefore, large landowners seize distributed lands both legally and through coercion, and although there are land distribution efforts, they can obstruct these processes in this way.

As a result, the issue of land distribution was primarily realized through the distribution of state land without directly touching the property of large landowners. In the process leading up to 1939, the government's efforts for "land reform" ultimately did not allow for land distribution to small producers or landless peasants but rather resulted in the private empowerment of large landowners. "The provisions aimed at granting land to the landless and smallholding peasants within the scope of settlement limits have not been implemented, and the relevant articles in the Title Deed Law have in fact facilitated the expansion of landholdings by large landowners."[137] The situation in rural Turkey indeed shows a picture where, even if land distribution took place, the land could not remain with small producers. The distribution of land from state-owned land and the inability to dismantle the power of large landowners have prevented land distribution from becoming permanent. At this point, the conceptualization of a land settlement policy rather than land reform seems more appropriate. Despite land reforms undertaken during the aforementioned period, particularly in Latin America, the primary reason for the lack of systematic transformation in Turkey stems from the failure to eliminate large landowners. Large landowners hold significant sway both economically and within the political apparatus of Turkey. This situation becomes even clearer when considering the structure of the Turkish Grand National Assembly. For example, despite numerous complaints against him, Emin Sazak was able to secure a seat in the Assembly as a permanent member of parliament from Eskişehir. Despite these complaints, directly reflected in party reports, the failure of Republican cadres to intervene in this situation reveals the power of landownership in Turkey. Therefore, the primary reason for the failure to implement land reform in Turkey, compared to other developing countries, is related to the failure to eliminate this class.

[137] Taner Timur, *Türk Devrimi ve Sonrası* (Ankara: İmge Kitabevi, 1994), 134.

This study focuses on the transformation of small peasants in the Republic of Turkey between the Great Depression of 1929 and 1939, examining how the effects of the Depression, their demands, efforts, and the outcomes related to land redistribution played out in Eskişehir. However, the study has inevitably had to proceed without access to certain crucial data. Due to the contested nature of property ownership records in the history of the Republic, the reluctance of institutions such as the General Directorate of Land Registry and Cadastre; and the General Directorate of Foundations to share their data with researchers has limited the depth of the analysis. For this reason, the research falls short in determining the exact landholdings of small producers in Eskişehir and in identifying the extent of land transfers either from small producers to large landowners or among smallholders themselves. The data collected to approach such determinations could only be interpreted through secondary sources. Should these contested records be resolved and made accessible to researchers, it would pave the way for more comprehensive studies not only on property relations in Eskişehir but across the rest of Turkey as well.

The findings of this study clearly show that from 1929 until the beginning of the Second World War, policies aimed at changing the conditions of the peasantry under the influence of the Depression were evident. Furthermore, the lands granted to landless and small peasants did not have a comprehensive or transformative character. Despite the cadres' emphasis on integrating small producers into the ongoing development strategy through land distribution, many of the laws proposed in this area either failed to pass due to the opposition of large landowners or were enacted only after provisions deemed harmful to their interests were softened. Moreover, even the lands that were directly distributed often ended up in the hands of large landowners, either through forced appropriation or in exchange for the debts incurred by the peasantry, reflecting the continuing relations of dependence. Thus, due to both the lack of transformative capacity in the enacted laws and the sustained resistance of the country's major landowners, the land policies pursued during this period failed to reorganize rural property relations in line with the Republic's development strategy. On the contrary, they often contributed to the further consolidation of land in the hands of the large landholding class.

In this context, I hope that future studies will lead to more detailed studies as the deadlocks in the archives are eliminated. However, despite all the limitations of the Republican historiography, I believe that studies that can be conducted by focusing on the region can still yield accurate and consistent results. By directly using the sources written during the period under review, healthier interpretations can be made on the effects of the Depression and land ownership. Therefore, I believe that future researchers will contribute more to the discussions on agricultural property in Turkish history by eliminating both objective boundaries and subjective limitations and focusing on regional studies.

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APPENDICES

A. TURKISH SUMMARY/ TÜRKÇE ÖZET

1929 Büyük Buhranı, Birinci Dünya Savaşı'nın yaralarının sarılmaya başlandığı bir dönemde 20. yüzyılın en büyük krizlerinden biri olarak ortaya çıkmış, Amerika Birleşik Devletlerinden başlayarak hızlıca tüm dünyaya yayılmıştır. Büyük Buhran yalnızca ekonomik alandaki dengeyi değil, politik arenayı ve sosyal yapıyı da radikal biçimde dönüştürerek 20. yüzyılın seyrini değiştirmiştir. Büyük Buhran'ın yaratmış olduğu bu yıkım, gelişmiş ya da gelişmekte olan ülkeler açısından üretim faaliyetlerini neredeyse durdurma noktasına getirmiş; tüketim üzerinde de uygulanan ciddi vergi politikalarıyla birlikte dışa kapalı bir ekonomi yaratmıştır. Bu noktada, birçok hükümet siyasi meşruiyetini yitirirken, toplumsal alt üst oluşlara da zemin hazırlanmıştır. Hem kentlerde hem de kırsal alanda gerçekleşen bu dönüşüm 1929 sonrasında ivmelenmeye başladı. Bu bağlamda, söylenebilir ki 1929 krizi dünya genelinde endüstriyel üretimi etkilemenin yanı sıra tarımsal ilişkileri ve kırsal yaşamı da sarstı. Bahsedilen dönem içerisinde hem sınai mallarının hem de tarımsal malların fiyatlarında ve üretim miktarlarında ciddi bir düşüş gözlendi.

Genç Türkiye Cumhuriyeti de tarıma dayalı ekonomisiyle kırılgan bir yapıya sahip olması sebebiyle 1929 Büyük Buhranının yaratmış olduğu yıkımdan ciddi bir şekilde etkilendi. Bu bağlamda, birçok ülkede ekonomik dengeyi derinden değiştiren ve dönüştüren kriz, aynı zamanda sosyal yapı ve toplumsal sınıf ilişkilerini de ideolojik biçimde yeniden tanımlamıştır. Dolayısıyla, Büyük Buhran bu ilişki biçimlerini analiz edebilmek adına kritik bir süreç anlamına da gelmektedir. Nüfusunun neredeyse %75'inin kırsal alanda yaşaması ve gayri safi milli hasılanın yarısından fazlasını tarımsal üretime borçlu olan Türkiye ekonomisi açısından bu krizin etkilerinden kaçınmak mümkün olmamıştır. Ancak, araştırmacıların da ortaya koyduğu üzere Büyük Buhranın etkileri Türkiye'de her kesime eşit yansımamış,

özellikle küçük tarımsal üreticiler üzerinde yıkıcı bir etki yaratmıştır. Dolayısıyla, Türkiye'nin tarımsal ekonomiye dayalı bir yapıya sahip olması ve kırsal üretimin de ağırlıklı olarak parçalı olması sebebiyle krizin etkileri genelde kırsal üreticiler özelde ise küçük tarımsal üreticiler üzerinde oldukça yıkıcı bir etki yaratmıştır. Bu bağlamda, Anadolu köylüsünün gündelik yaşam pratiklerini derinden sarsılırken; 1929 Büyük Buhran'ın yaratmış olduğu sosyal ve toplumsal travmadan nasibini almıştır. Yapılan bu çalışmanın amacı da Buhran sonrasında Türkiye kırsalındaki ilişki ağının nasıl dönüştüğünü açıklamaktır. Dolayısıyla, bu tez, 1929-1939 yılları arasında devlet kadrolarının ekonomik politikalar doğrultusunda geliştirdiği siyasi söylem ve düzenlemelerin Büyük Buhran sırasında küçük köylülüğün durumunu ve kırsal Anadolu'daki küçük köylülüğe "toprak dağıtımını" nasıl şekillendirdiğini incelemektedir. Aynı zamanda, devlet ile kırsal üretici sınıfları arasındaki ilişkilerin bu çabaları nasıl etkilediğini ve bu dinamiğin küçük kırsal üreticilerin konumunu nasıl belirlediğini açıklamayı amaçlamaktadır.

Büyük Buhranın yıkıcı etkilerinden sıyrılmak için Türkiye Cumhuriyeti kadroları ithal-ikameci sanayileşme hedefini ortaya koyarken; 1932 yılında devletçilik ilkesinin parti programına girmesiyle birlikte bu hedef resmileştirildi. Devletçilik ilkesinin resmiyete kavuşmasıyla birlikte, ithal-ikameci sanayileşme modeli Türkiye'deki iktisadi ilişkileri bir noktada yeniden dizayn etti. Buna göre, devlet öncülüğünde sanayileşme birincil hedef olarak ortaya kondu ve artı-değer üretiminin ağırlıklı bir şekilde yaratıldığı kırsal alan hem üretim alanı olarak hem de sanayileşmenin bir aracı olarak pazar alanı şeklinde yeniden kurgulanırken; devlet, büyük toprak sahipleri, küçük köylüler, topraksız köylüler ve tarım işçileri arasındaki ilişki de yeniden dizayn edildi. Dolayısıyla, Cumhuriyet'in temel ilkelerinden biri olan devletçiliğin yansıması kırsal alandaki üretim ilişkilerinde görülmektedir. Bu noktada tarımsal üreticiler sanayileşme amacı doğrultusunda pasif birer özne olarak görüldü ve üretimlerine devlet tarafından ya vergiler ya da alım politikaları doğrultusunda el konuldu. Ancak, devlet ile kırsal üreticiler arasındaki ekonomik ilişki her kırsal üretici ile aynı şekilde kurulmazken, sanayileşmenin asıl yükünü büyük toprak sahiplerinden ziyade küçük tarımsal üreticiler üstlendi. Sonuç olarak, 1932 yılında resmi olarak devletçiliğin parti programına girmesiyle birlikte, hali

hazırda ekonomik olarak sıkıntı yaşayan küçük tarımsal üreticiler, sanayileşme için ağırlaştırılan vergi politikalarının altında iyice ezilmeye başladılar.

Hem Büyük Buhranın negatif etkilerinin topraksız/az topraklı köylülerin üzerinde artması hem de sanayileşmenin faturasının bu kesimlere yansıtılması sebebiyle, kırsal üreticilerin önemli bir kısmı geçimlik ekonomilerini sürdüremez hale geldiler. Bu sebepten ötürü 1930'ların başından itibaren Türkiye'de toprak mülkiyeti ve toprak dağıtımı meseleleri hem dönemin dergilerinde/gazetelerinde hem de Meclis kürsülerinde çokça tartışılmaya başlandı. Bu tartışmanın temelinde Türkiye Cumhuriyeti'nin Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'ndan devralmış olduğu mülkiyet yapısı yatmaktadır. Etkileri 1930'lar boyunca devam eden ve ağırlıklı olarak küçük üretimin yaygın olduğu ve toprakların çokça parçalandığı bir yapıya sahip bu miras, küçük üreticilerin geçimlerini sağlamalarının önünde bir engel olarak görülmekteydi. Bu nokta itibariyle, Cumhuriyet'in önder kadroları hem sınırlı etkilere sahip olsa da çıkardıkları Kanunlar ile hem de Mecliste ve diğer kamusal alanda yapmış oldukları açıklamalar ile Türkiye'de topraksızlık sorununun olduğunu kabul etmekte ve acil bir şekilde topraksız/az topraklı köylülere toprak dağıtılması gerektiğini söylemekteydiler. Bu noktada, sadece devletin sorun olarak gördüğü bir olgu yoktu. Aynı zamanda, Cumhuriyet arşivlerinde de görüldüğü üzere köylülerin önemli kısmı devletten toprak talebinde bulunarak, mevcut durumlarını iyileştirmeye çalışmaktaydılar. Bütün bu talepler doğrultusunda devlet 1930'lu yıllar boyunca birçok Kanun teklifi hazırlamış ve mevcut durumu düzeltmeye çalışmıştır. Ancak, Nevzat Evrim Önal'ın da belirtmiş olduğu üzere, bu hamleler sınırlı bir etki yaratırken; Türkiye'de toprak reformu gerçekleşmemiş ve bunun yerine topraklandırma siyaseti güdülmüştür.

Bu tezde yukarıda özet bir şekilde verilen anlatı Eskişehir örneği üzerinden incelenmektedir. Eskişehir'in bahsedilen dönem içerisinde çoğu Anadolu kentine kıyasla jeopolitik açıdan önemli bir noktada yer alması, Cumhuriyet hükümeti tarafından önemli yatırımlar yapılması ve Anadolu demiryolu hattının kent merkezinden geçmesi gibi sahip olduğu önemli özellikler kırsal üreticilerin doğrudan ihracata yönelik üretim yapmasına katkıda bulunmuştur. Nitekim söz konusu dönemde, Cumhuriyet kadrolarının Halkevleri, eğitmen kursları, fabrikaların

kurulması, tarımsal modernizasyon çalışmaları ve iskân politikaları gibi çabaları hayata geçirilmiştir. Sonuç olarak, Eskişehir, şehirden geçen demiryolu hattı, büyük şehirlere yakınlığı ve göçmenler ve doğrudan devlet desteği sayesinde nispeten gelişmiş tarım tekniklerinin uygulamaya konulması sayesinde nispeten canlı bir Anadolu şehri haline gelmiştir. Bu noktada Eskişehir ikili bir yapıyı temsil etmektedir. Hem tipik bir Anadolu kenti özelliğini taşırken hem de ihracata dayalı bir profile sahip olması sebebiyle Türkiye'nin diğer ihracat bölgelerini de andırmaktadır. Bütün bu sebeplerden ötürü, Eskişehir hem Büyük Buhranın etkilerini hem de topraklandırma siyasetinin küçük köylülük üzerinde nasıl sonuçlar doğurduğunu anlamak için araştırma alanı olarak seçilmiştir.

Eskişehir'deki dönüşüm incelendiği zaman küçük köylülerin hayatta kalma çabaları daha da belirginleşmektedir. Türkiye'nin geri kalanında olduğu gibi Eskişehir'de de tarımsal fiyatlar hızla düşmüş ve küçük köylüler ciddi bir krize sürüklenmiştir. Yukarıda da görüldüğü gibi, bu durumdan kurtulmak için buğday, arpa ve çavdar gibi ürünlerin üretimini artırarak reel gelirdeki düşüşün etkilerini en aza indirmeye çalışmışlardır. Ayrıca, Eskişehir Şeker Fabrikası'nın kurulması ve şeker pancarı üretiminin görece daha yüksek kârlılığı nedeniyle üretimlerini bu bölgeye kaydırmışlardır. Tüm bu mücadeleler, köylülüğün hayatta kalmak için geliştirdiği stratejilerdi. Ancak, Eskişehir kırsalındaki toprak talepleri, atılan adımların küçük köylüler için tam bir çözüm olmadığını göstermektedir. Bu nedenle, geçimlik ekonomilerini sürdürebilmek için, topraklarını genişletmeleri için sürekli olarak devlet yetkililerine başvurmuşlardır. Bu talepler sonucunda, söz konusu dönemde yetersiz de olsa toprak yeniden dağıtımı gerçekleşmiştir. Dolayısıyla, tüm bu adımlar sayesinde küçük köylülük mevcut durumunu iyileştiremese de yok olmaktan kurtulmuştur.

Ancak küçük üreticiler için sorun yapısaldır. Bu nedenle, tüm bu politikalara rağmen üreticilerin durumunda fazla bir iyileşme olmadı. Sonuç olarak, köylüler geçimlerini sağlamak için devletten toprak talep etmeye başladılar. Devlet, politikaları nedeniyle toprak politikasına olumlu baksa da mülkiyet sorunundaki gerçek sorunları çözemediği için bu topraklar az toprağı olan/topraksız çiftçilere tam olarak dağıtılamadı. Hem kredi mekanizmasındaki sorunlar hem de büyük toprak

sahiplerinin topraklara el koyarak yarattığı sorunlar, köylülerin ve devletin politikalarını boşa çıkardı. Bahsedilen dönem içerisinde büyük toprak sahiplerinin güçlü muhalefetine rağmen, kadroların söylemleri ve küçük üreticilerin talepleri doğrultusunda, başta İskân Kanunu olmak üzere bir dizi yasa çıkarılmış ve kapsamı sınırlı da olsa, küçük köylülere toprak dağıtımı konusunda bazı somut adımlar atılmıştır. Ancak bu somut adımlar yapısal bir dönüşüm sağlamaktan uzaktı. Büyük toprak sahiplerinin gücünü kıramamış ve köylülerin topraklarını ellerinde tutmalarına izin vermemiştir. Eskişehir örneği, toprağın öncelikle devlet arazileri aracılığıyla küçük üreticilere ve topraksız köylülerin bir kısmına dağıtıldığını göstermektedir. Ancak, küçük köylülere veya topraksız köylülere toprak dağıtım sürecinin her zaman olumlu sonuçlanmadığını göstermektedir. Bir gün, tapu senetleri gösterilerek, göçmenler işledikleri topraklardan zorla çıkarılmakta ve mülksüzleştirme sürecine dahil edilmekteydiler. Bu durum hem Eskişehir'e özgü belgelerden hem de Şükrü Kaya'nın Meclis'teki konuşmasından açıkça anlaşılmaktadır. Örneğin, Sivrihisar'da Ali isimli şahsın çok büyük bir araziye doğrudan el koyması gibi örnekler de göze çarpmaktadır. Dolayısıyla, büyük toprak sahipleri dağıtılan arazilere hem yasal olarak hem de zorla el koymakta ve arazi dağıtım çalışmaları olsa da bu süreçleri bu şekilde engelleyebilmektedirler. Sonuç olarak, arazi dağıtımı sorunu, büyük toprak sahiplerinin mülklerine doğrudan dokunmadan, öncelikle devlet arazilerinin dağıtımı yoluyla gerçekleştirilmiştir. Eskişehir örneği, yerel bir örnek olmanın yanı sıra Türkiye’nin birçok yerinde yaşanan ekonomik ve toplumsal travmanın yansımanın sadece bir kısmıdır. 1939'a kadar geçen süreçte, hükümetin "toprak reformu" çabaları nihayetinde küçük üreticilere veya topraksız köylülere toprak dağıtımına izin vermemiş, bunun yerine özel mülkiyete yol açmıştır. Bu bağlamda, devlet kırsal üreticinin sorunlarını sözde çözmeye çalışırken, diğer yandan büyük toprak sahipleriyle mevcut çıkar bağlarını pekiştirmiştir.

Ancak, literatürde Eskişehir özelinde çalışma sayısının yeterli düzeyde olmaması sebebiyle bu çalışma, bugüne kadar yapılmış çalışmaların karşılaştırmalı analizine dayanmaktadır. Mevcut literatür, genellikle Türkiye’nin iktisadi yapısı, topraklandırma siyaseti ve Büyük Buhran konusunda birbirini taklit eden ve arşiv kaynaklarının yetersizliği sebebiyle belli başlı çalışmalar üzerinden yeniden yapılan çalışmalardan oluşmaktadır. Dolayısıyla, literatürün çoğu noktasında bir uzlaşı

olduğunu söylemek mümkündür. Ancak, bunun yanı sıra, Türkiye'de arazi mülkiyetinin dağılımı ve devlet-sınıf ilişkileri bağlamında literatürde göze çarpan bariz bir eksiklik ve tartışma söz konusudur. Bu sebepten ötürü, asıl olarak bu noktalara odaklanmak mevcut literatürü tekrar etmekten ziyade hem tartışmaların anlaşılması hem de bu çalışmanın odaklandığı yeri anlamak için daha faydalı olacaktır. Literatürdeki boşluk ve tartışma iki ana noktada özetlenebilir.

1930'larda Türkiye kırsalına bakıldığında, hem Cumhuriyet hükümetinin önder kadrolarının söylemlerinden hem de dönem içerisinde çıkarılan/çıkarılmaya çalışılan kanunlardan anlaşıldığı üzere temel sorun topraksız ve az topraklı köylülüğün geçimlik ekonomilerine yetmeyecek miktarda toprağa sahip olmalarıdır. Dolayısıyla, incelenmesi gereken ilk nokta, Türkiye'de toprak mülkiyetinin dağılımının nasıl olduğudur. Bu noktada, iki temel araştırma göze çarpmaktadır. Bunlardan ilki 1912 yılında Osmanlı İmparatorluğu döneminde bazı illeri kapsayacak şekilde yapılan mülkiyet haritasıyken; ikincisi ise 1938 yılında yapılan zirai anketlere dayanmaktadır. Ancak, bu iki veri seti de oldukça şüphelidir. Örneğin, Oya Köymen'in çalışmasında aktarmış olduğu üzere 1912 yılındaki veri setine göre ağalar, büyük toprak sahipleri, köylüler ve topraksız köylülerin miktarları verilmesine karşın bu grupların sahip oldukları toprak miktarları verilmemiştir. Dolayısıyla, hangi ölçütlere göre böyle bir sınıflandırma yapıldığı tam olarak bilinmemektedir. 1938 yılındaki veri seti de temelde Ömer Lütfi Barkan'ın çalışmalarına dayanmaktadır. Bu veriye göre 50 hektardan az toprağa sahip olan köylüler küçük mülk sahibi olarak tanımlanmaktadır. Ancak, bahsedilen toprak miktarı esas olarak oldukça geniş bir alanı tarif etmesinin yanı sıra Türkiye'nin her bölgesinde de aynı verim derecesine denk düşmemektedir. Dolayısıyla, verilen tablonun kategorik olarak sağlıklı bir tablo sunmaması sebebiyle hem de bütün istatistiki tabloların bizzat Barkan'ın çalışmasına dayanması sebebiyle bu anket sonuçları da oldukça şüphelidir. Barkan'ın çalışmasından başka özgün çalışma olmaması sebebiyle bahsedilen verilerin çapraz kontrolünün yapılması da mümkün olmamaktadır. Bütün bunların yanı sıra, Türkiye'de kent bazlı mülkiyet haritasının çıkarılması da mevcut literatür itibariyle oldukça zordur. Bu bağlamda, Eskişehir'de de sağlıklı bir şekilde mülkiyet biçimleri ve miktarları tespit edilememektedir. Bu konudaki tek kaynak, Eskişehir İl Yön Kurulu'nun yayımlamış olduğu eserdir.

Buradaki kaynağa ve İstatistik Yıllığındaki verilere birlikte bakıldığında, Eskişehir köylüsü ortalama olarak 14,4 hektar toprak işlemektedir. Ancak, İstatistik yıllığında bahsedildiği üzere Eskişehir'deki pek çok kişinin mesleği de tam belirlenememiştir. Türkiye'de tarımla uğraşan nüfusun oranı Eskişehir'e de uyarlandığı zaman, Eskişehir köylüsü ortalama olarak 4.83 hektar toprak üzerinde tarımsal üretim yapmaktadır. Sonuç olarak, genelde Türkiye özelde ise Eskişehir'de toprak mülkiyetinin nasıl dağıldığı konusunda eldeki veriler oldukça şüphelidir. Buna rağmen, Türkiye'nin hemen hemen her yerinde köylülerin önemli bölümünün yeterli toprağa sahip olmadığı açıktır.

Literatürde ortaklaşılamayan ikinci konu ise, devlet ve kırsal üreticiler arasındaki ilişkinin niteliğinin ne olduğu ile alakalıdır. Buna göre, devletin benimsemiş olduğu ekonomi politikalarıyla birlikte kırsal üreticilerin hangi kesimleriyle ilişki kurduğu, hangilerini dışladığı özellikle Çağlar Keyder ve Faruk Birtek tarafından çokça tartışılmıştır. Birtek ve Keyder, devletin sanayileşmeyi desteklemek için kırsal alandan fazla ürünlerin kentlere aktardığını ve bu sayede de küçük tarımsal üreticilerin varlıklarını sürdürdüğünü iddia etmektedir. Buradan hareketle 1930'lar boyunca Türkiye'de devlet ve küçük köylülük arasında bir ittifak olduğu söylenmektedir. Ancak, Oya Köymen İsmail Hüsrev'in geçimlik toprak miktarı analizine atıfta bulunarak devlet ve küçük köylülük arasındaki ittifak analizine şiddetle karşı çıkmaktadır. Köymen'e göre, devlet doğrudan alım politikalarıyla ve toprak dağıtımını sağlayamaması sebebiyle küçük üreticilerin mevcut durumunu zayıflatırken; bir ittifak kuramamıştır. Dolayısıyla, Birtek ve Keyder'in iddiaları doğrultusunda, Cumhuriyet hükümetinin kırsal alanları hem bir pazar hem de sanayileşmeyi destekleyecek bir rezervuar olarak gördüğü iddia edilebilir. Ancak, küçük tarım üreticilerinin karşı karşıya kaldığı borçlanma ve nihai mülksüzleşme hala ortadadır. Dolayısıyla, Faruk Birtek ve Çağlar Keyder'in aksine, devletin küçük üreticilerle gerçek bir ittifak kurduğunu iddia etmek zordur ve bu tezde benimsenen tutum, Oya Köymen'in bakış açısıyla daha yakından örtüşmektedir.

Bu tez temel olarak literatürdeki sorunlardan hareketle iki soru etrafında şekillenmektedir. İlk olarak, Türkiye genelindeki küçük tarımsal üreticiler ve özelde ise Eskişehir'deki küçük üreticilerin Büyük Buhrandan ne ölçüde etkilendikleriyle

alakalıdır. İkinci olarak ise, topraksız veya az topraklı köylülere yönelik yapılan ‘Topraklandırma siyaseti’nin ne ölçüde başarılı olduğu ve hangi direnç noktalarıyla karşılaştığıdır. Bu nokta itibariyle tezin temel argümanı, Türkiye'nin dış ticarete entegre olmuş diğer bölgelerinde olduğu gibi, Büyük Buhranın Eskişehir'de de küçük üreticilerin ekonomik durumlarında önemli değişime neden olduğudur. 1920'lerin ikinci yarısından itibaren tarımsal ürün fiyatlarındaki düşüş, Türkiye'deki tüm küçük üreticiler üzerinde yıkıcı bir etki yaratırken, onları sürekli bir bağımlılık ve borç döngüsüne itmiştir. Dahası, Türkiye'de Cumhuriyet kadrolarının sıkça dile getirdiği topraklandırma politikası, kötüleşen ekonomik koşullara ve geçimlik arazi eksikliğine bir yanıt olarak ortaya çıkmıştır. Ancak bu politika mevcut sorunları ele almaktan çok uzak kalırken; yapısal bir dönüşüm sağlayamamıştır.

Araştırma soruları etrafında oluşturulan argüman temel olarak birincil ve ikincil kaynakların karşılaştırmalı analizine dayanmaktadır. İkincil kaynaklara ek olarak, bu tez temel olarak Kanunlara, Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi Zabıt Ceridelerine, Tarım ve İstatistik Yıllıklarına, gazetelere ve Başbakanlık Cumhuriyet Arşivlerine dayanmaktadır. Bahsedilen dönem içerisindeki bütün Kanunları ya da Kanun tekliflerini incelemekten ziyade topraklandırma ile alakalı olanlar incelenmiştir. Benzer bir biçimde, T.B.M.M. Zabıt Ceridelerindeki konuşmalar da doğrudan arazi dağıtımı ile alakalı olarak seçici bir şekilde incelenmiştir. Bunların yanı sıra, gazete haberleri temelde borçluluk ilişkisinin anlatımının güçlendirilmesi için kullanılırken; doğrudan Eskişehir’deki toprak dağıtımı çabası için Başbakanlık Cumhuriyet Arşivindeki belgeler incelenmiştir. Dolayısıyla, bu çalışma, esas olarak nitel bir araştırma yaklaşımı benimseyerek, Eskişehir'de küçük köylülere yönelik arazi dağıtım çalışmalarının nasıl gerçekleştirildiğini incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Eskişehir'i örnek olay olarak seçerek, genel ulusal politikaların yereldeki köylülüğü nasıl etkilediğini inceleyerek genelden özele doğru ilerleyen tarihsel bir anlayış sunmaktadır.

Ancak, yapılan bu çalışma kaçınılmaz olarak bazı önemli verilere erişim olmadan ilerlemek zorunda kalmıştır. Cumhuriyet tarihinde mülkiyet kayıtlarının tartışmalı yapısı nedeniyle, Tapu ve Kadastro Genel Müdürlüğü ve Vakıflar Genel Müdürlüğü gibi kurumların verilerini araştırmacılarla paylaşma konusundaki isteksizliği analizin

derinliğini sınırlamıştır. Bu nedenle araştırma, Eskişehir'deki küçük üreticilerin kesin toprak sahipliklerini belirlemede ve küçük üreticilerden büyük toprak sahiplerine veya küçük çiftçiler arasında toprak transferlerinin kapsamını belirlemede yetersiz kalmaktadır. Bu tür tespitlere yaklaşmak için toplanan veriler ancak ikincil kaynaklar aracılığıyla yorumlanabilmektedir. Bu tartışmalı kayıtlar çözüme kavuşturulur ve araştırmacıların erişimine açılırsa, yalnızca Eskişehir'deki değil, Türkiye'nin geri kalanındaki mülkiyet ilişkileri üzerine daha kapsamlı çalışmaların da önü açılacaktır. Bu bağlamda, arşivlerdeki tıkanıklıklar giderildikçe gelecekteki çalışmaların daha detaylı çalışmalara yol açacağını umuyorum. Ancak, Cumhuriyet tarih yazımının tüm sınırlamalarına rağmen, bölgeye odaklanarak yürütülebilecek çalışmaların yine de doğru ve tutarlı sonuçlar verebileceğine inanıyorum. İncelenen dönemde yazılmış kaynakları doğrudan kullanarak, Büyük Buhran ve toprak sahipliğinin etkileri hakkında daha sağlıklı yorumlar yapılabilir. Bu nedenle, gelecekteki araştırmacıların hem nesnel hem de öznel sınırlamaları ortadan kaldırarak ve bölgesel çalışmalara odaklanarak Türk tarihindeki tarımsal mülkiyet tartışmalarına daha fazla katkıda bulunacaklarını düşünüyorum.

Dolayısıyla, bu çalışmanın literatüre katkısı, Cumhuriyet dönemindeki toprak dağıtım çabalarını devletin ekonomik politikalarıyla ilişkilendirerek bu politikalarının arkasındaki amaçları açıklığa kavuştururken; kadroların toprak dağıtımı konusundaki söyleminin yalnızca topraksız köylülere toprak tahsis etmekle sınırlı olmadığını, aynı zamanda dağıtım yoluyla küçük üreticilere yeterli toprak sağlamak olduğunu göstermektir. Ayrıca, belirli şehirler için toprak mülkiyeti hakkında çok fazla veri bulunmamasına rağmen, Eskişehir'e dair yazılmış bir çalışma kullanılarak 1938 civarında ortalama mülk büyüklüğüne dair bir tahmin yapılarak, literatüre katkı yapılmıştır. Bahsedilen çalışmaların birçok kent için olmasına rağmen, araştırmacıların önemli bir kısmı bu kaynakları kullanmamaktadır. Bu kaynakların güvenilirliği oldukça tartışmalı olsa da karşılaştırmalı bir analiz ile önemli veri setlerine ulaşılabilmektedir. Dolayısıyla, bu kaynakların daha derinlemesine incelenmesiyle hem şehirlerdeki hem de kırsal alandaki koşulların daha net bir biçimde anlaşılabileceğine inanıyorum ve yeni tartışma alanları açmayı umut ediyorum.

Sonuç olarak, bu tez üç ana başlık etrafında şekillenmektedir. “Büyük Buhranın Türkiye Cumhuriyeti ve Köylülük Üzerindeki Etkileri: Bir Tepki Olarak Devletçilik” başlıklı ilk bölüm, üç alt başlıktan oluşmaktadır. Bu bölümde Büyük Buhran ile birlikte Türkiye ekonomisinin ne ölçüde etkilendiği tartışılırken; devletçiliğin bir ilke olarak krizin yaratmış olduğu ekonomik koşullara bir tepki olarak ortaya çıktığı anlatılmaktadır. Son alt başlıkta ise, Büyük Buhranın yaratmış olduğu etki sebebiyle kırsal küçük üreticilerin ne ölçüde etkilendikleri ve nasıl bir borç ilişkisine girdikleri anlatılmaktadır. Dolayısıyla, bu bölüm temelde Türkiye’de kriz döneminde ortaya çıkan devlet politikalarına odaklanırken; küçük tarımsal üreticilerin bu politikalardan nasıl etkilendiklerini incelemektedir. Bu doğrultuda, devletin ortaya koyduğu ekonomik hamleler ile sosyal yapı ve toplumsal sınıf ilişkilerin arasındaki etkileşimi açık şekilde ortaya koymaktadır.

“1929-1939 Arasında Türkiye Tarımında Köylülük ve Toprak Dağıtımı” başlıklı ikinci bölüm ise, dört alt başlıktan oluşmaktadır. Bu bölümde sırasıyla, Türkiye’de mülkiyet yapısı ve küçük üreticilerin durumu, topraksızlık sorununa dair T.B.M.M. konuşmaları, dönem boyunca atılan hukuki adımlar ve devlet-kırsal üreticiler arasındaki ilişkiler konu edinmiştir. Birinci bölüm üzerine inşa edilen bu bölüm, Türkiye siyasetinde topraklandırma siyasetinin temellerini incelerken; bu siyasetin devlet ve kırsal sınıflar arasındaki ilişkiyi nasıl belirlediğini incelemektedir. Bu noktada, ikinci bölüm yalnızca devletin ekonomik alandaki tercihlerini değil, bu tercihlerin yol açtığı sosyal ve toplumsal dönüşümünü de sunmaktadır.

"Büyük Buhran Döneminde Eskişehir ve Küçük Ölçekli Üretimin Dönüşümü" başlıklı son bölüm üç alt başlıktan oluşurken, önceki bölümlerde yapılan analizin Eskişehir'e nasıl özel olarak uygulandığını göstermeyi amaçlamaktadır. Bölüm, Eskişehir'in genel özelliklerine, üretim çeşitliliği ve nüfus yapısına genel bir bakışla başlamaktadır. Ardından, istatistik yıllıklarından ve diğer yerel kaynaklardan doğrudan yararlanarak, Büyük Buhranın Eskişehir'deki tarımsal üretimi nasıl etkilediğini tartışmaktadır. Yoksul köylülüğün Buhrandan nasıl etkilendiğini göstermek için tahıl fiyatlarındaki yıllar içindeki değişikliklere özellikle dikkat çekilmektedir. Bölümde ayrıca, devletçi politikalara örnek olarak Eskişehir'deki Şeker Fabrikası'nın etkisi ele alınmaktadır. Son olarak, bölgedeki arazi dağıtımıyla

ilgili süreçler ve talepler ele alınarak, köylülerin koşullarını yeterli düzeye getirmek için sürekli olarak arazi talep ettikleri gösterilmektedir.

Bu çalışmanın bulguları, 1929'dan İkinci Dünya Savaşı'nın başlangıcına kadar, Büyük Buhran etkisi altındaki köylülüğün koşullarını değiştirmeyi amaçlayan politikaların açıkça görüldüğünü göstermektedir. Dahası, topraksız ve küçük köylülere verilen topraklar kapsamlı veya dönüştürücü bir niteliğe sahip değildi. Kadroların, küçük üreticileri arazi dağıtımı yoluyla devam eden kalkınma stratejisine entegre etme vurgusuna rağmen, bu alanda önerilen yasaların çoğu ya büyük toprak sahiplerinin muhalefeti nedeniyle kabul edilemedi ya da çıkarlarına zararlı olduğu düşünülen hükümler yumuşatıldıktan sonra yürürlüğe girebildi. Dahası, doğrudan dağıtılan topraklar bile ya zorla el koyma yoluyla ya da köylülüğün borçları karşılığında büyük toprak sahiplerinin eline geçti ve bu da devam eden bağımlılık ilişkilerini yansıttı. Dolayısıyla, hem çıkarılan yasaların dönüştürücü kapasite eksikliği hem de ülkenin büyük toprak sahiplerinin sürekli direnişi nedeniyle, bu dönemde izlenen toprak politikaları, kırsal mülkiyet ilişkilerini Cumhuriyet'in kalkınma stratejisi doğrultusunda yeniden düzenleyemedi. Aksine, genellikle büyük toprak sahibi sınıfın elindeki toprakların daha da konsolide olmasına katkıda bulundular.

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