

Agrarian Reform in the Middle East (1945-1965)

Ortadoğu'da Tarım Reformu (1945-1965)

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Abstract

At the beginning of the 1950s, Turkey, Iran, Iraq, Syria, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Yemen and Saudi Arabia were sparsely populated, and had large areas of agriculturally undeveloped land. In all five countries, share cropping was, or had been, practised extensively and the working peasant populations lived at a meagre subsistence level. Land had tended to accumulate in the hands of a small, but politically powerful, class which had no interest in reform and would block any reforming measures which might be initiated. Nevertheless, agrarian reform was very much on the agenda from 1945 onwards, and was given high priority in the programmes of all radical and revolutionary movements. Between 1945 and 1965, agrarian reform had been introduced into Turkey, Iran, Iraq, Syria, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Yemen and Saudi Arabia with varying effect. However, most governments instituted agrarian reform for political reasons, with not all of them being as successful as they may have hoped. All the same, it seemed clear that in those countries in which reform had taken or was taking place it would be impossible to turn the clock back, and that the power of the landowning oligarchies had been broken once and for all. These countries of the Middle East were moving out of a static, medieval condition, and rapid political, economic and social changes were beginning to take place. However, they all had to realise that agrarian reform was not an end in itself, and that, in order for any kind of land reform to realise its full value, it must be accompanied by reforms in other spheres such as education and administration.

Key words: Turkey, Iran, Iraq, Syria, Egypt, Agrarian Reform

Öz

1950'lerin başında Türkiye, İran, Irak, Suriye ve Mısır az nüfuslu, gelişmemiş geniş tarım arazilerine sahipti. Toprak paylaşımını bir plan gözetilmeden uygulanmış, çalışan köylü nüfusu ağır yaşam şartlarıyla savaşılmaya terk edilmişti. Araziler reform taleplerine kapalı; nüfus olarak küçük olsa da siyasal açıdan güçlü bir sınıfın elinde bulunmaktaydı. Bununla birlikte, tarım reformu 1945'ten itibaren gündeme gelmiş ve tüm devrimci hareketlerin programlarında öncelik verilmişti. 1953-1963 yılları arasında Türkiye, İran, Irak, Suriye ve Mısır'da tarım reformları, çeşitli etki ve farklılıklarla yapılmıştı. Mesela, Türkiye'de, 1945 yılında arazi reform yasası meclisten geçmesine rağmen, toprak sahiplerinin politik gücü yasanın yürürlüğe girmesini engelledi. Bu nedenle, 1947-1962 yılları arasında 1,8 milyon hektar 360.000 aileye dağıtıldı da; bunun yalnızca 8.600 hektarı özel mülk arazisinden alınmıştı. Sonuç olarak geniş arazi sahipleri ile köylü halk arasındaki maddi fark ta bir değişim olmamakla beraber; halk geçim kaynakları için devlet arazilerine bağımlı kalıp, köylüler çiftlik emekçileri konumuna düşürüldü. Çoğu iş arayan köylü kentlere göç etti. Birçok hükümetin başlattığı toprak reformları, her ülkede umulduğu kadar başarılı olmasa da; reformun yapıldığı ülkelerde, zamanı geri getirmenin olanaksızlığı ve oligarşilerin toprak sahibi olma baskısının - yer yer tamamen - kırıldığı açıkça görülüyordu. Ortadoğu'nun bu ülkeleri ortaçağ koşullarından uzaklaşıyordu; hızlı siyasi, ekonomik ve sosyal değişimler başlamıştı. Bununla birlikte her ülke, tarım reformunun kendi başına bir çözüm olmadığını;

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Görüş

Akademik
Bakış

331

Cilt 13
Sayı 25
Kış 2019

her türlü arazi reformunun tam değerinin ortaya koyulabilmesi için eğitim, yönetim gibi değerlerin de reformlara eşlik etmesi gerektiğini anlamışlardı.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Türkiye, İran, Irak, Suriye, Mısır, Toprak Reformu*

Summary

At the beginning of the 1950s, physical conditions in most of the countries under review (with the important exception of Egypt) were similar. All were sparsely populated, and possessed large areas that were agriculturally undeveloped.¹ In all of them, share cropping was practised extensively, and the working peasant populations lived at mere subsistence level. Land had accumulated in the hands of a small, but politically powerful, class which had no interest in reform and which could be counted upon to block any reforming measures which might be initiated. Yet, agrarian reform was very much on the agenda from 1945 onwards, and was given a high priority in the programmes of all radical and revolutionary movements.

In the previous decade, agrarian reform had been introduced into Egypt, Syria, Iraq, Iran, Turkey, Jordan, Lebanon, Yemen and Saudi Arabia with varying effect, but only in Egypt was it possible to measure in full some of the results. Even there, only about 7 per cent of the population had benefited directly from distribution of expropriated land, and little more could be done until further land was made available by one means or another. Results in Syria were hard to estimate, and the programme initiated during the union with Egypt had since been amended considerably. In Iraq, reform had produced little but confusion and loss of production, owing to the lack of adequate means for financing and spoon-feeding a very backward and ill-equipped peasantry, similar to Turkey. In Iran, the reformers made an impressive start, but at that time it was too early to attempt to estimate the final results. In Turkey, although a land reform law had been passed in 1945 the political strength of the landlords prevented it from being put into effect. Hence, between 1947 and 1962, 1.8 million hectares were distributed to 360,000 families, and only 8,600 hectares of this were taken from privately owned land. Once more, it was the peasants who lost. They had depended on the state-owned land for their livelihood, and now they had been reduced to the position of farm labourers. Many migrated to the cities in search of work.

Most Middle East Governments had instituted agrarian reform for political reasons, and not all of them were as successful as they may have hoped. Nevertheless, it seemed clear that in those countries in which reform had taken or was taking place it would be impossible to put back the clock, and that the power of the landowning oligarchies had been broken once and for all. The countries of the Middle East were moving out of a static, medieval

1 FO370/2718/LR6/3, "Agrarian Reform in the Middle East", Research Department Memorandum, 20 August 1963.

condition, and rapid political, economic and social changes were in process. It had yet to be realised by all of them, however, that agrarian reform was not an end in itself, and that in order to realise its full value it needed to be accompanied by reforms in other areas, such as education and administration.

1. Introduction

This article examines developments in agrarian reform in a number of countries in the Middle East, more particularly in Egypt, Syria, Iraq, Iran and Turkey.² Any such examination is, unfortunately, set back by scarcity of data and reliable statistics regarding the period under investigation. None of the countries under review, with the possible exception of Egypt, has ever possessed a fully competent Lands and Surveys Department. Land reform has emphasised this weakness, and the creation of new Ministries of Agricultural Reform added to the burden of work without addressing the lack of trained and experienced lands and co-operative experts. All statistics published by interested government departments are, therefore, to be treated with caution as they are likely to be inaccurate, inconsistent and influenced by considerations of propaganda.³

Before showing the variety of conditions under which reform was being carried out in the Middle East, it is appropriate to examine first the points of resemblance in physical conditions and methods of agriculture, in systems of land tenure, in the relationships of landlord and tenant, and in the planning and execution of the reforms which had taken place.⁴

With the exception of the predominantly pastoral countries of the Arabian Peninsula, the principle occupation in all Middle East countries was agriculture, and about 70 per cent of their populations were engaged in the production mainly of cereal and fodder crops, and such export crops as cotton. As regards physical conditions and agricultural methods, all were fairly similar, with the important exception of Egypt, which was unique in this as in so much else. In Egypt alone, all cultivation depended on irrigation, and the land was intensively utilised to produce two and sometimes three crops a year. In the other countries of the Middle East the irrigated area was balanced, and generally much exceeded, by the area under dry farming, much of which was left uncultivated from year to year depending on the rainfall.⁵

2 An article such as this, summarising the progress of land reform in the Middle East (more particularly in Egypt, Syria, Iraq, Iran, Turkey, Jordan, Lebanon, Yemen and Saudi Arabia) during 1950s, is handicapped by scarcity of adequate statistics, and few of the figures quoted can be regarded as wholly reliable.

3 FO370/2718/LR6/3, "Agrarian Reform in the Middle East", Research Department Memorandum, 20 August 1963.

4 FO370/2718/LR6/3, "Agrarian Reform in the Middle East", Research Department Memorandum, 20 August 1963.

5 FO370/2718/LR6/3, "Agrarian Reform in the Middle East", Research Department Memorandum, 20 August 1963.

Gazi

Akademik
Bakış

333

Cilt 13
Sayı 25
Kış 2019

All, again with the exception of Egypt, were scarcely populated, and possessed many more cultivable areas than those under cultivation at that time. Egypt, by contrast, was densely populated and had a highly developed agriculture. A cultivated area of only 6 million acres⁶ had to support a rural population of about 20 million, and the possibility of extending this area was much more limited than it was in other Middle Eastern countries. Iran, with a rural population of nearly 16 million, had a cultivated area of 41.5 million acres, almost seven times as large as that of Egypt. Iraq and Syria, each with rural populations of under 4 million, had cultivated areas respectively of 15.5 million and 10 million acres. In neither of these countries was there any great degree of land-hunger, and like Iran, they could extend their cultivated areas considerably.⁷

Each country had its own distinctive and often very complicated system of land tenure. In all these countries there was a small, politically powerful landed oligarchy, socially and economically far removed from the peasants who worked the land. Their political influence made it virtually impossible for land reform to be brought about by constitutional means. These oligarchies had their roots in a feudal system dating back to the Ommayad and Abbasid Caliphates, very little altered in Ottoman times, and surviving under the 20th century dynasties (the Mohammed Ali in Egypt, the Hashemite in Iraq and Jordan, and the Saudi in Arabia) which replaced the Sultanate.⁸ Little else had altered save that, since landownership conferred political power and social prestige, it became an attractive investment for a new class of urban capitalists who cared even less for their tenant than the old-type landlords. The gap between the rich landowning class and the peasantry thus tended to become wider; except for perhaps in Syria, where the landlord class, though sharing the common characteristics of its kind, was rather less insulated from the peasantry, and more given to personal management of its properties than elsewhere.⁹

In all countries sharecropping was practised widely, a system under which the major share of the crop was taken by the landlord in return for certain services, leaving the working tenant with a very inadequate share upon which to live. Landlords were not infrequently absentees, and in Syria, Iraq

6 All Middle East countries have their own system of land measurement, feddans in Egypt, dunums or masharas in Iraq, etc. For ease of comparison all measurements have been converted to their nearest round-figure equivalent in acres.

7 FO370/2718/LR6/3, "Agrarian Reform in the Middle East", Research Department Memorandum, 20 August 1963.

8 Following the break-up of the Ottoman Empire at the end of the First World War, Lebanon and Syria opted, under French influence, for a republican form of government.

9 FO370/2718/LR6/3, "Agrarian Reform in the Middle East", Research Department Memorandum, 20 August 1963.

Görüş

Akademik
Bakış

334

Cilt 13
Sayı 25
Kış 2019

and Iran many of them were tribal magnates who had taken advantage of their position to acquire personal possession of land which should more properly have been regarded as the communal possession of the tribe.¹⁰

The landed oligarchies not unnaturally used their political influence to block all attempts at reform, yet from 1945 onwards reform was very on the agenda. Agrarian experts gave it increasing attention, and were in agreement that successful development of the Middle East's agricultural resources would be impossible without it. All radical parties, the Arab Socialist Renaissance Party (the Ba'ath) in Syria, in particular, had their paper programmes for agricultural reform which were often far from realistic; and there was evidence to suggest that the Revolutionary Command Council in Egypt had a prepared scheme which, advised by a number of economists and agriculturalists, they successfully put into operation within a short time of their coup d'état. As reform progressed and unforeseen problems arose, they tended to abandon their brief and to become increasingly empirical and opportunist.¹¹

During the previous decade, the Governments of Egypt, Syria, Iraq, Iran and Turkey had introduced reforms which were in the process of changing the whole political, social and to a lesser extent, economic life of their countries. In Egypt and Iraq, the reforms were the immediate results of revolutions which had eliminated the monarchies and abolished parliamentary forms of government but which, despite possible similar intentions, had had different results. In Iran, many of the conditions which had favoured revolution in other Middle East countries were present, and the need for reform had been accentuated by events elsewhere. In Syria, land reform was a political issue long before its introduction in 1958, but typically enough, except during the period of the union with Egypt, little progress had been made. Since the break-up of the union it was being modified under changing political pressures, and seemed at the time to be taking a less revolutionary course.¹²

In the pastoral countries of the Arabian Peninsula and in the Sheikdoms of the Persian Gulf, land was agriculturally of less importance; and though pockets existed where a feudal structure based on the ownership of land still survived, as in the oases of the Hasa Province of Saudi Arabia, in Bahrain, and in the coastal area of Muscat, the idea of reform had hardly yet developed. Recent events in Yemen, and the declared intention of the Republican Government to institute reforms and to develop the agricultural

10 FO370/2718/LR6/3, "Agrarian Reform in the Middle East", Research Department Memorandum, 20 August 1963.

11 FO370/2718/LR6/3, "Agrarian Reform in the Middle East", Research Department Memorandum, 20 August 1963.

12 FO370/2718/LR6/3, "Agrarian Reform in the Middle East", Research Department Memorandum, 20 August 1963.

Gazi

Akademik
Bakış

335

Cilt 13
Sayı 25
Kış 2019

potential of the country, could have been the cause of similar demands being made elsewhere in Arabia. Jordan and Lebanon were small countries in both of which, although about 70 per cent of the population was engaged in agriculture, there were few signs of agrarian unrest, perhaps because much of the land in northern Lebanon and on the West Bank of Jordan was broken up into small holdings owned by peasant farmers.¹³

In practice reform in those countries in which it was taking place followed a very similar pattern in general, being aimed at the break-up of large estates and the creation of a new agrarian class of landowning peasants operating in a State-controlled, co-operatively financed system of agriculture. Briefly, what all Governments did was to fix a legal maximum for the amount of land which any one person or family happened to hold, to appropriate all land in excess, and to re-distribute it in small lots to peasant cultivators.¹⁴

There was hardly time for a precise or complete picture to emerge, and reform did not produce similar results in any of the countries. In Egypt, ten years later, the picture was clearer than anywhere else. The landlord class had been stripped of its estates and had suffered political and social eclipse; land values and rents fell steeply, to the great benefit of a large section of the peasantry; approximately 7 per cent of the rural population became small-scale landowners; the general standard of living of the cultivator rose slightly, and an agricultural pattern of what might be called State farming had started to emerge in which the Government provided technical, managerial and administrative services, while the cultivators supplied their labour and were financed and otherwise aided by an increasingly well-organised system of co-operatives.¹⁵

In Syria, it was difficult to discern what political or social changes resulted from the reforms initiated only four years previously, after the union with Egypt. The programme had been amended three times during this period, and there were doubts about the enthusiasm with which it was implemented. Three classes of landlords seemed to be affected the tribal sheikhs of the Jezira, the merchant farmers responsible for its remarkable development in post-war years, and the old-type rentiers of the Homs-Hama area. While all must have suffered financially, but it was much less certain whether or not they had suffered any political or social decline.¹⁶

13 FO370/2718/LR6/3, "Agrarian Reform in the Middle East", Research Department Memorandum, 20 August 1963.

14 FO370/2718/LR6/3, "Agrarian Reform in the Middle East", Research Department Memorandum, 20 August 1963.

15 FO370/2718/LR6/3, "Agrarian Reform in the Middle East", Research Department Memorandum, 20 August 1963.

16 FO370/2718/LR6/3, "Agrarian Reform in the Middle East", Research Department Memorandum, 20 August 1963.

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The only impression to be gained at that point in time from agrarian reform in Iraq was one of confusion: reforms were hastily and ill-advisedly applied, and there was an almost total lack of the administrative machinery necessary to deal with them. Landowners were deprived of large areas of land which were left uncultivated, either because no redistribution had taken place, or because the new peasant owners, in the absence of co-operatives, and lacking all necessary resources, had abandoned their holdings in despair. Some progress was being made, but it seemed clear that it would be many years before any considerable positive results were shown.¹⁷

Iran had benefited to some extent by the example of other countries' mistakes and successes. The Government began by introducing pilot schemes in selected areas only and in this way, and by simplifying the machinery of reform, avoided over-loading its limited survey, land settlement and co-operative staff. In the autumn of 1962, there were signs that the landlords with some support from the ulema, might try to take matters into their own hands, but incipient unrest was quelled by firm Government action following the murder of a land reform official. It was anticipated that distribution of the larger estates would be completed by the spring of 1964.¹⁸

Clearly, economically sound schemes for agricultural improvement were essential for the modernisation and development of all Middle Eastern countries. However, most Middle Eastern Governments and parties gave agrarian reform high priority for mainly political reasons. On the one hand, it was popular with the peasants and an obvious means of appeasing rural discontent; on the other, the elimination of the wealthy or feudal landlord as a political force was a necessary safeguard of the position of the new radical ruling classes. For these reasons radical Governments, and Governments concerned to stave off violent revolution, were expected to pursue agrarian reform, even at the risk of economic loss.¹⁹

Regarding the principal aim of reform to eliminate feudalism and the destruction of the privileged position of the landowning class, complete success was only achieved at that point in Egypt. In Iran, although reform appeared to be moving in a similar direction, there were possibilities that it might meet with an obstacle. In Syria and Iraq, the large landowners had been dispossessed, but the tribal system was still in place, and the sheikhs were still exercising a great deal of local power, despite a financial loss because of loss land. In both

17 FO370/2718/LR6/3, "Agrarian Reform in the Middle East", Research Department Memorandum, 20 August 1963.

18 FO370/2718/LR6/3, "Agrarian Reform in the Middle East", Research Department Memorandum, 20 August 1963.

19 FO370/2718/LR6/3, "Agrarian Reform in the Middle East", Research Department Memorandum, 20 August 1963.

Gazi

Akademik
Bakış

337

Cilt 13
Sayı 25
Kış 2019

countries, ill-conceived measures of reform created an agricultural vacuum in which large areas had been expropriated but not yet resettled, and there appeared to be no easy or immediate solution. The authorities in Iran were skilful enough to avoid a similar state of affairs by applying reform step-by-step. As far as the former landowning class was concerned, it was impossible to put back the clock, and it was longer be possible to acquire great wealth, or political power, or an influential social position through the ownership of land.²⁰

Except for those in the Arabian Peninsula, the States of the Middle East were beginning to move out of their static medieval phase, and in all of them rapid economic and social changes were taking place. It was only in Egypt and Iran, however, that it seemed to be fully realised that agrarian reform could not succeed unless it was accompanied by other immediate reforms in the fields of administration, education, health and social services; and that the general standard of living could not be raised or the national economy increased merely by depriving the rich of their estates and redistributing them as small holdings to a limited number of peasant cultivators.²¹

2. Egypt

Geographically Egypt is a large country, with a total area of 386,200 sq. miles. However, apart from a few thinly-populated oases in the Western Desert, the only habitable area in the early 1960s was the valley of the Nile, flowing through the desert for over 800 miles from the frontiers of Sudan to the Mediterranean Sea. For the greater part of its length the area in which cultivation was possible was rather less than 15, and often not more than 5, miles in breadth. Into this narrow strip and the wider delta below Cairo (a total area of only 13,500 sq. miles) was a population of 26 million, of whom about 20 million were estimated to depend upon agriculture for their livelihood.²²

Owing to the prevailing climatic conditions, in which no rain cultivation was possible, all crops were grown under irrigation. Agriculture was an intensive and highly skilled occupation which, under modern methods of Nile control, and given an almost limitless supply of labour, was capable of producing two and sometimes three crops a year. The total cultivable area was about 6 million acres only, but the area actually cropped annually was closer to 10 million acres. This intensive production depends upon a highly

20 FO370/2718/LR6/3, "Agrarian Reform in the Middle East", Research Department Memorandum, 20 August 1963.

21 FO370/2718/LR6/3, "Agrarian Reform in the Middle East", Research Department Memorandum, 20 August 1963.

22 FO370/2718/LR6/3, "Agrarian Reform in the Middle East", Research Department Memorandum, 20 August 1963. Also see Doreen Warriner; *Land Reform and Development in the Middle East: A Study of Egypt, Syria, and Iraq*, Royal Institute of International Affairs, London, 1962.

complex system of distribution of water from the Nile, whose seasonal floods were controlled by the Jebel Auliya Dam in the Sudan, the Aswan Dam, and a series of barrages between the latter dam and the sea. Under such conditions crop-production was comparatively stable, and except in years of exceptional pest infestation there was no great variation in output. The main crops grown were cotton, wheat, maize, rice, barley, sugar-cane and fodder crops.²³

One of the most serious problems which Egypt had to face over the previous decades was that of overpopulation. Since 1900 the irrigated area had been expanded by about 900,000 acres, and the crop area by 3,500,000 acres (51.4 per cent), thanks to improved water facilities and more intensive methods of farming; whereas the population increased by 268 per cent (i.e., nearly trebled itself) over the same period, and the number of people dependent on one acre of land has increased from 3.2 in 1947 to 4.5 in 1960.²⁴

Table-I: Acreage and Population Increases [in Egypt]²⁵

Year	Cultivable area (acres)	Cropped area l	Population
1897	5,000,000	6,800,000	9,700,000
1917	5,300,000	7,000,700	12,800,000
1937	5,300,000	8,400,000	15,900,000
1960	5,900,000	10,300,000	26,000,000
Increase since 1897	900,000	3,500,000	16,300,000

In all these respects, in the paucity of the land available, in the size and density of the population, in the degree of hydrological control and the intensity of its agricultural methods, Egypt was different from any other country of the Middle East.

As everywhere else in the Middle East, the possession of land in Egypt meant political influence. The landowner was in a position to manipulate the votes of the illiterate, politically ignorant, and almost wholly apathetic peasantry who lived and worked on his estates and were dependent on his goodwill for their livelihood. The more land he possessed, therefore, the more powerful he became; a situation which the Wafd was able to exploit. It

23 FO370/2718/LR6/3, "Agrarian Reform in the Middle East", Research Department Memorandum, 20 August 1963.

24 FO370/2718/LR6/3, "Agrarian Reform in the Middle East", Research Department Memorandum, 20 August 1963.

25 FO370/2718/LR6/3, "Agrarian Reform in the Middle East", Research Department Memorandum, 20 August 1963.

Gazi

Akademik
Bakış

339

Cilt 13
Sayı 25
Kış 2019

followed that with large numbers of deputies elected under these conditions land reform by constitutional means was impossible. Ministers who owed their positions to vote powerful landlords would do nothing to offend them, and no Egyptian Government prior to the revolution had any incentive to act against the interests of the powerful landlord class.²⁶

The ownership of land, however, was not only a means of exercising political influence, or even an outward sign of wealth and social position: it was also extremely profitable.²⁷ It was estimated that a well-managed estate of middle size (200-500 acres) could show a profit of £E7,500-17,500 per annum, and since industry prior to 1952 was almost non-existent, anyone who had any money to spare invested it in land. Reclamation produced only small quantities of new land, and since the demand was heavy, prices were correspondingly high, and land in a fertile part of the irrigated area could cost as much as £E750 per acre, as against an average of £E500 per acre.²⁸

Under such conditions, it might have been expected that land would come to be accumulated in the hands of a small number of wealthy landlords; but one of the most striking features of Egyptian land tenure prior to 1952 was the enormous increase in the number of small owners during the first half of the 20th century. In 1900 approximately 5 million acres were under irrigation, of which only 1,113,000 acres (21 per cent) were held by owners of less than 5 acres, the average per holding being 1.6 acres. By 1952 the irrigated area had increased to 5,982,000 acres, of which the owners of less than 5 acres held 2,122,000 acres or 34.6 per cent, and the average holding had dropped to under 0-50 acres. During the same period the holdings of over 5 acres had remained static, and in 1952 showed only a very slight increase over 1900 (160,000 as compared with 153,000). The only explanation of this was that while some estates were in the process of being built up by wealthy owners, others were as constantly being broken up by division among heirs. Nevertheless in 1952 a small number of large landowners²⁹ between them owned 1,209,000 acres, or 20 per cent of the cultivable area, and some of their estates were very large indeed.³⁰

26 FO370/2718/LR6/3, "Agrarian Reform in the Middle East", Research Department Memorandum, 20 August 1963. Also see Saad M. Gadalla; *Land Reform in Relation to Social Development, Egypt*, Missouri University Press, Missouri, 1970.

27 It has been calculated that the revenue of one acre of agricultural land in Egypt is equal to that of 20 acre in Syria.

28 FO370/2718/LR6/3, "Agrarian Reform in the Middle East", Research Department Memorandum, 20 August 1963.

29 The actual number was 2,115 or about 0.1 per cent of the landowning population, occupying 19.8 per cent of the cultivated area and receiving over 20 per cent of the gross agricultural income.

30 FO370/2718/LR6/3, "Agrarian Reform in the Middle East", Research Department Memorandum, 20 August 1963. Also see Haluk Gerger; *ABD, Ortadoğu, Türkiye*, Yordam Kitap, İstanbul, 2012.

Table-II: Estates of over 200 Acres prior to 1952[in Egypt]³¹

Size of holding	Number of owners	Total acreage	Average per head
200-800 acres	1,835	625,000	340
800-1000 acres	92	87,000	945
1000-2000 acres	127	220,000	1,730
Over 2000 acres	61	277,000	4500
Total	2,115	1,209,000	

Some of these owners, usually those with small estates, formed them themselves, using hired labour. Other employed farm managers, and other again only let their land in small parcels at highly profitable rents to peasant cultivators. This was by far the most numerous classes, and the system of lease adopted was that of metayage or share-cropping, under which the landlord supplied seed, fertilisers and any working animals or machinery that might be necessary. He was also usually responsible for canal maintenance, and in return for these services, and with many local variations due to different conditions, took a proportionate share of the crop, generally 75-100 per cent of the cotton crop and 50 per cent of the wheat crop, leaving the maize, fodder and any other minor crops to the working tenant. It was estimated that between 60 and 70 per cent of agricultural land in Egypt was leased in this manner.³²

The military junta which came to power as the result of the revolution of July 1952 was firmly committed to a programme of land reform which it lost no time in putting into effect. The main object was political, to break the power of the landowning oligarchy; but the Free Officers, the majority of whom came from the lower middle class with peasant origins, were also genuinely concerned to raise the living standards of the fellahin and to improve their social and economic status. The reformers started with certain natural advantages, a docile, agriculturally skilful population, engaged in a single intensive form of agriculture common to the whole country, a well-organised, State-controlled system of irrigation, the beginnings of a co-operative system, comparatively efficient and up-to-date survey and land registration departments, and a fairly adequate supply of technicians, survey, co-operative and agricultural experts, providing a reasonably adequate basis upon which to base the structure of reform. Against all this they were faced by a chronic land hunger, a rapidly

31 FO370/2718/LR6/3, "Agrarian Reform in the Middle East", Research Department Memorandum, 20 August 1963.

32 FO370/2718/LR6/3, "Agrarian Reform in the Middle East", Research Department Memorandum, 20 August 1963. Also see Alan Richards and John Waterbury, *A Political Economy of the Middle East*, Westview Press, Boulder, San Francisco, 1990.

Yaz

Akademik
Bakış

341

Cilt 13
Sayı 25
Kış 2019

increasing population, and the prospect that without vast expenditure and intensive development the already low standard of living of the great majority of the people would fall even further. Their problems were to find more land, to restrict, if they could, the growth of the population, to lower and stabilise land values and the cost of living, to increase agricultural wages and production, and to divert as much under-employed labour as possible from agriculture into industry.³³

The Agrarian Reform Law of 1952 limited holdings to a maximum of 200 acres plus not more than 100 acres for dependent members of the same family. All land in excess was appropriated against compensation in the form of 3 per cent bonds redeemable in 30 years. Compensation was assessed at 10 times the rental value or 70 times the basic land tax. Land tax assessments had always been low, and the compensation to be paid is therefore well below the real value of the land. Under Article 4 of the Law, landlords were allowed to dispose of land in excess of the maximum by sale in 5-acre lots to genuine cultivators possessing not more than 10 acres already. All land which the owner was unable to dispose of in this way was placed at the disposal of a Higher Committee for Agrarian Reform for distribution in lots of 2-5 acres to cultivators already possessing less than 5 acres. The land thus distributed was to be purchased over a period of 30 years; fragmentation was forbidden, and owners of less than 5 acres were required to join an agricultural co-operative.³⁴

A further Agrarian Reform Law in July 1961 reduced the permissible maximum to 100 acres with an extra 50 acres for dependent members of the family; at the same time the purchase price to peasant owners was reduced by 50 per cent and purchasers were relieved of interest payments on their instalments. In 1962 Nasser made a further announcement reducing the maximum holding to 100 acres per family, and giving owners until 1970 to dispose of any land in excess.³⁵

Available statistics showed considerable variance, but it was estimated that about 650,000 acres were affected by the Reform Law of September 1952, of which some 145,000 acres were sold by their owners prior to revocation of the Article 4 of the Law. For a variety of reasons part of the land expropriated was considered unfit for distribution, leaving about 450,000 acres, or 7.5 per cent of the cultivable area, for distribution by the Higher Committee. It was estimated further that by July 1961 about 425,000 acres had been distributed,

33 FO370/2718/LR6/3, "Agrarian Reform in the Middle East", Research Department Memorandum, 20 August 1963.

34 FO370/2718/LR6/3, "Agrarian Reform in the Middle East", Research Department Memorandum, 20 August 1963.

35 FO370/2718/LR6/3, "Agrarian Reform in the Middle East", Research Department Memorandum, 20 August 1963.

and that the Reform Law of that month added about another 300,000 acres to the total, making some 325,000 acres still available for distribution. By the end of 1963 the total distributed had risen to approximately 500,000 acres, and recent legislation, foreshadowed by Nasser in December 1961, which prohibits the holding of agricultural land by foreigners, will increase the area available yet further. Allotment was at the rate of 2.53 acres per family, so that by the time redistribution is complete some 250,000 families, or only 6-7 per cent of the rural population will have benefited.³⁶ It was estimated that about 2 million farmers still owned less than one acre, and that a further 4 million between them rented 3,600,000 acres, or nearly 61 per cent of the cultivated area. For purposes of comparison it was of interest that in another area of intensive agriculture, Taiwan (Formosa), the Land-to-Tiller programme which was inaugurated in 1953 had resulted up to that date in the transfer of 344,000 acres of farmland from landlords to 195,000 peasant cultivators.³⁷

Since 1952 the Government had sought to relieve the population pressure by accelerating the rate of land reclamation. Its programme included a number of large-scale development schemes such as the New Valley project and Liberation Province in the Western Desert, dependent partly on underground water supplies and partly on flow irrigation from the Nile to be provided by the Aswan High Dam. Official statistics tended to overplay the progress made, and there were also considerable differences between the amount of land reclaimed (levelled, drained and otherwise prepared for cultivation) and the amount that was actually being cultivated. It appeared possible, however, that since 1952 about 250,000 acres had been wholly or partly reclaimed, inclusive of 40,000 acres in the New Valley Area, but that as little as 50 per cent of the area had been put under a crop. Considerable progress, however, had been made at considerable cost, valuable experience had been gained, and several thousand families resettled under greatly improved conditions. The Egyptians estimated that it would be possible to reclaim and cultivate an area of 585,000 acres over 5 years at a cost of £E11,300,000. It was estimated also that on completion of the Aswan High Dam a further 1 million acres of new land and 700,000 acres of basin land will be brought under perennial irrigation.³⁸

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- 36 It is extremely difficult to estimate with any accuracy exactly how much land has been distributed, and to how many people. Official figures purport to show that 750,000 acres have been distributed to 120,000 families in lots of 5 acres per family up to the end of 1962. These figures are suspect for a number of reasons. Even if all families received as much as 5 acres, which is doubtful, only 600,000 acres (120,000 x 5) can have been distributed, and it is possible that the gross figure is that of all land expropriated and not of land actually distributed.
- 37 FO370/2718/LR6/3, "Agrarian Reform in the Middle East", Research Department Memorandum, 20 August 1963.
- 38 FO370/2718/LR6/3, "Agrarian Reform in the Middle East", Research Department Memorandum, 20 August 1963.

Gazi

Akademik
Bakış

343

Cilt 13
Sayı 25
Kış 2019

Agrarian Reform was not merely a simple process of confiscating the property of large landowners and distributing it in small holdings to peasant cultivators—who lacked the necessary knowledge and skills in such matters as marketing, economic cropping, pest control and water distribution, and who had insufficient capital for the purchase of improved seed, fertilisers and agricultural machinery. The Government coped with the technical problems involved by changing farming methods as little as possible—a decision doubly wise in the face of the natural conservatism of the peasantry, and their suspicion of innovations in particular, and of Government officials in general. It continued to farm large estates as agricultural entities much on the old lines, with co-operatives providing finance, and Government technicians the necessary managerial direction. Although the land was distributed to peasant proprietors each holding about 5 acres or less, it was farmed in blocs of up to 400 acres under a single crop: this encouraged agricultural efficiency and greatly eased the problem of irrigation and the economic use of machinery. A further adaption of this system was that in which the cultivator did not own a particular piece of land, but the right to a share in the crop proportionate to the area of land registered in his name. This form of tenure seemed to be becoming increasingly popular.³⁹

Much of what had been done amounted to a managerial revolution with the co-operatives and Government technicians and bureaucrats, taking over many of the functions of the old landowning class. Also the importance of what had taken place was not so much the redistribution of land, which benefited a small section only of the rural population, as the regularisation of relations between landlord and tenant, affecting a very large proportion of the peasantry, and the creation of conditions favourable to social change, which will, however, require to be exploited by population control, provision of cultivable land on a large scale, extension of education and development of national industries.⁴⁰

Egyptian peasants were peaceful and hardworking, but at the same time extremely conservative, individualistic, and suspicious of bureaucratic control, with the result that in spite of Government encouragement and the credit facilities offered by the Banque du Credit Agricole (since 1949 the Banque du Credit Agricole et Cooperatif) the co-operative movement had made only moderate progress prior to the Revolution. The Agrarian Reform Law of 1952 made it obligatory for peasant proprietors receiving land under the Law to join a supervised co-operative, the main advantage of which was that all loans were guaranteed by the Agricultural Reform Association.⁴¹

39 FO370/2718/LR6/3, "Agrarian Reform in the Middle East", Research Department Memorandum, 20 August 1963.

40 FO370/2718/LR6/3, "Agrarian Reform in the Middle East", Research Department Memorandum, 20 August 1963.

41 FO370/2718/LR6/3, "Agrarian Reform in the Middle East", Research Department Memorandum,

Gazi

The system was overhauled in 1956, including the creation of a Co-operative Federation with a complete chain of local, branch and regional associations, and in 1960 it was applied to all co-operatives as part of the policy of using them towards achievement of the agricultural targets of the Five-year Plan. There were approximately 5,100 supervised co-operatives, of which 530 £E in agrarian reform areas, with a membership of over 238,000. In the last two were approximately £E200,000 of State aid channelled to co-operatives through the Banque du Credit Agricole, whose loans in 1959 amounted to nearly £E10,250,000. The co-operatives were much more, than suppliers of cheap credit, however, and took over many of the managerial functions of the old landlord class, including supply of seed, fertilisers and equipment; storage and transport; pest control and marketing⁴² and maintenance of drains and canals, in addition to supply of consumer goods and provision of a number of social services. The main criticism of supervised co-operatives was that they were artificial creations, dominated by officials of the Higher Committee for Agrarian Reform, which had ceased to be true co-operatives because they were not voluntary associations, and their committees only works councils with little or no control over their affairs. As the system developed, however, it seemed probable that bureaucratic control would be relaxed. It was claimed that co-operative management had resulted in increased production. This may have been so, but increase in yield per acre over pre-revolution days could have been due as much to increased use of fertilisers, seed selection, and better pest control.⁴³

Table-III: Comparative Yields [in Egypt]⁴⁴

Crop	1950			1960		
	Area	Yield	Yield per acre	Area	Yield	Yield per acre
Cotton	1,979,000	8,075,000	4.08	1,873,000	10,643,000	5.67 kantars
Wheat	1,496,000	8,060,000	5.39	1,460,000	9,990,000	6.7 ardebs
Rice	488,000	656,000	1.35	710,000	1,570,000	2.21 darbas
Sugar cane	86,000	62,533,000	727.0	111,000	97,000,000	874.0 kantars
Onions	36,000	5,206,000	142.0	50,000	11,820,000	236.4 kantars
1 kantar=99 lb. approx.; 1 darbas=2,083 lb. approx.; 1 ardeb=5.4 bushels						

dum, 20 August 1963.

42 In 1959-60, 455,000 kantars of cotton valued at £E7-7 million were marketed through co-operatives as compared with 25,000 kantars only in 1952-53.

43 FO370/2718/LR6/3, "Agrarian Reform in the Middle East", Research Department Memorandum, 20 August 1963.

44 FO370/2718/LR6/3, "Agrarian Reform in the Middle East", Research Department Memorandum, 20 August 1963.

Gazi

Akademik
Bakış

345

Cilt 13
Sayı 25
Kış 2019

Agrarian reform in Egypt achieved at least one of its aims in destroying the political power of the land-owning class and putting an end to so-called "feudalism". In other ways it achieved rather less. Comparatively little private capital was attracted from land investment into industry (the tendency being to reinvest in urban property) and the Government's minimum agricultural wages policy had very little success. Although land prices and rents fell rapidly in the years immediately following enactment of the Agrarian Reform Law, such was the pressure of population and the shortage of cultivatable land that prices rose again to approximately their pre-revolution level, and there were signs that rents too were increasing. Several thousand families benefited from the distribution of sequestered estates and from settlement on reclaimed land, and in general the standard of living of the small landowner improved. This was not without its effect on the national economy. The peasants were more nourished and were retaining more of what they produced for their own consumption, with the result that less home-grown food was reaching the markets, and larger imports from abroad were therefore necessary. The still large class of landless labourers (about 38 per cent of the rural population) was, however, no better off than before. Agricultural co-operatives appeared to be working adequately; but there was little change in agricultural methods and, largely for technical reasons, sequestered estates were being run much as before, with co-operatives and Government technicians in the role of management and finance. Reform also had considerable effect in enhancing the personal status of the peasants. They now had a recognised legal position as a registered owner of land, together with security of tenure and greater inducement to farm their holdings adequately. Through participation co-operative committees and village councils, they were also beginning to have a greater say in the management of his affairs. These improvements affect, however, only a small proportion of the peasant class (6.25 per cent) to date (as compared with 36 per cent affected by Japanese agrarian reforms immediately after the war), and it was unlikely that much more could be accomplished until further land was made available.⁴⁵

It was estimated that as a result of land reform, reclamation of new areas, including the New Valley and Liberation Province, and construction of the High Dam, it could be possible to provide land for about 1,200,000-1,500,000 families, or possibly 7 million people. The population was increasing annually at the rate of 2.4 per cent, so that by 1972, the date forecast for completion of the dam, it was expected to have risen by about 7,500,000 to 34,000,000. Hence, all these projects, even if they fulfilled the highest expectations, would only succeed in barely keeping pace with the rise in population. While this

45 FO370/2718/LR6/3, "Agrarian Reform in the Middle East", Research Department Memorandum, 20 August 1963.

in itself would be quite an achievement, the problem of over-population and land hunger would still prevail, a fact which Egyptian experts were beginning to admit.⁴⁶

To sum up, to that date agrarian reform in Egypt had achieved the elimination of an upper group of about 2,000 landowners, expropriation of some 500,000 acres of land and their redistribution to 120,000 families, the extension of the co-operative system to cover managerial as well as credit services, the lowering of agricultural rents, and a small increase in the standard of living and personal status of the landowning peasantry. What it had failed to do was to reduce the price of land (which owing to population pressures was back to its pre-revolution level), or to improve the wages and general conditions of the large landless labouring class. Redistribution of land had also affected only 8.3 per cent of the total area under cultivation, and only 6.25 per cent of a rural population of about 20,000,000. The problem of rural poverty and over-population remained.⁴⁷

3. Syria

Only about one-third of Syria's 72,000 sq. miles was cultivable. It could be divided into three distinct areas: the coastal and mountain strip, including the fertile valley of the Orontes; the central desert plateau; and the trans-Euphrates area of the Jezira, irrigated by the tributary streams of the Khabur and the Belikh. Cultivation was possible only in the river valleys and in the area of substantial rainfall (an annual average of 90 cm), stretching from Jebal al Druse northwards to Aleppo and then eastwards along the Turkish frontier to Qamishi and Tel Kutchuk. Irrigation was confined to parts of the Jezira, to the Orontes Valley and to well-watered pockets such as the Ghouta surrounding Damascus, and the irrigated area amounted to only about 15 per cent of the land under cultivation. Cotton and rice were grown in the valleys of the Orontes and the Euphrates and its tributaries; tobacco and fruit in the mountain ranges and on the coastal plain; wheat, barley and an increasing amount of sugar-beet in the Homs-Aleppo plain and the Jezira. The population of about 4,800,000 was divided unequally between the western mountain and coastal region, where there was agricultural overpopulation, and the newly developed areas in the north-east which, apart from a few growing towns and a small number of villages, were scarcely populated at all.⁴⁸

46 cf. Saad M. Gadalla; *Land Reform in Relation to Social Development, Egypt*, Missouri University Press, Missouri, 1970, p. 99, "the prospective increase in the cultivated area will hardly meet the prospective increase in population."

47 FO370/2718/LR6/3, "Agrarian Reform in the Middle East", Research Department Memorandum, 20 August 1963.

48 FO370/2718/LR6/3, "Agrarian Reform in the Middle East", Research Department Memorandum, 20 August 1963. FO371/52909/E8746/8746/89, "Political Review of Syria and Lebanon for 1945", 4 September 1946.

Gazi

Akademik
Bakış

347

Cilt 13
Sayı 25
Kış 2019

There had been considerable change in the classification of land in Syria since Ottoman times, and the Ottoman Land Law of 1858 was in fact never very strictly applied, with the exception of a small quantity of freehold land held by individuals. All land in theory was owned by the State. However, at that time the State only had effective control over part of it. It could be divided as follows: (a) land to which no title exists (mawat or "dead" land); (b) State domain proper, subject to no usufructuary rights; (c) land which is State-owned in theory, but which was let out in hereditary tenancies, and recoverable only if left uncultivated for five years in succession, amounting in fact to almost unqualified private ownership (miri land); (d) land in common village ownership, and allocated in family plots subject to periodical reallotment (musha'a land).⁴⁹

About 80 per cent of the cultivated land was either miri or musha'a, and before the Second World War cultivation was confined mostly to the fertile Western region between Jebel al Druze and Aleppo. Most of the land in this area was owned by rentiers who had developed cotton cultivation under irrigation, and who leased it out to small holders on a share-cropping basis: the share taken by the landlord depending on a variety of factors such as rainfall, fertility, density of population and, in irrigated areas, availability of water. Where the land was irrigated and the owner supplied seed, water, etc., the share taken was, as a rule, 75 per cent, and in other cases 50 per cent only. Since 1945, however, a great change had come over the pattern of agriculture, and mechanisation had enabled vast new tracts of country in the Aleppo and Jezira areas to be cultivated under wheat and barley.⁵⁰

Table-IV: Main Crops: Increase in Areas Cultivated ('000 acres) [in Syria]⁵¹

	Average 1934-38	Average 1950-54	Average 1955-60
Wheat	1,170	2,890	3,665
Barley	680	1,055	1,770
Cotton	75	335	610
Total	1,925	4,280	6,045

49 FO370/2718/LR6/3, "Agrarian Reform in the Middle East", Research Department Memorandum, 20 August 1963.

50 FO370/2718/LR6/3, "Agrarian Reform in the Middle East", Research Department Memorandum, 20 August 1963. FO371/52909/E8746/8746/89, "Political Review of Syria and Lebanon for 1945", 4 September 1946.

51 FO370/2718/LR6/3, "Agrarian Reform in the Middle East", Research Department Memorandum, 20 August 1963.

The area under cultivation had more than trebled-an expansion carried out mainly by merchants from Aleppo and Damascus who invested their wartime profits in agricultural machinery and seed, and who operated under very difficult conditions of expensive credit, scarcity of labour, a poor transport system, confused land tenure, lack of foreign aid, and little or no Government assistance. Most of the land was leased from tribal sheikhs for a rent of about 10-15 per cent of the gross produce, and only where irrigation was possible and pumps were installed did the merchant farmer actually buy the land. Despite losses in areas of marginal rainfall, very considerable profits were believed to have been made.⁵² The area cultivated by these methods was often immense, and at least two estates of about 250,000 acres were known. The merchant farmer very often sub-let part of his holding on a crop-sharing basis, supplying capital, machinery and seed, paying the rent and taking 40 per cent of the crop, leaving 60 per cent to the sub-lessee out of which to pay 20 per cent of the cost of machinery.⁵³ In 1955, a few years before the union with Egypt and introduction of agrarian reform, the cultivated area of Syria was believed to have been divided up as follows:

Table-V: Land Distribution (acres) [in Syria]⁵⁴

Small (under 25)	Private estates (inclusive of miri land) (medium 25-250)	Large (over 250)	State domains	Total
2,711,000	7,045,000	5,800,000	3,940,000	19,469,000

In January 1952, within a month or so of assuming supreme power in Syria, Adib Shishakli brought in an Agrarian Reform Law which decreed a maximum holding of 370 acres in the Jezira and Euphrates areas, and 125 acres in the rest of Syria. The law was never applied because in the confused and inadequate state of Syrian land registration it was impossible to enforce it. In January 1953, however, a decree was enacted for distribution of State domains with a maximum of 500 acres in the Jezira, and 125 acres of rain land or 25 acres of irrigated land elsewhere. The main result of this law was to transfer the title of nominally State lands to those who had long been in occupation of them in all but full ownership. A further attempt at reform was made in 1955, when the Ba'ath Party submitted a draft Law for the Protection of the Fellah

52 FO371/62159/E2793/E2793/89, "Annual Report on Syria, 1946", 1 April 1947. It is probable that the ploughing of sub-marginal land has been carried too far, and the Development Plan for 1960-65 proposes to return to grazing about 800,000 acres of land in which the rainfall is less than 250 millimetres.

53 FO370/2718/LR6/3, "Agrarian Reform in the Middle East", Research Department Memorandum, 20 August 1963. FO371/75527/E1457/1011/89, "Syria: Annual Review for 1948", 31 January 1949.

54 FO370/2718/LR6/3, "Agrarian Reform in the Middle East", Research Department Memorandum, 20 August 1963.

Gazi

Akademik
Bakış

349

Cilt 13
Sayı 25
Kış 2019

which proposed written contracts for agricultural leases, allowing the landlord only one-third of the crop on irrigated land and one-quarter on rain land, and making eviction illegal except for breach of contract. The law was abortive, because it touched the rentiers of the Homs-Hama area far too closely.⁵⁵

Nothing further was done until after the union with Egypt, as the result of which an Agrarian Reform Law, comparable to the Egyptian Law of 1952, came into force on September 27, 1958. The maximum holding in irrigated land was fixed at 200 acres with an additional 25 acres for each wife and child, up to a maximum of 100 acres. It was much less easy to arrive at a rational figure for rain land, in which conditions varied widely, and the maximum was fixed at 750 acres with a further addition of 100 acres for dependent members of the family up to a total of 400 acres. Thus a family holding might not exceed 300 acres of irrigated land or 1,350 acres of rain land. All land exceeding the permitted maximum was to be expropriated against compensation in bonds bearing interest of $1\frac{1}{2}$ per cent and redeemable in 40 years, and was to be distributed to peasant farmers in lots of 20 acres of irrigated land and 75 acres of rain land.⁵⁶

Not a great deal of progress had been made preceding the break-up of the union in September 1961, and in February 1962 the Government of Ma'aruf al Dawalibi introduced amendments which modified the law of 1958 considerably. Four different categories of irrigated land, with a maximum holding of 500 acres depending on local conditions, were recognised; and seven in rain land, with a maximum of 1,500 acres. In both irrigated land and rainland, each wife and child was allotted a holding of one-eighth of the basic holding without limit as to numbers. The size of plots distributed varied from 20 acres of irrigated land to 125 acres of rainland in the least favourable areas, and peasant owners were not required to pay for the land allotted to them. The amended law was, on the whole, an improvement on the law of 1958, being less rigid, and taking a more comprehensive and realistic account of the vagaries of Syrian agriculture. But it was not popular, particularly with those of strong Leftist sympathies; and further amendments introduced by the Azmeh Government in March 1962 made a partial return to the original law of 1958, and as regards maxima introduced a new differentiation between landlords and peasants.⁵⁷

55 FO370/2718/LR6/3, "Agrarian Reform in the Middle East", Research Department Memorandum, 20 August 1963.

56 FO370/2718/LR6/3, "Agrarian Reform in the Middle East", Research Department Memorandum, 20 August 1963.

57 FO370/2718/LR6/3, "Agrarian Reform in the Middle East", Research Department Memorandum, 20 August 1963.

Table-VI: The Amended Law of 1962 [in Syria]⁵⁸

Irrigated Land (maxima)		Rain Land (Normal provinces)		Arid Provinces ²	
Landlord	Peasants	Landlords	Peasants	Landlords	Peasants
200	20	750	75	1,125	112

In addition landowners were allowed to retain 25 acres of irrigated land, 100 acres of normal rainland or 160 acres of arid rainland for each wife and child. Distribution remained as before, but new proprietors were required to pay half the cost of the land allotted to them. There was thus less flexibility in the classification of land and some reduction of the maxima which could be held by a landowning family.⁵⁹

Not only did agricultural conditions in Syria complicate the problem of land reform to a degree unknown in Egypt, but the essential information and staff necessary to carry it through were almost non-existent. Survey and land registration were complete only in certain areas, and no organisation was capable of the rapid expansion necessary to deal efficiently with the problems of progressive programme of land reform. The reform had progressed as far as it had due largely to the initial enthusiasm of the Ba'ath reformers and to Egyptian advice and agricultural expertise, in spite of too much top-level planning without due regard to local conditions, and resentment caused by authoritarian methods. As such, expropriation far outstripped redistribution, especially in the Jezira, where areas of rainland amounting to nearly 1 million acres were yet to be re-allotted.⁶⁰

The Ba'ath Government which came to power as the result of the coup d'état of 8 March 1963, put into operation yet another Agrarian Reform Law (the fourth since 1958) on June 23 which reduced considerably the amount of land to be retained by landowners, while leaving new allotments to peasant cultivators very much the same. The law was noteworthy for being the first to be introduced by a Ba'ath Government, and appeared to have been aimed at rallying the peasantry behind the party by doubling the amount of land to be made available for distribution. Even so the number of potential benefices was estimated to be about only 500,000. The pace of distribution continued to be slow, and up to the end of June 1963 Government statistics revealed that approximately 74,500 cultivators had received a total of 494,000 acres.⁶¹

58 FO370/2718/LR6/3, "Agrarian Reform in the Middle East", Research Department Memorandum, 20 August 1963.

59 FO370/2718/LR6/3, "Agrarian Reform in the Middle East", Research Department Memorandum, 20 August 1963.

60 FO370/2718/LR6/3, "Agrarian Reform in the Middle East", Research Department Memorandum, 20 August 1963.

61 FO370/2718/LR6/3, "Agrarian Reform in the Middle East", Research Department Memorandum,

Gazi

Akademik
Bakış

351

Cilt 13
Sayı 25
Kış 2019

Such success as land reform achieved in Syria was due initially to Egyptian enterprise, and to the reforming zeal of a few Left-wing politicians; but agricultural conditions were very different from those in Egypt, and Egyptian experts tended to be unable to deal with local variations, in which an estate of 250 acres in the Ghouta near Damascus constituted a large holding, and 2.500 acres in the indifferently watered Jezira was by the same standards only a small farm.⁶²

The rigidity of the reform measures introduced during the period of the union revealed their Egyptian conception, and successive amendments only partially overcame the difficulties imposed by widely differing conditions of climate and agricultural practice. No great difficulty occurred in the areas under irrigation, or in the cultivated areas of western Syria where the rainfall was reliable, the land was closely cultivated, and there was no shortage of labour. Attempting to establish peasant farmers on the vast areas of rainland expropriated in the Jezira was a different matter. These areas were seriously under-populated, and at best could be cultivated by the methods employed during the post-war period. These required heavy capital investment and extensive use of machinery, both of which could be provided only by highly organised and efficient co-operatives, or by capitalist farmers prepared to take risks.⁶³

The law of June 1963 allowed the landowner in the arid Provinces to retain a maximum of 750 acres only. This was not very attractive for anyone used to farming as much as 20 or 30 times that amount. The maximum peasant holding in the same area was 112 acres, which meant that it can be farmed efficiently and profitably only if the farmer had the financial and administrative support of a co-operative. Such settlement and co-operative development that had taken place was confined mainly to the Hama-Idlib-Aleppo area in the west, and to the irrigated areas of the river valleys in the east. It was doubtful whether, without massive State intervention, the Jezira could be developed adequately by peasant smallholders alone; and the practical difficulties which were being experienced in this area no doubt account for the fact that distribution had lagged so far behind expropriation. It was, however, possible that with the construction of the Euphrates Dam and consequent irrigation of some 500,000 acres of what was now rainland, agrarian development in the Jezira could undergo radical alteration.⁶⁴

dum, 20 August 1963.

62 FO370/2718/LR6/3, "Agrarian Reform in the Middle East", Research Department Memorandum, 20 August 1963.

63 FO370/2718/LR6/3, "Agrarian Reform in the Middle East", Research Department Memorandum, 20 August 1963.

64 FO370/2718/LR6/3, "Agrarian Reform in the Middle East", Research Department Memorandum, 20 August 1963.

4. Iraq

Iraq, constituting an area of 175,000 sq. miles, was divided into three main regions: the alluvial plains and marshlands of the valleys of the Tigris and the Euphrates, which flow across the country from the highlands of Turkey to the Persian Gulf; the western and largely desert area lying between the Euphrates and the frontiers of Saudi Arabia, Jordan and Syria; and the Alpine grasslands of the mountainous region along the frontiers of Turkey and Iran. Only in the last of these was there any appreciable rainfall (annual average 76 cm). The river system of the central plains had only recently been brought under partial control, and flooding could still be extensive, and large tracts of country in the south between Baghdad and Basra were covered by permanent swamps. The system of agriculture practised in the irrigated area, even before the Development Board's irrigation works made even greater areas available, was extremely wasteful, and land was flooded with water year after year without regard for drainage or for the health of the soil. Some estates were enormous (two of over 500,000 acres had been recorded,⁶⁵ and estates of 50,000-100,000 acres were not uncommon); but they were often only half utilised, and there were large expanses of poorly cultivated and ill-cared-for land, much of which produced minimal crops rapidly going out of cultivation and soon to be abandoned. It was estimated that over 20 per cent of the arable area had recently been abandoned due to salivation, and that the area over which there had been a decline in yield for similar reasons was very much larger.⁶⁶

The cultivable area extended to about 15,500,000 acres, divided almost equally between the mountainous dry farming areas of the north-east and the irrigated areas of the river valley. Cultivation in the latter was nowhere as intensive as it was in Egypt, and it was calculated that as much as 50 per cent of the land lay uncultivated annually. Although Iraq made use of only about one-seventh of its potential cultivable land, it was only in recent years that the cultivated area had been extended to its limits of the early 1960s. Three-quarters of the area under cultivation at that time had been developed since 1918, and about one-third since 1945. About 50-60 per cent of the population of 6,250,000 derived its livelihood from agriculture and was very unevenly distributed.⁶⁷ The average was as high as 154 per sq. mile in the Hilla Province of the Tigris-Euphrates valley, and as low as 0.5 per sq. mile in the eastern

65 Those of Emir Rabia in Kut Province, and of Mohan al Khairallah in Muntafiq Province.

66 FO370/2718/LR6/3, "Agrarian Reform in the Middle East", Research Department Memorandum, 20 August 1963. See Marion Farouk-Sluglett & Peter Sluglett, *Iraq since 1958: From Revolution to Dictatorship*, I. B. Tauris, London, 1990, p. 30-35, 76-78.

67 Doreen Warriner; *Land Reform and Development in the Middle East: A Study of Egypt, Syria, and Iraq*, Royal Institute of International Affairs, London, 1962, p. 115, gives a figure of 62 per cent. The agricultural population is declining as land is abandoned and peasants congregate in the towns in search of work.

Gazi

Akademik
Bakış

353

Cilt 13
Sayı 25
Kış 2019

deserts. The main crops cultivated were barley, wheat, lentils, beans and rice, but tobacco, sesame and linseed, and a small amount of cotton were also grown.⁶⁸

The system of land tenure in Iraq was the result of the chaotic growth of thousands of years. The Ottoman Government had made some attempt at reform, but the Land Law of 1857 was a failure, and nothing further was done until 1932, when, as the result of a report by Sir Ernest Dowson, a law was introduced classifying title to land in Iraq as follows: (a) Private (mulk): for which there was proof of long-standing title; (b) Public: largely desert, and other uncultivated areas; (c) Trust (waqf): land mainly in ownership of religious institutions; (d) Government (miri): subdivided into: (1) Tapu = recognised permanent tenure amounting to ownership; (2) lazma = continuous tenure for 15 years. Similar to tapu, but with title less secure; and sirf = no established tenure.⁶⁹

Land settlement and registration on these lines progressed slowly, but by 1961 about 53,400,000 acres had been registered, as follows: Government (tapu) 7,840,000 acres, (lazma) 7,410,000 acres, (sirf) 33,340,000 acres; other tenures 4,880,000 acres, total 53, 410,000. In 1953 distribution by size of holding was as follows: under 6.5 acres 24,270; 6.5-1,650 acres 97,156; 1,650-33,000 acres 3,515; over 33,000 acres 104. At a rough estimate it was calculated that about one-quarter of these holdings were estates of from 5,000 to 6,000 acres.⁷⁰

The land laws of 1932 and 1938 and subsequent amendments with their recognition of claims based on existing use were rightly criticised as being over-favourable to the tribal sheikhs, who registered tribal land in their own names, and absentee landlords, who were allowed to claim large areas for which no other more valid claims could be discovered. The laws also gave over-generous recognition to vested interests. Landlords who in the past had done little more than perform some haphazard agricultural services, or act as tax and rent collectors, were enabled to acquire considerable estates of miri lazma in the river rain provinces. In the mountainous areas of the north, where small holdings had always been the rule, the 1932 laws acted to codify existing practice.⁷¹

68 FO370/2718/LR6/3, "Agrarian Reform in the Middle East", Research Department Memorandum, 20 August 1963.

69 FO370/2718/LR6/3, "Agrarian Reform in the Middle East", Research Department Memorandum, 20 August 1963.

70 FO370/2718/LR6/3, "Agrarian Reform in the Middle East", Research Department Memorandum, 20 August 1963.

71 FO370/2718/LR6/3, "Agrarian Reform in the Middle East", Research Department Memorandum, 20 August 1963. Also see Michael Ionides; *Divide and Lose: The Arab Revolt of 1955-1958*, Geoffrey Bles, London, 1960.

Gör

A law of 1952 allotted to the Iraq Development Board, which had been set up in 1950, 70 per cent of the revenue gathered from oil royalties⁷² and from then on the Board disposed of very large funds, much of which it spent on water control and irrigation works. The effect was to bring more land into cultivation at the expense of abandoning land already ruined by insufficient drainage, waterlogging and salination. In recent years more attention had been given to drainage, but all such improvements, whether irrigation of new land or adequate draining of land already under cultivation, in the main benefited only the landlord class, and the greater the efficiency of the irrigation and agricultural systems the richer they became.⁷³

Over against this small, powerful and privileged class, which paid almost no taxes and contributed nothing to the development of the country, was a large class of penurious sharecroppers farming land which, while it might show a profit for the landlord, who took up to two-thirds of the crop depending upon the services provided (five-sevenths on land irrigated by pump), was incapable of providing a livelihood for the cultivator and his family from the remainder. Nearly all land was leased in this way, and there was an almost complete lack of agricultural labourers working for a cash wage. In consequence there was a growing and continuous shift of population to the newly irrigated and more profitable areas, or to the slums of such cities as Baghdad and Basra. The Iraqi tribesmen were, moreover, poor cultivators, accustomed to bad and slipshod methods of farming, and completely lacking the skill, industry and tenacity of the Egyptian fellahin.⁷⁴

Tentative attempts at reform were made between 1945 and the revolution. However, it was realised, that cultivation in Iraq was based on the tribal system which might collapse under the strains of far-reaching land reform and result in social and administrative chaos; and the problem of dispossessing the large land-owners was never faced full on. The existence of large tracts of unoccupied Government land (miri sirf) made it possible to introduce legislation providing for allotment of land to peasant cultivators without trespassing on the interests of the great land-owners. The Miri Sirf Law which was introduced in 1945 was applied in the first instance to a land development scheme at Dujeila, consisting of about 240,000 acres, and a further law (the Miri Sirf Lands Development Law of 1951) laid down the maximum holdings which might be held, depending upon the area in which it

72 After the revolution this was reduced to "not less than 50 per cent", and the functions of the Development Board were taken over by the Ministry of Planning.

73 The speech from the Throne in December 1957, foreshadowed a law (never enacted) designed to recover part of the capital cost of drainage and irrigation improvements from owners of private land.

74 FO370/2718/LR6/3, "Agrarian Reform in the Middle East", Research Department Memorandum, 20 August 1963.

Gazi

Akademik
Bakış

355

Cilt 13
Sayı 25
Kış 2019

was situated and the water facilities available, with a minimum of 12 acres in the well-watered mountain region, and a maximum of 300 acres on high land irrigated by pump.⁷⁵

Neither of these laws achieved their objectives in full, due in the main to political pressure by the land-owners. In the Dujeila scheme, which subsequently failed completely due to bad drainage and poor administration, 150,000 acres only were distributed to peasant cultivators in holdings of 60 acres each; the remaining 90,000 acres went to increase the estates of tribal sheikhs and land-owners, and the provisions of the 1951 law were manipulated to benefit the local magnate to the detriment of the cultivator. 1952 saw the enactment of what came to be known as the Amara Law⁷⁶, with the object of giving cultivators the opportunity of proving claims to unregistered Government land. The intention was excellent, but the law was framed and applied in such a way as to give the local sheikhs a right to keep possession of much of the land, including all the best areas. The effects were so disastrous that it resulted in a large-scale exodus of peasant cultivators and a number of outbreaks of agrarian discontent, and it was amended in 1955, cutting by half the original sheikhly allotments. Even so, it was not strictly enforced, and as long as there was no social or political force in Iraq which could challenge the position of the land-owners, legislation detrimental to their interests could rarely be enacted and even less so enforced.⁷⁷

The Ministry of Agrarian Reform which was set up in the early days of the Revolution was dominated for some time by Communist sympathisers, including the Minister himself, Ibrahim Kubbah. The aims of the programme of reform which he introduced were declared to be the destruction of feudalism, including re-distribution of land, improvement of production and of the standard of living of the peasants, a system of agricultural co-operatives based on peasant ownership of land, and the encouragement of middle-class participation in agriculture. The Agrarian Reform Law which was introduced in September 1958 resembled the Egyptian law of 1952, but was more generous to land-owners, who were allowed to retain a maximum of 600 acres of irrigated land and 1,200 acres of rainland. Anything in excess was to be expropriated over a period of five years against compensation to be assessed by an Agrarian Reform Committee and payable in 3 per cent Government bonds redeemable in 40 years. The land acquired in this way was to be distributed to peasant cultivators in lots of not more than 37, and not less than 18 acres of irrigated

75 FO370/2718/LR6/3, "Agrarian Reform in the Middle East", Research Department Memorandum, 20 August 1963. Also see Phebe Marr; *The Modern History of Iraq*, Westview Press, Boulder, San Francisco, 1985.

76 The Law Granting Lazma Rights in Miri Sirf Land in Amara Liwa (No. 42/1952).

77 FO370/2718/LR6/3, "Agrarian Reform in the Middle East", Research Department Memorandum, 20 August 1963.

land and 75 acres of rainland. A minimum wage for agricultural workers was applied and co-operatives were to be set up for financing and assisting peasant farmers.⁷⁸

Even before the revolution the amount of new development with which the Development Board was burdening the Ministries was causing administrative confusion, particularly in the Miri Sırf Department, which proved incapable of coping with the allocation of large areas of new land and of organising their use. It had not been designed to deal with these tasks, which were beyond its competence, and none of the Departments concerned had the organising ability required to put the various plans into operation.⁷⁹

The Agrarian Reform Law of 1958 worsened matters even further, when already over-burdened and inadequately trained Departments were given the additional task of sequestrating and distributing some 7 million acres of land, of arranging for assessment of compensation, and of organising a wholly new system of cultivators' co-operatives. The very small body of trained experts in the Lands and Agricultural Departments did their best; but by October 1959 only about 125,000 acres had been distributed, and it was not until late in 1960 that some order had been established and real progress was made. It is estimated by United Nations experts that in all about 15,300,000 acres (5,100,000 privately owned; 10,200,000 Government land) were available for distribution, and up to the middle of 1962 it was claimed that 3,600,000 acres had been expropriated, of which 780,000 acres had been distributed to 30,000 families. Progress was slow for a number of technical reasons, and as a temporary expedient, 3,845,000 acres of expropriated, uncultivated and miri sırf lands were rented on short term leases to about 215,000 peasant cultivators. The following approximate figures were given in the Iraq Statistical Abstract for 1961 for the progress of expropriation and distribution up to the end of 1961. Expropriated and uncultivated land at the disposal of the Agrarian: Reform Committee 2,130,000 acres; distributed 842,500 acres; balance for distribution 1,287,500 acres.⁸⁰

Following the coup d'état of February 8, 1963, the new Ministry of Agrarian Reform repeated that the objects of reform were to bring about a social and economic revolution in the rural areas by the elimination of

78 FO370/2718/LR6/3, "Agrarian Reform in the Middle East", Research Department Memorandum, 20 August 1963. Also see Marion Farouk-Sluglett and Peter Sluglett; *Iraq since 1958: From Revolution to Dictatorship*, I. B. Tauris, London, 1990.

79 FO370/2718/LR6/3, "Agrarian Reform in the Middle East", Research Department Memorandum, 20 August 1963.

80 The Report on the World Social Situation for 1963 of the United Nations Economic and Social Council gives, however, the following figures: Expropriated 3,360,000 acres; distributed 1,695,000 acres; balance 1,655,000. Of the area expropriated about 6 per cent are irrigated land, 84 per cent rainland, and 10 per cent waste.

Gazi

Akademik
Bakış

357

Cilt 13
Sayı 25
Kış 2019

feudalism, introduction of up-to-date agricultural methods, and organisation of co-operative farming. It was also admitted that although nearly five years had passed since the revolution of July 14, 1958, only 4.5 per cent of the land available had been distributed and only about 12 per cent of those entitled had benefited.⁸¹

It was now agreed that the Agrarian Reform programme introduced after the revolution was ill balanced, both as regards its size and the pace of its planned implementation. The staff available was inadequate both in numbers and ability to deal with the problems suddenly presented, and the result was an administrative breakdown and a decline in agricultural production. Only the primitiveness of the agricultural system has prevented the effects from worsening even further. The worst feature was the failure, now to some extent being rectified, to provide co-operatives to replace the landlords as suppliers of certain essential services which the new peasant owners lacked capital or enterprise to provide for themselves. The Government aim was to establish at least 2,000 societies, but only 58 were now actually in being, working reasonably well under the supervision of 27 agricultural supervisors. Loans had been made available, but their use was never properly supervised and they were largely wasted. In such matters as marketing, irrigation control, and efficient use of machinery, the Iraqi peasantry, among the most conservative and backward in the world at that time, was unable to look after itself. The result was that peasants find themselves owners of land which they were unable to begin to farm adequately without assistance, and that they very often abandoned it to seek a livelihood elsewhere. There were frequent food shortages, due in part to drought and in part from being a grain-exporting country prior to the revolution. Iraq in 1959 imported 300,000 tons of cereals, and standards of production appeared to have been maintained best in the mountainous regions of the north, where the old feudal system remained unchanged.⁸²

Table-VII: Comparative Acreage Cultivated ('000 acres) [in Iraq]⁸³

Crop	1957-58	1960-61	Difference	Per cent drop
Wheat	3,680	3,510	70	1.9
Barley	2,780	2,490	290	10.4
Rice	210	184	26	12.4

Source: Statistical Abstracts, 1959, Tables 125 and 128, and 1961, Tables 59 and 62.

81 FO370/2718/LR6/3, "Agrarian Reform in the Middle East", Research Department Memorandum, 20 August 1963.

82 FO370/2718/LR6/3, "Agrarian Reform in the Middle East", Research Department Memorandum, 20 August 1963.

83 FO370/2718/LR6/3, "Agrarian Reform in the Middle East", Research Department Memorandum, 20 August 1963.

5. Iran

Iran, with an area of 629,000 sq. miles, consisted of an arid central plateau of sand, salt and gravel enclosed on three sides by high mountain ranges, namely the Elburz and Ala Dagh ranges in the north, and the Zagros range in the south-west, rising to a height of 10,000-18,000 ft. Rainfall on the Caspian shores of the northern ranges was as high as an annual 200 cm, and as low as 63-76 cm in the south-west. Only about one-fifth of the total area was cultivable, of which about one-third, or approximately 41,500,000 acres, were actually cropped.⁸⁴ About 75 per cent of the population of 21 million was dependent on agriculture, and the standard of living of the peasantry was, on the whole, depressingly low. The main crops grown were wheat, barley, rice, sugar-beet and fodder crops.⁸⁵ There were four main types of land ownership in Iran, crown lands (amlak), state domains (khalese), religious trust land (waqf) and privately-owned land, subdivided into the estates of the large and small landowners and land owned by peasant proprietors. It was estimated that there were about 40,000 villages in Iran, the ownership of which could be divided as follows:

Table-VIII: Distribution of Land [in Iran]⁸⁶

	Villages	Per cent
Crown Land (amlak)	2000	=5
State domains (khalese)	1900	=5
Religious trusts (vaqf)	6000	=15
Privately own		
(a) Estates	22,000	=55
(b) Peasants proprietors	8000	=20
Total	40,000	100

Over half the cultivable area (60 per cent if both private estates and Crown lands were included) were owned by a small, largely absentee, non-working and politically powerful class, some of whom owned as many as 100-

84 The official unit of measurement in Iran is the hectare (2.47 acres), but for all practical purposes the basic agricultural unit is the village divided, whatever its size or the extent of its cultivation, into six dangs or portions.

85 FO370/2718/LR6/3, "Agrarian Reform in the Middle East", Research Department Memorandum, 20 August 1963.

86 FO370/2718/LR6/3, "Agrarian Reform in the Middle East", Research Department Memorandum, 20 August 1963.

150 villages apiece. These were not always complete villages, as very often a landowner might own a number of parts (dangs) in different villages, so that the ownership of a village might be divided between a number of landowners.⁸⁷

All, Crown, State and religious trust land, was cultivated on a share-cropping basis. Depending on the fertility of the land, the availability of water, and the services supplied by the landlord, the latter might receive from not less than 50 per cent of the crop to as much as 70 per cent on irrigated land, and from 25-30 per cent upwards on rainland. While some tenants had a certain security of tenure and owned their own houses, gardens and a few animals, the standard of living in most villages was extremely low. In addition to rent in crops, the peasants were required to pay traditional dues to their landlords, which might include personal labour, gifts of produce or livestock on special occasions, and in some areas a form of poll tax. Owing to the impersonal nature of ownership, peasants on trust lands tended to be even worse off than elsewhere, and the land was less well cultivated.⁸⁸

Tentative attempts at reform were made by Reza Shah just before the war and abortive land reform laws were passed in 1947 and again in 1952. Under the influence of the Shah, a fresh campaign was launched in 1959-60; however, the Land Reform Bill of June 1960 was not only badly drafted but so diluted that by the time it passed into law it was of little practical effect. In the meantime, the Shah had been setting an example by distribution of amlak lands to peasant cultivators on easy terms. About 320 villages, making up about 400.000 acres, benefited from this reform, which later failed to achieve its full effect largely owing to the ineptitude and dishonesty of the officials handling it.⁸⁹

The Amini Government which came to power in May 1961 introduced an amending law on 14 January 1962, which was in effect a complete recasting. Among other things, it abandoned area measurement in favour of the village as the basic agricultural unit—a sensible amendment in the absence of a cadastral survey, an adequate lands and survey department, or an accurate system of registration. The new law recognised the division of each village into six dangs and allowed the landowner to retain not more than six dangs, or a complete “village”, the component parts of which may be situated in a number of different villages. All holdings in excess had to be sold, and if they were not the Government could expropriate at a price to be fixed on the basis of Land

87 FO370/2718/LR6/3, “Agrarian Reform in the Middle East”, Research Department Memorandum, 20 August 1963. Also see Ann K. S. Lambton; *Landlord and Peasant in Persia, a Study of Land Tenure and Land Revenue Administration*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1953.

88 FO370/2718/LR6/3, “Agrarian Reform in the Middle East”, Research Department Memorandum, 20 August 1963.

89 FO370/2718/LR6/3, “Agrarian Reform in the Middle East”, Research Department Memorandum, 20 August 1963.

Tax. The aim was to transform the share-cropping peasantry into a society of smallholders, to institute wide measures of social reform, and to increase agricultural production. The new smallholder was to be allotted the land which he actually farmed under the old system, so that there would be as little dislocation as possible; and the services provided previously by the landlord would be performed by co-operatives, the aim being that there should be one for every 10 villages, with compulsory membership for all acquiring land under the reforms.⁹⁰

Reform was being applied step-by-step and not comprehensively. The Government announced the area to which reform was to apply, and concentrated the efforts of its limited land and co-operative staff in that area. The landowners who, in the past, were able to prevent reforms from achieving any practical result tried, albeit unsuccessfully, to form an association for the purpose of resisting the present reforms. They complained that the new law was a punitive measure directed against a class which was performing essential and indispensable functions. Dr. Arsanjani, the Minister for Agriculture until March 1963, who was responsible, with the Shah's strong support, for the initial stages of the reform programme, made no secret of the fact that his aim was to eliminate the landed aristocracy and bring about a "white revolution". The amended law, the manner of its enforcement, and the views expressed by Dr. Arsanjani all served to increase opposition. It was argued that one of the results of the Shah's distribution of Crown lands had been the creation of a landless class; that the situation had been aggravated by the inefficiency of the Development Board and the mishandling of distribution by Government bureaucrats; and that all this on the large scale now projected was likely to prove agriculturally ruinous. The landlords also claimed that they provided protection for the peasant against an avid and corrupt cadre of provincial bureaucrats whose inefficiency and rapacity was likely to go unchecked, and they had hopes of revocation of the law on the grounds that, not having been ratified by the Majles, it was illegal.⁹¹

Since the referendum, held at the end of January 1963, which gave overwhelming approval to the Government's six-point reform programme including land reform measures, it was unlikely that any attempt to kill reform in a resurrected Majles would stand any chance of success, more especially as the Shah had stated expressly that one of the objects of the referendum was to prevent a restoration of the old system of peasant serfdom and plunder of the country's wealth by a privileged few. However, not everything was going

90 FO370/2718/LR6/3, "Agrarian Reform in the Middle East", Research Department Memorandum, 20 August 1963.

91 FO370/2718/LR6/3, "Agrarian Reform in the Middle East", Research Department Memorandum, 20 August 1963. Also see William L. Cleveland; *A History of the Modern Middle East*, Westview Press, Boulder, San Francisco, 1994.

Gazi

Akademik
Bakış

361

Cilt 13
Sayı 25
Kış 2019

according to plan, and opposition was expressed by the ulema who considered that the leasing of vaqf is contrary to Islam, by the National Front who have been irritated by the Shah's stealing their force, and by landowners who still had hopes of salvaging something of their estates. In bringing the reform programme to a successful conclusion the Government needed a great deal of skill and firmness.⁹²

On the whole, good progress had been made by Iranian standards and the reforms were being pushed vigorously. Land Reform teams began operations in Western Azerbaijan early in 1962, and further teams were subsequently sent to Gilan, Maragheh, Kermanshah and Fara. In Azerbaijan about 835,000 acres were distributed to 23,790 peasant proprietors, who were being financed by 55 co-operatives with a total membership of nearly 30,000. The Government claimed that up to the end of 1962 about 1,100,000 acres had been redistributed to 30,000-35,000 peasant families, and that reform was complete in 11,000 of the 25,000 villages to which it was applicable. As regards trust lands (comprising about 6,000 villages) the Government decided to take them over on 99-year leases for reallocation to peasant proprietors in the usual way.

The Minister of Agriculture estimated that all land would have passed into the hands of smallholders by the spring of 1964. The Land Reform Law was also amended further in the light of experience so as to require landlords to dispose of all land in one of three ways-by sale, by renting to smallholders on a 30-year lease, or by parcelling it out on a share-cropping basis. Only those engaged in mechanical farming were permitted to retain up to 1,235 acres worked by wage-earning labourers. A further amendment allows landlords to retain for their own use a certain amount of land depending upon the area of the country in which it is situated. The maximum acreage permitted varies from about 75 acres in the rice growing area of Gilan to 250 acres in the Tehran-Rey area and 500 acres in Khuzistan.⁹³

It was still too early to attempt to do more than indicate some of the possible effects of reform which had up to that point affected about 50 per cent of the villages to which it was applicable, but there was no doubt that landlords were being effectively dispossessed, especially the smaller and less powerful ones who had little local or political influence. Landlords in areas not yet directly affected by the reform laws were beginning to feel a change of climate as peasants refused dues and services; and in the land reform areas, those who had retained the village or part of a village allowed by the law were

92 FO370/2718/LR6/3, "Agrarian Reform in the Middle East", Research Department Memorandum, 20 August 1963.

93 FO370/2718/LR6/3, "Agrarian Reform in the Middle East", Research Department Memorandum, 20 August 1963.

finding conditions increasingly difficult and are not unwilling to sell. The non-working landlord class was in fact being squeezed out, and the Government's overall firmness had its effect.⁹⁴

Reform was undoubtedly both necessary and inevitable, and there was also little doubt of its popularity with the mass of the people. There were, however, certain weaknesses and dangers, the most obvious of which was the attitude of the departmental officials concerned, as they were had age-long tendencies towards idleness and corruption. The new landowners, the peasants, also lacked education and experience of anything outside the very limited sphere of village agriculture, a fact which would make the working of the co-operatives rather more difficult than it might have been.⁹⁵

As the areas of reform were extended there were some signs of developing financial strain as funds had to be found for purchase of expropriated lands and for establishment of co-operatives; moreover, it was possible that the peasants, deprived of landlord protection, may find themselves at the mercy of local bureaucrats and Government officials. A further difficulty was that of finding staff with sufficient experience for the establishment and administration of the all-important co-operatives. Some initial loss of production seemed to be expected, but this was likely to right itself, and a substantial increase was to be sought as the new system stabilised itself. The only class likely to benefit substantially were the crop-sharing cultivators: those without a stake in their village community would remain landless as before.⁹⁶ In general it seemed unlikely that land reform would in itself wholly succeed without reform in other spheres. It could not achieve the results desired in isolation, or without comparable reforms in administration, education, social services and communications, to name only the most obvious. Much more capital development for the extension of agriculture and research into improved methods of farming are also necessary. Without such ancillary reforms the success of land reform was likely to remain doubtful. The Government was aware of the difficulties of the task, and there were signs that it was initiating measures to deal with them. The Shah himself was personally involved in the success of the land reform programme, and for that reason alone it was likely to be pushed to a conclusion whatever the obstacles.⁹⁷

94 FO370/2718/LR6/3, "Agrarian Reform in the Middle East", Research Department Memorandum, 20 August 1963.

95 FO370/2718/LR6/3, "Agrarian Reform in the Middle East", Research Department Memorandum, 20 August 1963.

96 The Minister of Agriculture has indicated that this class will be provided for by land reclamation.

97 FO370/2718/LR6/3, "Agrarian Reform in the Middle East", Research Department Memorandum, 20 August 1963.

Gazi

Akademik
Bakış

363

Cilt 13
Sayı 25
Kış 2019

6. Turkey

During the opening of Assembly on 1 November 1945, President İnönü suggested that he was ready to make major changes in the political system to bring it up to date with the post-war global situation. He believed that the main deficiency in the Turkish system was the lack of an opposition party, and he was now ready to allow for one to be formed

Despite the influences of external factors behind the need for political change in Turkey, it was domestic issues that rendered impossible the maintenance of the current status quo. The traditional political alliance between the military elite, the landlords and the bourgeoisie had deteriorated beyond repair. The private sector had grown considerably during the first twenty years of the republic, and it would no longer tolerate the unpredictable behaviour of the state. This led to two factions within the RPP: the first consisted of representatives of the private sector who urged for liberalisation; and the second of the hard-line statist who wanted to tighten the hold of the state.⁹⁸

Similarly, the RPP was split over the Land Reform Bill presented to the Assembly in January 1945, with which the statist aimed to break the landlords' political grip by turning the country into a republic of independent peasant proprietors. Party discipline eventually prevailed after weeks of debate, and the Bill was passed on 11 June 1945. The government faced criticism over economic and constitutional issues. Critics claimed that land reform would lead to a reduction in production and that it violated the constitutionally guaranteed principle of private property.⁹⁹

Four of the main critics broadened their attack on the government. These four men were later to establish the main opposition Democrat Party (DP), namely Celal Bayar, Refik Koraltan, Professor Fuad Köprülü, and Adnan Menderes. Their unyielding attacks on the government and the RPP led three of them being expelled from the party, and the resignation of Bayar on 1 December 1945. They announced the formation of Democrat Party on 7 January 1946. Hence, the period between 1946-1950 represented a transition during which both parties sought to acquire new identities to win the vote of the electorate. During this period, the policy of liberalisation gained increasing strength, which was due to a certain extent to İnönü's commitment to multi-party politics, and also to Turkey's increasing involvement with the West.¹⁰⁰

98 Ahmad, Op. Cit., p. 102-115. Also see Keyder Çağlar and Şevket Pamuk; "1945 Çiftçiyi Topraklandırma Kanunu Üzerine Tezler", *Yapıt 8* (December/January 1984/85).

99 Ahmad, Op. Cit., p. 102-115. Also see Sinan Yıldırım; *Politics and the Peasantry in Post-War Turkey: Social History, Culture and Modernization*, I. B. Tauris, London, 2017.

100 Ahmad, Op. Cit., p. 102-115. Also see M. Asım Karaömerlioğlu; "Bir Tepeden Reform Denemesi: Çiftçiyi Topraklandırma Kanununun Hikâyesi", *Birikim Dergisi*, Sayı: 107, (Mart 1998).

In May 1950, the Democrats' victory turned the political scene in Turkey upside down. A brief political honeymoon followed the 1950 elections. However, the latter did not wait long to launch an overt attack on the former. Interestingly, both parties were committed to the same goal: the development of a modern and prosperous country. However, the difference between the parties lay in their preferred methods.¹⁰¹

The Democrats' approached economic reform chaotically. They had given no thought to an overall plan because in their view, planning was considered to be 'bureaucratic and communist', both of which they despised. They prioritised the production of agricultural goods and minerals, which were both very much in demand in post-war Europe, and the creation of an infrastructure that would facilitate these exports. A network of roads soon emerged which opened up the villages of Anatolia for the first time.¹⁰²

Turkish agriculture was transformed. Despite the land reform law, the political power of the landlords had prevented any effective land reform from being made. Thus, between 1947 and 1962, only approximately 1.8 million hectares had been distributed to 360,000 families, a mere 8,600 hectares of which had been procured from privately owned land.

The state-owned lands were crucial in sustaining the landless peasants who had used them for communal grazing. As a consequence, these peasants either became farm labourers, or they migrated to the cities in the hope of employment.¹⁰³

Mechanisation also had a transformative effect on Turkish agriculture. During the 1950s, the number of tractors increased from 1,750 to 43,747, and harvesters from 994 to 6,072. As a result, the area of cultivated land increased from 13,900,000 hectares in 1948 to 22,940,000 in 1959. The traditional relationship between landlord and peasant also changed as a result of mechanisation. Previously, peasants had cultivated the landlord's fields in return for a share of his crop. Now, however, even peasants with land borrowed the landlord's tractor in return for a share of their crop.¹⁰⁴

The early 1950s are considered as the 'golden years' of the Menderes era. During this period, Turkey experienced an "economic miracle" based on exports of food and raw materials, and the country witnessed a tremendous

101 Ahmad, Op. Cit., p. 102-115. Also see Erdal Akbaş; "Türkiye'de Çiftçi ile Köylüleri Topraklandırma Söylemleri ve Uygulamaları (1923-1939)", *Vakanüvis*, (Yıl: 2, No: 1, (Mart 2017).

102 Ahmad, Op. Cit., p. 115-118.

103 Ahmad, Op. Cit., p. 115-118. Also see Erdal İnce; *Türk Siyasi Yaşamında Çiftçiyi Topraklandırma Kanunu*, Libra Yayınevi, İstanbul, 2009. Also see Sinan Yıldırım; *Politics and the Peasantry in Post-War Turkey: Social History, Culture and Modernization*, I. B. Tauris, London, 2017.

104 Ahmad, Op. Cit., p. 115-118. Also see Roger Owen and Şevket Pamuk; *A History of Middle East Economies in the Twentieth Century*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1999.

Görüş

Akademik
Bakış

365

Cilt 13
Sayı 25
Kış 2019

economic growth rate of 13 per cent. However, this miracle was short-lived. By the mid-1950s, Turkey could not purchase capital goods or spare parts. Thus, it was not possible to service farm machinery properly, and much of it went out of use. In the meantime, the operating capacity of dilapidated factories was reduced by half. The government was forced to abandon its commitment to liberal policies. On 18 May 1956, it passed the National Defence Law, which was similar to the war-time measure of 1940 and allowed the government to regulate the economy. However, the DP failed to restore stability and confidence in the economy.¹⁰⁵

Toward the end of the decade, Menderes no longer controlled the economy, although he strongly believed that his policies would soon yield results. In July 1958, the West announced their programme to rescue the Turkish economy and the Menderes government. In return for a loan of \$359 million and the consolidation of Turkey's \$400 million debt, Menderes was asked to "stabilise" the economy by taking several measures, the most significant one being the lira's devaluation from 2.80 to 9.025 to the US dollar. This rescue attempt was ineffective: Menderes did not have the confidence to take unpopular measures that were necessary to stabilise the economy. When he was overthrown in May 1960, the economy was on the brink of collapse. The post-Menderes regime had the task of bringing back balance and order to the economy, and of taking more rational steps to organise economic life for Turkey to achieve the long-awaited boom.¹⁰⁶

7. Lebanon

Lebanon, with a total area of 4,000 sq. miles, had a population of 1,626,000, divided almost equally between rural and urban areas. Only about 25 per cent of its very mountainous area was cultivated, and the necessity for extensive terracing increases the costs of crop production. Irrigation was being increasingly used, and by Middle East standards Lebanese techniques, especially in fruit farming, were highly developed. Apple cultivation had expanded rapidly over the past 20 years, and this crop provided one of the country's most profitable exports. Other main crops cultivated were wheat, barley, olives, vines and fruit, including citrus, figs, apricots, cherries, bananas and peaches, of excellent quality.¹⁰⁷

Although conditions in general were similar to those of Western Syria, land reform did not appear to be an urgent problem. Few reliable statistics were available, but it appears that only in the south, in the muhafazat of

105 Ahmad, Op. Cit., p. 115-118.

106 Ahmad, Op. Cit., p. 115-118.

107 FO370/2718/LR6/3, "Agrarian Reform in the Middle East", Research Department Memorandum, 20 August 1963.

Saida, Sur and Merjayun, and in some parts of the Biqa'a, were there any large estates. In the north, and more particularly in Mt. Lebanon itself, much of the cultivated land was farmed in small plots, the old feudal position of the landlords having been destroyed by the revolt of the Maronite peasantry in 1858. The great majority of holdings were of less than 5 acres, but in the Shi'i areas of the south over 50 per cent of the cultivable area was believed to be held by about 200 landlords only, many of whom were absentees.¹⁰⁸

8. Jordan

Jordan had an overall area of 37,500 sq. miles, and a population of 1,700,000, of which about 70 per cent was believed to live by agriculture or herding; but preliminary reports of the 1961 census, in which the figures for Kerak, Maan, Belqa, Hebron and Amman were available, suggested that only about 30 per cent of the population were thus engaged.¹⁰⁹ The principal crops grown were wheat, barley and olives, but there was a great increase in fruit and vegetable cultivation in recent years, especially on the West Bank and in the newly irrigated areas of the Jordan valley, some 700-1,300 ft. below sea level, in which cultivation was intensive and farming techniques were highly developed. On the East Bank methods were more primitive and yields were correspondingly low.¹¹⁰

In the upland country of the West and East Banks conditions were similar to those of the rest of geographical Syria. Nearly all available land was cultivated and there were few large estates. According to the agricultural census of 1953 there were only 22 holdings of over 2,000 acres, most of which were rented to working farmers on a share-cropping basis. The main grain growing areas were the Irbid plain which is a southern extension of the Syrian Hauran, and the Madaba plain southwards to Kerak on the East Bank. East of this fairly narrow highland belt rainfall decreases sharply and there was a large desert area which supported only a sparse pastoral population. All land on the East Bank had been resettled recently and freehold titles confirmed to all claimants able to establish them. Similar resettlement was now in progress on the West Bank.¹¹¹

Though irrigation played an increasingly important part in agricultural development the total irrigable area was limited, and dry farming was likely

108 FO370/2718/LR6/3, "Agrarian Reform in the Middle East", Research Department Memorandum, 20 August 1963.

109 The lowness of this figure is due to inclusion of Amman, the main urban centre: even so, it seems unlikely that the rural population is as numerous as once believed.

110 FO370/2718/LR6/3, "Agrarian Reform in the Middle East", Research Department Memorandum, 20 August 1963.

111 FO370/2718/LR6/3, "Agrarian Reform in the Middle East", Research Department Memorandum, 20 August 1963.

Gazi

Akademik
Bakış

367

Cilt 13
Sayı 25
Kış 2019

to retain its importance. The Government of the United States, which had financed irrigation of the East Ghor scheme, made its help conditional on the division of the land into small (7.5 acre) peasant-owned holdings. Difficulty is being experienced in applying this condition as areas are small and farmers appear to be finding purchase arrangements unduly onerous. Nevertheless with the extension of the irrigated area some very similar pattern of allotment is likely to be applied.¹¹²

9. Yemen

Very little was known about agricultural conditions in Yemen. Although the highlands were believed to be one of the most fertile areas in Arabia, only about 20 per cent of the total area was under cultivation. Terracing is extensive, and a wide variety of crops, including coffee, maize, barley, qat¹¹³ and fruit were grown. The cultivation of cotton in the coastal area of the Tihama was increasing. The total area of the country is 75,000 sq. miles much of it uncultivable mountain, and the population was believed to be about 5 million, entirely rural apart from a few thousands living in Sana'a and Hodeida.¹¹⁴ The Republican Government which rose against the Imam Badr in September 1962 declared its interest in developing agriculture, in eliminating feudalism, and in building up a prosperous farming class, a programme based on the assumption that the Imams possessed large personal estates and deliberately neglected the country's agriculture in order to keep the people in a state of subjection.¹¹⁵

10. Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia had an area of approximately 1,500,000 sq. miles, but agriculture was practised only where sufficient water was available. Only a small proportion of the population of about 6 million were engaged in farming and production of small crops of wheat, barley, maize and dates. Official statistics gave the number of settled cultivators as about 1 million, but this was probably an exaggeration. The Ruling Family showed some interest in creating, where practicable, new farms with foreign advice: e.g., at Kharj, South of Riyadh; but no one yet had foreseen any possibility of increasing the scanty water resources sufficiently to permit any really extensive agricultural development.¹¹⁶

112 FO370/2718/LR6/3, "Agrarian Reform in the Middle East", Research Department Memorandum, 20 August 1963.

113 Qat (*Catha Edulia*) is a shrub grown in some quantity in the highlands, the leaves of which are much used as a stimulant and narcotic. It is one of the country's main cash crops.

114 FO370/2718/LR6/3, "Agrarian Reform in the Middle East", Research Department Memorandum, 20 August 1963.

115 FO370/2718/LR6/3, "Agrarian Reform in the Middle East", Research Department Memorandum, 20 August 1963.

116 FO370/2718/LR6/3, "Agrarian Reform in the Middle East", Research Department Memorandum, 20 August 1963.

11. Conclusion

In 1950s, physical conditions in most of the countries under review (with the important exception of Egypt) were similar. All were sparsely populated, and possessed large areas that were agriculturally undeveloped. In all of them, sharecropping was practised extensively, and the working peasant populations lived at mere subsistence level. Land had accumulated in the hands of a small, but politically powerful, class which had no interest in reform and which could be counted upon to block any reforming measures which might be initiated. Yet, agrarian reform was very much on the agenda from 1945 onwards, and was given a high priority in the programmes of all radical and revolutionary movements.

In the previous decade, agrarian reform had been introduced into Egypt, Syria, Iraq, Iran, Turkey, Jordan, Lebanon, Yemen and Saudi Arabia with varying effect, but only in Egypt was it possible to measure in full some of the results. Even there, only about 7 per cent of the population had benefited directly from distribution of expropriated land, and little more could be done until further land was made available by one means or another. Results in Syria were hard to estimate, and the programme initiated during the union with Egypt had since been amended considerably. In Iraq, reform had produced little but confusion and loss of production, owing to the lack of adequate means for financing and spoon-feeding a very backward and ill-equipped peasantry, similar to Turkey. In Iran, the reformers made an impressive start, but at that time it was too early to attempt to estimate the final results. In Turkey, although a land reform law had been passed in 1945 the political strength of the landlords prevented it from being put into effect. Hence, between 1947 and 1962, 1.8 million hectares were distributed to 360,000 families, and only 8,600 hectares of this were taken from privately owned land. Once more, it was the peasants who lost. They had depended on the state-owned land for their livelihood, and now they had been reduced to the position of farm labourers. Many migrated to the cities in search of work.

Most Middle East Governments had instituted agrarian reform for political reasons, and not all of them were as successful as they may have hoped. Nevertheless, it seemed clear that in those countries in which reform had taken or was taking place it would be impossible to put back the clock, and that the power of the landowning oligarchies had been broken once and for all. The countries of the Middle East were moving out of a static, medieval condition, and rapid political, economic and social changes were in process. It had yet to be realised by all of them, however, that agrarian reform was not an end in itself, and that in order to realise its full value it needed to be accompanied by reforms in other areas, such as education and administration.

Gazi

Akademik
Bakış

369

Cilt 13
Sayı 25
Kış 2019

Each country had its own distinctive and often very complicated system of land tenure. In all these countries there was a small, politically powerful landed oligarchy, socially and economically far removed from the peasants who worked the land. Their political influence made it virtually impossible for land reform to be brought about by constitutional means. These oligarchies had their roots in a feudal system dating back to the Ommayad and Abbasid Caliphates, very little altered in Ottoman times, and surviving under the 20th century dynasties (the Mohammed Ali in Egypt, the Hashemite in Iraq and Jordan, and the Saudi in Arabia) which replaced the Sultanate. Little else had altered save that, since landownership conferred political power and social prestige, it became an attractive investment for a new class of urban capitalists who cared even less for their tenant than the old-type landlords. The gap between the rich landowning class and the peasantry thus tended to become wider; except for perhaps in Syria, where the landlord class, though sharing the common characteristics of its kind, was rather less insulated from the peasantry, and more given to personal management of its properties than elsewhere.

During the previous decade, the Governments of Egypt, Syria, Iraq, Iran and Turkey had introduced reforms which were in the process of changing the whole political, social and to a lesser extent, economic life of their countries. In Egypt and Iraq, the reforms were the immediate results of revolutions which had eliminated the monarchies and abolished parliamentary forms of government but which, despite possible similar intentions, had had different results. In Iran, many of the conditions which had favoured revolution in other Middle East countries were present, and the need for reform had been accentuated by events elsewhere. In Syria, land reform was a political issue long before its introduction in 1958, but typically enough, except during the period of the union with Egypt, little progress had been made. Since the break-up of the union it was being modified under changing political pressures, and seemed at the time to be taking a less revolutionary course.

In the pastoral countries of the Arabian Peninsula and in the Sheikdoms of the Persian Gulf, land was agriculturally of less importance; and though pockets existed where a feudal structure based on the ownership of land still survived, as in the oases of the Hasa Province of Saudi Arabia, in Bahrain, and in the coastal area of Muscat, the idea of reform had hardly yet developed. Recent events in Yemen, and the declared intention of the Republican Government to institute reforms and to develop the agricultural potential of the country, could have been the cause of similar demands being made elsewhere in Arabia. Jordan and Lebanon were small countries in both of which, although about 70 per cent of the population was engaged in agriculture, there were few signs of agrarian unrest, perhaps because much of

Görüş

Akademik
Bakış

370

Cilt 13
Sayı 25
Kış 2019

the land in northern Lebanon and on the West Bank of Jordan was broken up into small holdings owned by peasant farmers.

In practice reform in those countries in which it was taking place followed a very similar pattern in general, being aimed at the break-up of large estates and the creation of a new agrarian class of landowning peasants operating in a State-controlled, co-operatively financed system of agriculture. Briefly, what all Governments did was to fix a legal maximum for the amount of land which any one person or family happened to hold, to appropriate all land in excess, and to re-distribute it in small lots to peasant cultivators.

Clearly, economically sound schemes for agricultural improvement were essential for the modernisation and development of all Middle Eastern countries. However, most Middle Eastern Governments and parties gave agrarian reform high priority for mainly political reasons. On the one hand, it was popular with the peasants and an obvious means of appeasing rural discontent; on the other, the elimination of the wealthy or feudal landlord as a political force was a necessary safeguard of the position of the new radical ruling classes. For these reasons radical Governments, and Governments concerned to stave off violent revolution, were expected to pursue agrarian reform, even at the risk of economic loss.

Regarding the principal aim of reform to eliminate feudalism and the destruction of the privileged position of the landowning class, complete success was only achieved at that point in Egypt. In Iran, although reform appeared to be moving in a similar direction, there were possibilities that it might meet with an obstacle. In Syria and Iraq, the large landowners had been dispossessed, but the tribal system was still in place, and the sheikhs were still exercising a great deal of local power, despite a financial loss because of loss land. In both countries, ill-conceived measures of reform created an agricultural vacuum in which large areas had been expropriated but not yet resettled, and there appeared to be no easy or immediate solution.

The authorities in Iran were skilful enough to avoid a similar state of affairs by applying reform step-by-step. As far as the former landowning class was concerned, it was impossible to put back the clock, and it was longer be possible to acquire great wealth, or political power, or an influential social position through the ownership of land.

Except for those in the Arabian Peninsula, the States of the Middle East were beginning to move out of their static medieval phase, and in all of them rapid economic and social changes were taking place. It was only in Egypt and Iran, however, that it seemed to be fully realised that agrarian reform could not succeed unless it was accompanied by other immediate reforms in the fields of administration, education, health and social services; and that the general

Gazi

Akademik
Bakış

371

Cilt 13
Sayı 25
Kış 2019

standard of living could not be raised or the national economy increased merely by depriving the rich of their estates and redistributing them as small holdings to a limited number of peasant cultivators.

12. Bibliography

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(Footnotes)

- 1 The “cropped” area is greater than the “cultivable” area because in favourable conditions it is possible to secure a winter, summer and intermediate crop from the same land.
- 2 The arid provinces are Jerira, Euphrates and Rashid.